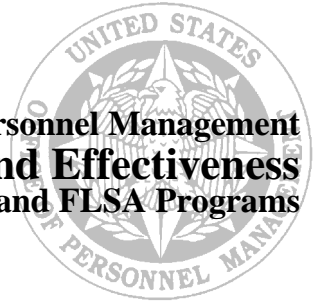


**U.S. Office of Personnel Management
Office of Merit Systems Oversight and Effectiveness
Classification Appeals and FLSA Programs**



**Chicago Oversight Division
230 South Dearborn Street, DPN 30-6
Chicago, IL 60604**

**Classification Appeal Decision
Under Section 5112 of Title 5, United States Code**

Appellant: [Appellant's name]
Agency classification: Secretary (OA), GS-318-5
Organization: Department of Veterans Affairs
Medical Center
Nursing Service
[City, State]
OPM decision: Secretary (OA), GS-318-5
OPM decision number: C-0318-05-04

/s/

Frederick J. Boland
Classification Appeals Officer

January 30, 1998

Date

As provided in section 511.612 of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations, this decision constitutes a certificate that is mandatory and binding on all administrative, certifying, payroll, disbursing, and accounting officials of the government. The agency is responsible for reviewing its classification decisions for identical, similar, or related positions to ensure consistency with this decision. There is no right of further appeal. This decision is subject to discretionary review only under conditions and time limits specified in the Introduction to the Position Classification Standards, appendix 4, section G (address provided in appendix 4, section H).

Decision sent to:

[appellant's name and address]

[name and address of appellant's servicing
personnel office]

Mr. Ronald E. Cowles
Deputy Assistant Secretary for Personnel
and Labor Relations (05)
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

INTRODUCTION

The appellant contests her agency's decision in classifying her position. She is assigned to position number 667, classified on May 30, 1997, as Secretary (OA), GS-318-5, by the Department of Veterans Affairs. The position is located in the Department of Veterans Affairs, Medical Center, Professional Services, Nursing Service, Office of Chief, [City, State].

The appellant requests that her position be upgraded to Secretary (OA), GS-318-6. She believes her work warrants greater credit than her agency allowed because of the range of knowledge and skill her duties demand and because of the high level of her various personal contacts (Factors 1 and 6 of the GS-318 classification standard). She believes her position description accurately reflects her major duties.

JOB INFORMATION

The appellant is one of about 146 employees in her organization, which is headed by the Chief, Nursing Service (VN Nurse [#]), and consists of Registered Nurses, Licensed Practical Nurses, Nursing Assistants, a Medical Records Technician, the appellant, and a GS-4 Clerk-Typist.

The appellant coordinates the administrative and clerical functions of the Service, supporting both her supervisor (the Chief of the Nursing Service) and the nursing staff. Her administrative functions entail providing assistance concerning VA and Medical Center regulations and policies to the nursing staff; independently handling requests for information from employees and assisting in handling complaints made by patients, families, and staff members; preparing AMIS (hours worked/patient categories) and annual reports; obtaining information from files, manuals, and other Services for accurately completing reports; making arrangements for conferences and meetings by reserving space, preparing travel vouchers, and composing, typing, and distributing all necessary paperwork to attendees; determining appropriate action on all incoming correspondence, publications, regulations and directories; determining those that can be acted upon personally and taking action; and maintaining the Chief Nurse's calendar by scheduling appointments and conferences.

Among her clerical duties are answering telephone calls and receiving visitors; creating and maintaining Nursing Service files and manuals used by nursing staff; reviewing all outgoing correspondence for signature of Chief Nurse for proper format, compliance with procedural instructions, typographical accuracy, and necessary attachments; typing proficiency reports and maintaining follow-up records of proficiencies due; typing performance appraisals for non-professional nursing staff; entering tuition reimbursements into computer; calculating and typing all necessary paperwork for Fee Basis personnel; and typing Standards Board actions. She is expected to be proficient (at least 40 words per minute) in typing and in the use of word processing and other office software.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Series and Title Determination

The appellant's duties fall within the type of work covered by the Secretary, GS-318, series, which includes positions that assist one individual, and, as in the appellant's case, the subordinate staff of that individual, by performing general office work auxiliary to the work of the organization. As required by the GS-318 classification standard, the appellant functions as the principal administrative and clerical support position in her organization, operating independently of any other such position in the office. She coordinates a comprehensive range of administrative and clerical support duties, as noted in the Job Information section of this decision. Her duties require knowledge of administrative and clerical procedures and requirements, various office skills, and the ability to apply such skills in a way that increases the effectiveness of others. Her duties require a general knowledge of the substantive work of the Nursing Service, but not technical or professional knowledge in any specialized subject-matter area.

