

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

Dallas Oversight Division
1100 Commerce Street, Room 4C22
Dallas, TX 75242-9968

Classification Appeal Decision
Under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code

Appellant: [appellant's name]

Agency classification: Secretary (Steno/OA)
GS-318-7

Organization: [appellant's activity]
U.S. Army Reserve Command
Department of the Army
[geographic location]

OPM decision: Secretary (Office Automation)
GS-318-7

OPM decision number: C-0318-07-03

/s/Bonnie J. Brandon

Bonnie J. Brandon
Classification Appeals Officer

August 15, 2000

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).

Since this decision changes the classification of the appealed decision, it is to be effective no later than the beginning of the fourth pay period after the date of the decision (5 CFR 511.702). The servicing personnel office must submit a compliance report containing the corrected position description and a Standard Form 50 showing the personnel action taken. The report must be submitted within 30 days from the effective date of the personnel action.

Decision sent to:

Appellant:

[appellant's name and address]

Agency:

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Introduction

On February 22, 2000, the Dallas Oversight Division of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted a classification appeal from [the appellant]. Her position is currently classified as Secretary (Stenography/Office Automation), GS-318-7. She believes that her position should be classified as Executive Assistant, GS-301-9. She works in the Command Section of [a] Medical Brigade, [under a] Regional Support Command, U.S. Army Reserve Command, Department of the Army, in [geographic location]. We have accepted and decided this appeal under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.).

To help decide this appeal, a Dallas Oversight Division representative conducted a telephone audit of the appellant's position. The audit included interviews with the appellant and her immediate supervisor. In reaching our decision, we reviewed the audit findings and the information of record furnished by the appellant and her agency, including her official position description [number].

General issues

In her appeal, the appellant compares her position to another position classified by her agency as Executive Assistant, GS-301-9. By law, we must classify positions solely by comparing their current duties and responsibilities to OPM standards and guidelines (5 U.S.C. 5106, 5107, and 5112). Since comparison to standards is the exclusive method for classifying positions, we cannot compare the appellant's position to others as a basis for deciding this appeal.

Position information

The appellant is chiefly responsible for providing administrative and clerical services to the Commanding General of [a specific] Medical Brigade and the Command Section. In addition to the appellant herself and the Commanding General, the Command Section includes a Deputy Commander, a Chief of Staff, and a Supervisory Staff Administrator. The Supervisory Staff Administrator is the appellant's immediate supervisor. The appellant receives, screens, and directs all visitors, calls, and incoming correspondence. She independently responds, both orally and in writing, to inquiries from individuals both inside and outside her section about administrative issues relating to leave usage, time and attendance, travel, military protocol, and office communication. She may also initiate either written or oral communication relating to any of these administrative areas.

The appellant coordinates the flow of information between her section and the 27 subordinate units throughout the brigade. This includes controlling suspense dates on correspondence, reports, required forms, and other material; reviewing documents for complete and accurate factual information; following up and reporting on the status of actions required by the Commanding General or his staff; and compiling needed information and sharing it with the appropriate organizational units or personnel.

The appellant maintains and controls the Commanding General's personal calendar, arranges his travel, and briefs and advises him on matters concerning administrative support procedures. She

also oversees all matters concerning proper military protocol that affect the Commanding General and the organization. She plans and coordinates administrative arrangements for large conferences, ceremonies, and other meetings. She records and keeps track of the Command Section's funding estimates and spending by object class. As needed, she provides assistance and guidance to other administrative support personnel throughout the brigade regarding proper format for correspondence and other written material, standard administrative practices, and other clerical procedures.

To accomplish her work, the appellant must use various computer software. She must also be skilled in automated word processing.

Series, title, and standard determination

We find the appellant's position is properly classified in the Secretary Series, GS-318. The appellant's position meets the series definition as it serves as the principal clerical and administrative support position for the head of an organizational unit (and his immediate staff). The primary purpose of her work is to perform the necessary general office work that facilitates the work of the organization and to assist other organization staff members to perform their duties more effectively. Her position requires knowledge of clerical and administrative procedures and various office skills. Although she must possess knowledge of various administrative processes and must thoroughly understand the functions of subordinate organizational units throughout the brigade, her position does not require her to apply a professional or technical knowledge of any specialized subject area or administrative field, e.g., personnel management, financial management, contracting.

The Miscellaneous Administration and Program Series, GS-301, is an inappropriate series for the appellant's position. This series is used to classify two-grade interval administrative work for which no other series is appropriate. Two-grade interval administrative work requires a high order of analytical ability combined with a *comprehensive* knowledge of the functions, theories, and principles of management and the methods of evaluation. These criteria are not applicable to the appellant's position. One-grade interval administrative support work, such as that performed by the appellant, can be performed based on a *practical* knowledge of the purpose, operation, procedures, techniques, and guidelines of specific program areas or functions. Support work personnel who apply a thorough (but practical) knowledge of these facets of administration typically learn to do the work on the job through what may sometimes be years of experience.

