

OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT
MERIT SYSTEMS OVERSIGHT AND EFFECTIVENESS
DALLAS OVERSIGHT DIVISION
CLASSIFICATION APPEAL DECISION

Under section 5112(b) of title 5, United States Code

Appellant: [the appellant]

Position: Electrical Engineering Technician, GS-802-9
[Position Number]

Organization: [unit name]
Engineering Flight
Department of the Air Force
[an Air Force installation, state]

Decision: Electrical Engineering Technician, GS-802-9
(Appeal denied)

OPM decision number: C-0802-09-02

Approved by:

/s/ Bonnie J. Brandon
Bonnie J. Brandon
Classification Appeals Officer

6/30/97
Date

INTRODUCTION

The appealed position is assigned to the [a department], Department of the Air Force. The position is currently classified as Electrical Engineering Technician, GS-802-9. The appellant requests that his position be classified at the GS-11 grade level.

This appeal is filed with our office under the provisions of chapter 51, title 5 of the United States Code. This is the final administrative decision of the Government, subject to discretionary review only under the conditions and time limits specified in title 5 of the Code of Federal Regulations, sections 511.605 and 511.613, and appendix 4 of the *Introduction to the Position Classification Standards*.

GENERAL ISSUE

In reaching our classification decision, we considered information submitted by the appellant; his supervisor; and his agency, including his official [position description number]. We also considered information obtained by telephone from the appellant, his supervisor, and agency personnel officials. The appellant believes that his position compares favorably with GS-11 positions at other air force bases. In support of this belief, he submitted position descriptions for GS-11 electrical engineering technicians at [a large Air Force installation and a large Air Force installation]. By law, we must classify positions solely by comparing their current duties and responsibilities to Office of Personnel Management standards and guidelines (sections 5106, 5107, and 5112 of title 5, United States Code). Since comparison to standards is the exclusive method for classifying positions, we cannot compare the appellant's position description to others as a basis for deciding his appeal.

POSITION INFORMATION

Both the appellant and his supervisor certified to the accuracy of the appellant's position description. We find the position description is adequate for position classification purposes.

The principal purpose of this position is to design, plan, sequence, estimate cost of, and participate in negotiating projects to be contracted out. The appellant is responsible for writing the statement of work, developing the design, estimating costs, negotiating with the contractor through the contracting office, managing the construction projects, and accepting finished projects. He serves as technical advisor on contracts with a particular emphasis on electrical systems, including interior and exterior lighting systems and power distribution systems. The appellant attends pre-construction conferences and pre-final and final inspections. The appellant's position description, the other material of record, and our audit findings provide much more information about his duties and responsibilities and how they are performed.

SERIES AND TITLE DETERMINATION

The appellant does not question the series or title of the position. We concur with the agency's determination that the position is properly assigned to the GS-802 series with the title of Electrical Engineering Technician.

GRADE LEVEL DETERMINATION

The GS-802 standard, dated June 1969, defines grade levels under two criteria: *nature of assignment* and *level of responsibility*. Our evaluation of the appellant's position in terms of these two criteria follows.

Nature of Assignment

The nature of assignment includes the scope and difficulty of the project and the skills and knowledge required to complete the assignment.

At the GS-9 level, engineering technicians typically perform a variety of work relating to the area of specialization that requires the application of a considerable number of different basic but established methods, procedures, and techniques. Assignments at this level usually involve independent responsibility for planning and conducting a block of work which is a complete conventional project of relatively limited scope, or a portion of a larger and more diverse project. These assignments require study, analysis, and consideration of several possible courses of action, techniques, general layouts, or designs and selection of the most appropriate. Assignments generally require consideration of numerous precedents and some adaptation of previous plans or techniques. Further, GS-9 level assignments typically require coordination of several parts, each requiring independent analysis and solution, and a good understanding of the effect that recommendations made or other results of the assignment may have on an item, system, or process and its end-use application.

