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

**Atlanta Oversight Division
75 Spring Street, SW., Suite 1018
Atlanta, GA 30303-3109**

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

Appellant:	[Appellant]
Agency classification:	Computer Assistant GS-335-7
Organization:	[Organization] Forest Service U.S. Department of Agriculture
OPM decision:	Computer Assistant GS-335-6
OPM decision number:	C-0335-06-05

_____
Virginia L. Magnuson
Classification Appeals Officer

May 30, 2002
_____
Date

As provided in section 511.612 of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), 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 lowers the grade of the appealed position, it is to be effective no later than the beginning of the sixth pay period after the date of this decision, as permitted by 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.

The personnel office must also determine if the appellant is entitled to grade or pay retention, or both, under 5 United States Code 5363 and 5 CFR 536. If the appellant is entitled to grade retention, the two-year retention period begins on the date this decision is implemented.

Decision sent to:

[Appellant]

[Human Resources Officer]

Ms. Donna D. Beecher
Director of Human Resources Management
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Introduction

On January 31, 2002, the Atlanta Oversight Division of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted an appeal for the position of Computer Assistant, GS-335-7, [organization] Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, [geographical location]. The appellant is requesting that her position be classified as Information Technology (IT) Specialist, GS-2210. We received the complete appeal administrative report from the agency on February 20, 2002.

We have accepted and decided this appeal under section 5112(b) of title 5, United States Code.

General issues

The appellant occupies a position classified as Computer Assistant, GS-335-7. In August 2001, the Director, [organization], revised the position description to more accurately describe the appellant's duties and responsibilities. The agency's Human Resources (HR) staff evaluated the revised position description and determined that the existing classification was still accurate. The appellant believes that her work should be classified in the IT Management Series, GS-2210, as GS-9, with the Customer Support parenthetical specialty title.

In reaching our classification decision, we have carefully reviewed all information furnished by the appellant, her supervisor and her agency, including the official position description. An OPM representative conducted onsite interviews on April 11, 2002, with the appellant and her immediate supervisor. This appeal was decided by considering the audit findings and all information of record.

Position information

The appellant is assigned to position description number [#]. The appellant, supervisor, and the agency have certified the accuracy of the position description.

The [organization] provides management direction and leadership for administration of the information systems for the [organization]. The appellant's position is located in the [organization] whose principal mission is to provide computer information systems support and training to all [organization] employees. The primary purpose of this position is to provide end-user technical support and to assist members of the [organization] staff responsible for supporting the operation, administration and maintenance of the organization's desktop and laptop computers, the network and associated hardware/software. The appellant spends 50 percent of her time providing technical support for the organization's computer network. She spends 45 percent of her time functioning as the primary point of contact for troubleshooting and resolving end-user problems involving system hardware, application software and configuration. The remaining 5 percent of her time is spent training end-users on computer procedures and practices specific to the organization. Her responsibilities include identifying the nature and source of problems with the network, desktop and laptop computers; answering questions related to hardware and software compatibility and/or configuration conflicts; and providing technical program support to technical and program specialists whose work directly supports the [organization] mission.

The appellant works under the supervision of the [title], [organization] who provides objectives, priorities for new work, and deadlines and deadline changes for new and established work. She identifies the work to be done and independently plans and carries out steps required to accomplish the work. Work products are submitted to supported users without supervisory review. Matters involving controversial findings or information are referred to the supervisor for direction and/or guidance. Completed work is reviewed in terms of customer service, timeliness and accuracy of results. Methods used to complete the work are normally reviewed only if a recurring pattern of common problems develops.

Series, title, and standard determination

The agency placed the appellant's position in the Computer Clerk and Assistant Series, GS-335, and titled it as Computer Assistant. The appellant believes that the work she performs is two-grade interval IT work.

In May 2001, OPM issued a new position classification standard for Administrative Work in the IT Group, GS-2200. This standard abolished the Computer Specialist Series, GS-334, standard and instructed agencies to classify work previously covered by that series to the IT Management Series, GS-2210, when knowledge of IT (as defined in the standard) is the paramount requirement necessary to perform the primary duties of the position. Since the appellant believes her position is properly classified as IT Specialist, GS-2210, we applied the new standard to her position.