Consistent with our series determination, the proper title for the appellant's position is *Secretary*. Since her position requires proficiency in the use of computer software and automated word processing office equipment, the title of her position should include "office automation" as a parenthetical title. Interviews with the appellant and her supervisor established that her position does not require stenography. Accordingly, this designation should be eliminated from her position's title. The full title of the appellant's position is *Secretary (Office Automation)*.

When evaluating the appellant's position, we applied the Office Automation Grade Evaluation Guide to ensure that her use of office automation systems was not classifiable at a higher grade than her secretarial work. We determined that her office automation responsibilities are lower

graded than her secretarial work. As a result, the appellant's position is properly graded using the Position Classification Standard for the Secretary Series, GS-318.

Grade determination

The GS-318 position classification standard is written in the Factor Evaluation System (FES) format, which uses nine factors. Each factor is evaluated separately and is assigned a point value consistent with factor level definitions described in the standard. The total number of points for all nine factors is converted to a grade by use of the standard's grade conversion table. Under the FES, each factor level description describes the minimum characteristics needed to receive credit for the described level. Therefore, if a position fails to meet the criteria in a factor level description in any significant aspect, it must be credited at the next lower level. Conversely, the position may exceed those criteria in some aspects and still not be credited at a higher level.

Factor 1, Knowledge required by the position

This factor measures the nature and extent (e.g., concepts, policies, procedures, and rules) needed to perform the position's duties and responsibilities. The GS-318 standard measures this factor by (1) the type of knowledge required and (2) the position's work situation.

Knowledge type

The appellant's position meets Knowledge Type III. At this level, positions require knowledge of duties, priorities, commitments, policies, and program goals of the organization. This knowledge must be sufficient enough to allow the secretary to complete nonroutine assignments; to independently follow up on commitments made by staff members; and to locate and summarize information from files and documents that involve having to make distinctions between relevant and irrelevant material. At Knowledge Type III, the secretary is fully responsible for coordinating the work of the office with that of other offices and for recognizing situations where coordination is needed.

To perform her duties and responsibilities, the appellant must possess a substantive knowledge of her organization's program goals and priorities. She must understand the functions of superior offices in the Command and of subordinate units throughout the brigade. She must also understand established policies and practices in a variety of administrative areas, e.g., time and attendance, travel, military protocol, and internal and external communication. She uses this knowledge in her day-to-day work to review letters, investigation reports, progress reports, and other written material to direct information and inquiries to the appropriate staff; to prepare simple but frequently substantive correspondence for signature by the Commanding General and the Supervisory Staff Administrator; and to recognize problems with incomplete, missing, or factually inaccurate information (e.g., on administrative paperwork submitted to the Command Section by other units in the brigade and in responses to requests for information by the General and other staff). She also uses her knowledge of the Command's program area as well as its administrative functions to consolidate and organize information for the General and Supervisory Staff Administrator for their use in managing Command operations and personnel.

The appellant's position meets some of the criteria of Knowledge Type IV, but it does not fully meet this level. Although the appellant routinely develops simple material for the General's use in public speaking engagements (e.g., acknowledgements of retirements, commendations, personnel changes) as described at this level, her position does not fully meet other aspects of the factor level description. Positions at Knowledge Type IV require the secretary to regularly use organizational and administrative knowledge to eliminate conflict in office procedures, to systematically evaluate administrative processes used by subordinate offices, and to recommend restructuring of activities. At this level, the secretary routinely uses knowledge of policies and procedures to adapt them to emergency situations and to recognize how and when policies, procedures, and guidelines will be confusing to others. Although the appellant assists her supervisor with some of these responsibilities, we found insufficient evidence in both the appeal file and in interviews with the appellant and her supervisor to conclude that she works to meet these needs as regularly or as independently as described in the standard. Similarly, in interviews with the appellant, we found no examples of how she applies a comprehensive knowledge of her organization to regularly brief or advise individuals outside the organization on current and substantive administrative issues, as also described by the factor level description for Knowledge Type IV. The standard also provides that Work Situation B, as discussed below, only rarely involves the application of Knowledge Type IV. Because the appellant's position does not fully meet the criteria for Knowledge Type IV, her position is appropriately credited with Knowledge Type III.

Work situation

The appellant's position matches Work Situation B. Consistent with the standard's description, [a specific] Medical Brigade is organized into subordinate sections, some of which are further divided, with intermediate supervisors. The presence of subordinate units and supervisors under the Command Section places demands on the appellant that are significantly greater than those imposed on secretaries in Work Situation A, which describes organizations that are small and of limited complexity.