The title *Secretary* applies to all nonsupervisory positions in the GS-318 occupation. Because the position requires knowledge of office automation systems (e.g., word processing), the parenthetical *Office Automation* or *OA* is added to the title. Thus, the appellant's position is properly titled *Secretary (OA)*.

Grade Determination

Work demanding less than a substantial (at least 25 percent) amount of time is not considered in classifying a position. Similarly, acting, temporary, and other responsibilities that are not regular and continuing are not considered in classifying positions. (Temporary assignments of sufficient duration, though, are sometimes recognized in accordance with agency discretion by temporary promotion if higher graded duties are involved, by formal detail, or by performance recognition.)

The appellant's Secretarial duties are evaluated using the OPM *Secretary, GS-318, Series* position classification standard, dated January 1979. Her office automation duties are evaluated using the OPM *Office Automation Grade Evaluation Guide*, dated November 1990. Her office automation duties, however, cannot be higher graded than her Secretarial duties unless they involve a wide variety of nonstandard automation problems or assignments requiring knowledge of *advanced* functions of more than one type of software, which they do not. Therefore, they are not further evaluated in this decision.

The GS-318 standard is in Factor Evaluation System (FES) format. This system requires credit levels assigned under each factor to relate to only one set of duties and responsibilities. Under FES, work must be fully equivalent to the factor-level described in the standard to warrant credit at that level's point value. If work is not fully equivalent to the overall intent of a particular level described in the standard, a lower level and point value must be assigned, unless the deficiency is balanced by an equally important aspect of the work that meets a higher level.

Nine factors were evaluated in determining the grade level of this position. The appellant disputes her agency's assignment of credit for two of the factors, (Factors 1 and 6), but not the others. Based

upon our review of the written record and our telephone interview with her, we concur with the agency's credit level assignment for the undisputed factors. Accordingly, the following recounts only our examination of the disputed factors.

FACTOR 1: KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED BY THE POSITION

This factor measures the nature and extent of information or facts that employees must understand to do acceptable work (e.g., steps, procedures, practices, rules, policies, theories, principles, and concepts) and the nature and extent of the skills needed to apply those knowledges. In the Secretary occupation, the same type of knowledge may be found at different factor-levels and point values, depending on the extent of knowledge required. The extent of knowledge required in this occupation is related, in part, to the work situation in which the position is found. Accordingly, this factor is examined by means of these two parts, type and situation.

The standard describes four types of knowledge requirements and three levels of work situations that determine the factor level credited.

Knowledge Type

The appellant believes her work warrants higher credit than Level 1-3 given by her agency. She states:

"In this position, I have complete understanding, knowledge of all policies, procedures, program goals, commitments to perform assignments such as reviewing publications (which I complete on a daily basis), directives, etc. All pertaining information is correlated for review by Chief, Nursing Service for meetings, review, etc. Also set up conference calls, i.e., Chief Nurses Group VISN [#], and meetings with Administrative Group. On some occasions, I take appropriate follow-up action on own initiative for completion of task. I sign routine correspondence of a non-technical nature in supervisor's name or in own name.

I have the knowledge and skill to coordinate the operation of the Nursing Office, along with providing guidance to other clerical personnel in Nursing Service. I orient new secretaries (other services) to the policies, procedures and operation of Nursing Service and provide ongoing guidance/assistance when deemed necessary.

I feel that I meet the qualifications for a GS-6 secretary and feel that I perform these duties in a satisfactory manner."

The appellant's knowledge of basic rules and procedures applicable to receiving and referring phone calls and visitors, her knowledge of common clerical practices and procedures in filing material and obtaining requested data from the files, and her knowledge of grammar, punctuation and required formats for correspondence and reports are fully credited under Type I of the classification standard.

She is further credited under Type II for knowledge of an extensive body of rules, procedures, or operations as well as knowledge of the organization and functions of the Nursing Service in order to carry out and coordinate many different procedures, each of which involves numerous steps, such as preparing travel orders; making travel and lodging arrangements; and preparing a variety of recurring reports and documents from information obtained from the staff, files, and other offices, e.g., the Nursing Service's hours worked by patient category and tuition reimbursement reports.