The IT standard covers two-grade interval administrative positions that manage, supervise, lead, administer, develop, deliver, and support IT systems and services. This series covers only those positions for which the paramount requirement is knowledge of IT principles, concepts, and methods to perform functions such as planning, designing, analyzing, developing and implementing systems for the organization.

IT refers to systems and services used in the automated acquisition, storage, manipulation, management, movement, control, display, switching, interchange, transmission, assurance, or reception of information. IT includes computers, network components, peripheral equipment, software, firmware, services, and related resources.

The Computer Clerk and Assistant Series, GS-335, covers positions involving performance or supervision of data processing support and services functions for users of digital computer systems. This work requires knowledge of external data processing sequences, controls, procedures, or user and programming languages, rather than in-depth knowledge of computer requirements or techniques associated with development and design of data processing systems.

The GS-335 standard states that employees in this occupation support or assist other employees who design, operate, or use automatic data processing systems applications and products by performing work in one or a mix of functional areas. One of the functional areas identified by the standard is direct support to computer specialists. In this capacity, some computer assistants at full performance levels perform duties similar to those assigned to entry and trainee level

computer specialist positions. Such support work typically requires knowledge of the scope, contents, and purposes of program documentation. The duties may also require a working knowledge of programming languages. Some work may require knowledge of system hardware such as the number and kinds of devices, operating speeds, amount of core and other equipment characteristics. This knowledge may also be supplemented by knowledge of internal software routines. We find this work situation similar to the work performed by the appellant.

The appellant's primary responsibilities involve serving as the Help Desk point of contact for troubleshooting and resolving a variety of routine computer hardware/software and system problems experienced by end-users. The system is composed of a local area network (LAN) consisting of 14 servers, and 150 to 200 desktop and laptop microcomputers and associated hardware and software that support the organization's IT requirements. The appellant's responsibilities include authorizing and managing network access accounts and passwords for dial-up users; accessing databases to extract data and generate reports and specialized printouts requested by management and other customers and preparing and maintaining standard operating procedures and instructions for system users. She maintains and updates hardware/software manuals, handbooks, reference and instructional materials; maintains profiles of the hardware/software configuration of individual computers; coordinates the organization's equipment and software inventory, equipment warranties and software licenses, and contacts vendors or manufacturer representatives to resolve equipment problems. The appellant installs, configures and maintains desktop/laptop computer operating system and application software, and hardware components; installs software updates and temporary patches to operating systems, and performs follow-up activities to ensure proper equipment functioning and correct software installation. The work performed by the appellant requires knowledge of a variety of computer operating procedures and processing techniques; electronic file structures and access requirements; and hardware components and operating system and application software to troubleshoot and resolve problems and carry out her other responsibilities.

The work performed by the appellant does not involve the planning, design, or development of systems typical of IT Specialists, GS-2210. The appellant supports end-users of the organization's computer equipment and system and IT Specialists (two GS-11's and one GS-12) who have primary responsibility for system administration, management and programming responsibilities. User problems that cannot be resolved by the appellant are referred to the specialists. The type of work performed by the appellant is characteristic of that described in the Computer Clerk and Assistant Series, GS-335, and is properly classified using the standard, dated February 1980, for that series. Based on the grade level analysis that follows, we find the position is properly titled Computer Assistant.

Grade determination

The GS-335 standard uses the Factor Evaluation System (FES) format. Under the FES, positions are evaluated on the basis of the duties, responsibilities, and the qualifications required in terms of nine factors common to non-supervisory General Schedule positions. A point value is assigned to each factor based on a comparison of the position's duties with the factor level descriptions in the standard. The factor point values mark the lower end of the ranges for the indicated factor level. For a position factor to warrant a given point value, it must be fully

equivalent to the overall intent of the selected factor level description. If the position fails in any significant aspect to meet a particular factor level description in the standard, the point value for the next lower factor level must be assigned, unless the deficiency is balanced by an equally important aspect which meets a higher level. The total points assigned are converted to a grade by use of the grade conversion table in the standard

The agency credited Levels 1-5, 2-3, 3-2, 4-3, 5-3, 6-2, 7-2, 8-1, and 9-1. The appellant disagrees with the agency's evaluation of Factor 1 (Knowledge Required) and Factor 3 (Guidelines). After careful review of the record, we concur with the agency's analysis of the uncontested factor levels and have so credited the position. This decision will address the remaining factors.