The appellant's position does not meet Work Situation C. Work Situation C is characterized by significantly greater organizational complexity, such as three or more subordinate levels with several organizations at each level and with specialists in fields such as personnel, finance, and management analysis. It is also characterized by having programs that are interlocked with the programs of other agencies; are directly affected by widely varying conditions and undergo frequent change; or require the supervisor to devote a substantial portion of time in personal contacts with citizen groups, the media, State and local government officials, etc.

For Factor 1, we credit the appellant's position with Knowledge Type III and Work Situation B, which equates to Level 1-4 (550 points).

Factor 2, Supervisory controls

This factor measures the nature and extent of supervision exercised over the position. Controls measured by this factor include the way assignments are made, the way priorities and deadlines are set, and the way work is reviewed.

The appellant's position exceeds Level 2-3 but does not fully meet Level 2-4. At both of these levels, the secretary works independently, using personal initiative to complete many assignments; plans and carries out the clerical work of the office; and handles problems or deviations in accordance with the program goals of the organization. At Level 2-3 and Level 2-4, the work of the secretary is reviewed primarily for effectiveness. At Level 2-4, however, the secretary must use personal initiative to handle a wider variety of situations and conflicts. Secretarial positions at Level 2-4 are most likely to be found in organizations of such size and scope that many complex office problems arise which cannot be brought to the attention of the supervisor.

The appellant's position exceeds Level 2-3 in that, in addition to her duties overseeing office procedures and coordinating the flow of information between organizational units throughout the brigade, she is responsible for planning and arranging large conferences and meetings with a high order of independence. For instance, she uses her own initiative and judgement to determine optimal travel arrangements, needed audiovisual equipment, the order of agenda items, and backup representatives to take the place of personnel who would normally be expected to attend but who are unavailable. The appellant is also fully responsible for ensuring that all military protocol requirements are met, making proper seating arrangements in meetings, composing invitations and thank-you letters, contacting guest speakers, and serving as the point of contact for all logistical details such as travel and reservations. The appellant is also held responsible by her supervisor to independently attend to the details of, and to coordinate or resolve, a variety of administrative issues. These include, for instance, issues concerning transportation, housing, and training of military units throughout the brigade; questions or problems concerning payroll, leave usage, reassignment, or conduct of military personnel; and the monitoring of available funding for awards and of expenditures incurred by the brigade for personnel on temporary duty.

The appellant's position does not fully meet Level 2-4 in that secretaries at this level must regularly and independently handle a wider variety of more complex situations. For instance, when resolving issues, secretaries at Level 2-4 must often obtain information from sources which are not initially known, on subject matter that is specialized or is highly complicated because it is scattered in numerous or obscure documents. Secretaries at this level review correspondence and other material for the supervisor's signature where there frequently are departures from established policies and where conflicts between information must be independently researched and resolved. At Level 2-4, many complex problems cannot be presented to the supervisor. Although the Supervisory Staff Administrator and the Commanding General are frequently away from the office, the appellant typically maintains daily contact with them. The appellant's supervisor is usually available to exercise managerial control, to establish priorities, and to provide guidance to the staff on most nonroutine or complicated administrative issues.

For Factor 2, we credit the appellant's position with Level 2-3 (275 points).

Factor 3, Guidelines

The appellant's agency has credited her position with Level 3-3, which is the highest level described by the standard. We concur that the appellant's position fully meets, but does not

exceed, Level 3-3. Level 3-3 is appropriate since a significant portion of the appellant's work is guided by unwritten policies, unestablished practices, and personal judgement regarding priorities and organizational efficiency.

For Factor 3, we credit the appellant's position with Level 3-3 (275 points).

Factor 4, Complexity

The appellant's agency has credited her position with Level 4-3, the highest level described by the standard. We concur that the appellant's position fully meets, but does not exceed, Level 4-3. The appellant's position matches Level 4-3 in that her work involves differing and unrelated processes, personal decisions based on her familiarity with program goals, and analysis of subject matter to decide what needs to be done. Similar to secretaries at Level 4-3, the appellant is responsible for making arrangements for conferences, award ceremonies, receptions, and other meetings including travel, transportation, hotel reservations, and seating arrangements. In addition to procedural duties such as approving leave and maintaining time and attendance records, the appellant monitors the available funding for awards and expenditures incurred by the brigade for personnel on temporary duty and prepares reports as needed.

For Factor 4, we credit the appellant's position with Level 4-3 (150 points).

Factor 5, Scope and effect

This factor measures the effect of the work both within and outside the organization. Elements considered in measuring this factor include the purpose, breadth, and depth of assignments.