GS-11 engineering technicians perform work of broad scope and complexity that requires application of (1) demonstrated ability to interpret, select, adapt, and apply many guidelines, precedents, and engineering principles and practices which relate to the area of specialization; and (2) some knowledge of related scientific and engineering fields. Technicians at this level plan and accomplish complete projects or studies of conventional nature requiring the independent adaptation of a general fund of background data and information and interpretation and use of precedents. They are typically confronted with a variety of complex problems in which considerable judgment is needed to make sound engineering compromises and decisions. Initiative, resourcefulness, and sound judgment are needed in planning and coordinating phases of assignments and in selecting which of several sound alternatives is to be used in arriving at acceptable engineering compromises. Ingenuity and creative thinking are

required in devising new ways of accomplishing objectives and in adapting existing equipment or current techniques to new uses.

The appellant's assignments require technical knowledge of accepted engineering principles and practices of the electrical discipline which would be acquired through experience in construction and remodeling of engineering. A general knowledge of architectural, civil, and mechanical disciplines is also needed to perform the work. In carrying out assignments, the appellant uses well-established regulations contained in the Code of Federal Regulations, Air Force technical orders, approved plans, conditions specified in Applications for Permit to Drill and lease terms, industry standards, and agency procedures. These guidelines are relatively clear cut and do not require significant interpretation or adaptation to accomplish the work.

In performing his work, the appellant identifies the limits of the problems involved, the kinds of controlling data needed, and the criteria and techniques to be applied. The appellant plans exterior lighting systems and the interior electrical systems installed in hazardous areas and generation systems. He prepares detailed statements of work and estimates for electrical requirements, using unit pricing books and automated pricing systems. Such work requires the ability to assimilate the information into a detailed cost estimate. Information provided by the appellant, his supervisor, and agency personnel officials indicates that the appellant spends about half of his time on assignments which involve design and/or construction inspection responsibilities.

The appellant and his supervisor provided information on three projects as representative examples of the complexity of the appellant's work: design of two baseball fields at [a large Air Force installation], installation of a fiber optic communication duct bank on the base, and design of power requirements at the [laboratory name]. Our audit found that work on the ball fields required the appellant to make calculations for the proper lighting of the fields, using new energy saving type fixtures, the current electrical code, the right amount of lighting, and the power requirements as specified in Air Force Regulation 88-33 (Design of Outdoor Sports Facilities). The appellant served as team leader for installation of the fiber optic communication duct bank, completion of which was needed for future expansion of [laboratory name] (Air Force, Army, Navy) laser research laboratories. The appellant designed this project and participated in awarding the contract. For the [laboratory name] project, the appellant designed the power requirements for the buildings, including the requirements for lighting, fire detection, air conditioning, and power to the computer room. These projects required the appellant to study, analyze, and consider several possible courses of action, techniques, general layouts, or designs and to select the most appropriate from among these.

Similar to GS-9 work, the appellant's assignments require applying a considerable number of different methods, procedures, and techniques. Also similar to GS-9

assignments, most of the appellant's work requires studying, analyzing, and considering various possible courses of action, techniques, general layouts, or designs and selecting the most appropriate. As discussed at GS-9, the appellant's work requires consideration of many precedents and some adaptation of previous plans or techniques. As is typical at GS-9, the appellant's electrical work sometimes requires adaptation or modification of precedents by making minor deviations, such as the number or location of light fixtures in an area. Most of these electrical problems have been previously encountered.