In addition, as required of Type III Secretaries, the appellant must know the duties, priorities, commitments, policies, and program goals of nursing staff so that she can independently note and follow-up on commitments made at meetings and conferences. However, her position falls notably short of the Type III requirement that Secretaries be fully responsible for coordinating their office's work with that of other offices and for recognizing the need for such coordination in various circumstances. The appellant cites her responsibilities for arranging meetings and conference calls as an example of such coordination, but such work is recognized as Type II work under the standard. None of the duties she references require extensive administrative coordination with other offices, an essential requirement for Type III credit. Although the Nursing Service is a sizable organization, all its components are engaged in essentially similar work. Its organizational components levy a heavier workload demand, but not a greater knowledge demand. The internal procedures and controls of the simpler organization remain adequate for its administrative needs. Similarly, it lacks significant coordination demands with outside organizations, such as those that might be imposed on small research organizations with extensive outside dealings and reporting arrangements with other offices.

We evaluate the position's knowledge requirements as equivalent to Type II.

Work Situation

Work situation refers to the complexity of the organization served (i.e., the immediate office in which the secretary works, and any subordinate offices) which affects the extent of office rules, procedures, operations, and priorities Secretaries must apply to maintain a proper and smooth flow of work within the organization and between organizations. The standard describes three work situations, A, B, and C, each of increasing complexity.

Work Situation B requires a system of formal internal procedures and administrative controls and a formal production or progress reporting system not found in the appellant's organization. The coordination required among offices is sufficiently complex as to require Secretaries' continuous attention.

In contrast, the appellant's organization faces few administrative problems requiring coordination through the use of formal procedures and controls for adequate solution. The similarity of work across the Nursing Services' components require minimal internal procedural and administrative controls, as in less complex organizations.

We evaluate the position's work situation as equivalent to Level A.

Type II knowledge and Level A work situation convert to Level 1-3 according to the standard. Therefore, we evaluate this factor at Level 1-3 and credit 350 points.

FACTOR 6: PERSONAL CONTACTS

This factor includes face-to-face telephone contacts with persons not in the supervisory chain. Levels described under this factor are based on what is required to make the initial contact, the difficulty of communicating with those contacted, and the setting in which the contact takes place (e.g., the degree to which the employee and those contacted recognize their relative roles and

authorities). Above the lowest level, points are only for contacts that are essential for successful performance of the work and that have a demonstrable impact on the difficulty and responsibility of the work performed. Contacts credited under Factor 6 must be the same contacts credited under Factor 7.

The appellant states that:

“I not only have contact with Medical Center employees, but have contact with various agencies, i.e., community nursing homes, VA Headquarters, Academic Affairs, Hospice of [County name], Schools of Nursing, College of [State name] on a wide variety of matters. I also coordinate Administrative Disciplinary Boards for Chief, Nursing Service, i.e., travel, meeting dates/times, etc.

Some of this contact is personal (face to face) and some is by telephone, some is done by correspondence through e-mail. Some correspondence is by written communication.”

The appellant’s written communications are not considered under this factor, which credits only personal contacts. Her contacts with employees within her immediate organization are characteristic of Level 6-1. Her more difficult contacts outside her organization are recognized at Level 6-2, which credits her contacts with employees engaged in different functions, missions, and kinds of work (e.g., representatives from various levels within the agency such as headquarters, regional, district, or field offices, or other operating offices in the immediate installation). Level 6-2 also recognizes her contacts with individuals external to her agency that occur in a moderately *structured* setting (i.e., the contacts are generally established on a routine basis, usually at the employee’s work place; the exact purpose of the contact is frequently unclear at first to one or more of the parties and one or more of the parties may be uninformed concerning the role and authority of the other participants). Contacts at Level 6-2 include visitors and calls requiring Secretaries to clarify first why the caller or visitor is in contact with the office, as when the appellant receives a complaint from a patient's family and determines whether it merits referral to the Head Nurse of the unit involved, the Associate Chief, or the Chief of the Service.

Unlike Level 6-3, the visitors, calls, and complaints the appellant handles are frequently routine rather than out-of-the-ordinary. Level 6-3's requirement for frequent contacts in moderately *unstructured* settings (where the purpose and extent of each contact is different and the role and authority of each party is identified and developed during the course of the contact) is evident where Secretaries must frequently handle sensitive or contentious matters, as when dealing with attorneys, public action groups, etc. The appellant rarely encounters such situations.

We evaluate this factor at Level 6-2 and credit 25 points.

FACTOR LEVEL POINT SUMMARY

Factor	Level	Points
1	1-3	350
2	2-3	275
3	3-2	125
4	4-3	150
5	5-2	75
6	6-2	25
7	7-2	50
8	8-1	5
9	9-1	5
	Total:	1060

The table above summarizes our evaluation of the appellant's work. As shown on page 9 of the standard, a total of 1060 points falls within the GS-5 grade range (855-1100).

DECISION

As explained in the foregoing, the proper classification of the appellant's position is Secretary (OA), GS-318-5.