The appellant's position meets Level 5-2. At this level, the purpose of the work is to carry out specific procedures. The work affects the accuracy and reliability of the work of others and of other work processes. Duties at this level include serving as a liaison between the supervisor and other individuals, consolidating information into correspondence and reports, and making various arrangements to assist the supervisor with administrative and program responsibilities.

The primary purpose of the appellant's position is to initiate and complete a variety of office and administrative support work that is essential to the smooth operation of her organization. Her work directly affects the timely and effective accomplishments of internal office activities and contributes to the accuracy of work performed by the Commanding General, the Supervisory Staff Administrator, and other staff members. She collects, monitors, and coordinates various types of information used by her supervisor and his staff to carry out their responsibilities, e.g., correspondence on a variety of subjects, follow-up actions from meetings and reports, and budget data. She serves as the initial and primary point of contact for conference planning and for administrative affairs, such as personnel, training, logistics, travel, and pay.

The appellant's position does not meet Level 5-3. At this level, the secretary serves offices that clearly and directly affect a broad range of agency-wide activities, operations in other agencies, or large segments of the public. The secretary performing at Level 5-3 works in the context of situations that are outside the command structure of the appellant's organization. Positions at

Level 5-30 regularly require creativity to modify usual clerical and administrative methods in ways that directly affect the organization's mission accomplishment. The appellant's work does not meet this level as she directly serves an organizational component (the [specific] Medical Brigade) that is part of a larger organizational component (the [specific] Regional Support Command) that in turn is part of another larger unit (the U.S Army Reserve Command). Her organizational component is responsible for program administration of a specific nature (operation of a health service support system) for a limited geographic area (five states). The scope and effect of the appellant's work typically does not reach beyond her organization's command structure.

For Factor 5, we credit the appellant's position with Level 5-2 (75 points).

Level 6, Personal contacts

This factor measures the type of personal contacts that occur in the work. Elements measured include the difficulty of communicating with those contacted and the setting in which the contacts take place.

The appellant's position meets Level 6-3. Secretaries performing at this level regularly have contacts with parties outside the agency, and these contacts occur on a moderately unstructured basis. At this level, there is variety in the contacts, and the secretary must use skill and judgement to identify the information to be provided or obtained. Both parties involved in the contact typically understand each other's relative role and responsibilities.

The appellant serves as the point of contact for many administrative and all clerical issues and for general inquiries from both superior and subordinate office staff and the public. This combination reflects the variety of contacts described at Level 6-3. Contacts are moderately unstructured since they can occur at any time. In making contacts, the appellant must use her knowledge of her the brigade's functions, procedures, policies, and organization to provide answers and information, to direct inquiries, and to resolve issues in a range of clerical and administrative support areas.

The appellant's position does not meet Level 6-4. At this level, regular contacts are with high-ranking officials at national or international levels in a highly unstructured setting.

For Factor 6, we credit the appellant's position with Level 6-3 (60 points).

Factor 7, Purpose of contacts

This factor measures the purpose of personal contacts. The appellant's agency has credited her position with Level 7-2, which is the highest level described by the standard. We concur that the appellant's position fully meets, but does not exceed, Level 7-2. This level is appropriate since the purpose of the appellant's contacts is to plan and coordinate work efforts relevant to the goals of her organizational unit and to resolve problems.

For Factor 7, we credit the appellant's position with Level 7-2 (50 points).

Factor 8, Physical demands

This factor measures the physical requirements placed on the employee by work assignments. The appellant's position meets Level 8-1, as it is sedentary in nature, and there are no special physical requirements to perform the work.

For Factor 8, we credit the appellant's position with Level 8-1 (5 points).

Factor 9, Work environment

This factor measures the risks and discomforts in the employee's physical surroundings. The appellant's position meets Level 9-1. Her work occurs in a standard office setting with good lighting and ventilation. There are no hazards posing greater than everyday risks to her personal safety.

For Factor 9, we credit the appellant's position with Level 9-1 (5 points).

Summary

In sum, we have evaluated the appellant's position as follows:

Factor	Level	Points
1. Knowledge required	1-4	550
2. Supervisory controls	2-3	275
3. Guidelines	3-3	275
4. Complexity	4-3	150
5. Scope and effect	5-2	75
6. Personal contacts	6-3	60
7. Purpose of contacts	7-2	50
8. Physical demands	8-1	5
9. Work environment	9-1	5
Total		1,445

The total number of points assigned to the appellant's position equals to 1,445. According to the standard's grade conversion table, these points fall within the range of GS-7.

Decision

The appellant's position is properly classified as Secretary (Office Automation), GS-318-7.