The appellant's work falls short of GS-11 criteria. The appellant's three representative projects were not as broad in scope and as complex as the GS-11 examples on pages 34 and 35 of the standard. One GS-11 example describes projects which might entail development of new equipment or systems, simplification and improvement of present equipment, or development of new design techniques, or methods to meet electrical requirements. Another GS-11 example might involve preparing designs and specifications where the complexity or nonconventional nature of the buildings and facilities entails design problems requiring considerable adaptation of precedents or design of features for which precedents are not directly applicable. Our audit indicates that none of the appellant's projects were as broad in scope or as complex as the GS-11 examples or required substantive adaptation or modification as envisioned for positions at the GS-11 level. While the appellant's assignments generally require an analysis of the work, time constraints, available resources, and consideration of several courses of action, most of his work is conventional in nature and has limited scope. For example, the appellant has access to a wide variety of guidelines, agency regulations, specification books, manufacturing guides, and national code handbooks which are applicable to most of his assignments. Because the appellant's projects are narrower in scope than envisioned at GS-11, they do not have phases requiring planning and coordination to the extent intended at that level. Further, GS-11 projects require initiative, resourcefulness, and sound judgment in planning and coordinating their phases. Typically, the appellant's assignments do not afford him the opportunity for ingenuity and creative thinking which is indicative of the GS-11 level.

Level of Responsibility

This factor includes consideration of the nature and purpose of person-to-person work relationships and supervision received in terms of intensity of review of work as well as guidance received during the course of the work cycle.

At the GS-9 level, the supervisor outlines requirements, provides information on any related work being performed, and furnishes general instructions as to the scope of objectives, time limitations, priorities, and similar aspects. The supervisor is available for consultation and advice where significant deviations from standard engineering practices must be made and gives more detailed instructions when distinctly new

criteria or new techniques are involved. Standard methods employed are seldom reviewed, but review is made for adequacy and for conformance with established policies, precedents, and sound engineering concepts and usage.

Personal work contacts at the GS-9 level are primarily to resolve mutual problems and coordinate the work with that of personnel in related activities. Some contacts are made with agencies for whom work is done and with contractors and engineer firms. The contacts are made to clear up doubtful points, advise as to discrepancies found in meeting contract terms, consider recommendations for acceptable substitutes, and promote adherence to agency standards. Contacts outside the agency are usually arranged under supervisory guidance.

At the GS-11 level, engineering technicians have considerable freedom in planning work and carrying out assignments. The supervisor makes assignments in terms of the major objectives, providing background information and advice on specific unusual problems which are anticipated or on matters requiring coordination with other groups. Unusual or controversial problems, or policy questions arising in the course of a project, may be discussed with the supervisor, but technical assistance is infrequently sought or required. The supervisor is usually informally advised regarding progress, but there is little review during progress of typical assignments. Completed work in the form of recommendations, plans, designs, reports, or correspondence is reviewed for general adequacy, conformity to purpose of the assignment, and sound engineering judgment. By comparison, technicians at lower grade levels receive advice and guidance on the application of nonstandard methods and techniques or in the solution of complex problems requiring significant deviations from established practice. Technicians at the GS-11 level customarily make contacts in the course of their work with the same groups of individuals as do technicians at lower grade levels, and the purpose of the contacts is similar. Because of the increased scope of GS-11 assignments, these contacts tend to become more extensive than at lower levels.

The appellant works under the immediate supervision of the chief of the [department], who assigns work in terms of the general priorities established and in terms of the volume of current workload and contractual activity involved. Contacts are with base-wide and senior-level staff or organizations and contractor representatives.

The appellant's level of responsibility falls short of GS-11 criteria. Although the appellant may work relatively independently in terms of designing, collecting data, writing performance work standards on the electrical requirements which contractors use to construct the project, and participating in the negotiation of contracts and awarding sums of money for the completion of the project, his assignments are narrower in scope than envisioned at GS-11. Our audit indicated that the appellant has limited opportunity to resolve unusual or complex problems requiring significant deviations from established practice. The appellant has access to a wide variety of

guidelines, agency regulations, specification books, manufacturing guides, and national code handbooks which are applicable to most of his assignments. Further, engineering and architectural staff at the base are available to provide technical assistance if needed. The appellant's completed work is reviewed for general adequacy, conformity to purpose, and sound engineering judgment. In summary, the appellant's level of responsibility does not exceed the GS-9 level.

DECISION

The appellant's position is properly classified as Electrical Engineering Technician, GS-802-9.