Factor 1, Knowledge required by the position

This factor measures the nature and extent of information or facts which the worker 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. The agency credited Level 1-5 for this factor. The appellant believes that her work meets the criteria for crediting Level 1-6.

At Level 1-6, employees use extensive knowledge of at least one multi and typically several single processor computer systems. They monitor processing workflow and diagnose and resolve error and problem conditions involving many program interrelationships and interlocking computer systems. The work at this level encompasses many of the problem solving aspects of computer specialist work concerned with effective program implementation and processing except those requiring programming corrections or equipment repair. This work requires extensive knowledge of computer equipment, internal computer processes, applications and utility programs and magnetic media. It also requires knowledge of a wide range of analytical and diagnostic methods, procedures and principles.

Level 1-6 is not met. The work performed by the appellant does not require the in-depth knowledge of hardware/software to diagnose and resolve problems that typically result from the multiple interrelationships of programs and operating systems. She works primarily with new or existing application software and performs work related to resolution of user hardware, software application, and/or system hardware and software problems. The appellant's regular and recurring work also does not require the knowledge of the range or variety of analytical and diagnostic methods, procedures and principles typical of Level 1-6.

At Level 1-5, employees carry out limited specialized projects and assignments using knowledge of fundamental data processing methods, practices and techniques in work involving development, test, implementation and modification of computer programs and operating procedures. In addition, employees use knowledge of data content and output options for a variety of program applications processed on multi-program operating systems. Employees use knowledge of time-sharing, remote job entry, batch and demand processing for work such as allocating core or writing new program documentation and operating procedures. Knowledge at this level is used as the basis for analysis and decision making in several functional settings.

Level 1-5 is not met. The appellant is primarily responsible for supporting the users of commercially available, standardized off-the-shelf hardware and software and performing a variety of administrative support functions (e.g., data extraction, report compilation, publications maintenance etc.) for program specialists. The work requires knowledge of precedent and applicable manufacturer's installation, maintenance, repair and troubleshooting procedures. The work also requires knowledge of the various application software packages and how they are used in agency operations. The appeal record contains no indications that the appellant's regular and recurring work involves activities related to the development, testing, implementation, or modification of computer programs and operating procedures.

At Level 1-4, employees perform a wide range of preparing, advising, assisting, coding and procedure-related problem solving duties using knowledge of data processing rules, operating procedures and processing methods.

Level 1-4 is met. The appellant's duties primarily involve carrying out assignments related to troubleshooting and resolving user problems related to stand-alone and networked computer hardware/software problems and conflicts; installing and configuring hardware components and software upgrades, and assisting IT specialists in maintaining the organization's computers and administering its LAN. The hardware and software with which she routinely works are standard, commercially available products. The majority of the problems to which the appellant responds are recurring in nature and are generally resolved through the application of standard procedures and techniques.

Level 1-4 is credited for 550 points.

Factor 3, Guidelines

This factor covers the nature of guidelines used in doing the work and the judgment that is needed to apply them. The agency credited Level 3-2 for this factor. The appellant believes that her work meets the criteria for crediting Level 3-3.

At Level 3-3, the highest level described in the standard, the employee works with new requirements or new applications for which only general guidelines are available. The employee uses judgment in adjusting the most appropriate guidelines to fit new processing requirements or develops new methods for accomplishing the work. Guidelines may require modification to provide for adding new forms of input, allowing for flexible scheduling, adjusting to new or conflicting requirements, or to adapt to new hardware/software capacity.

Level 3-3 is not met. The appellant's duties do not routinely involve working with new requirements or new applications for which only general guidelines are available. Guidelines are available for all areas of her work and do not require that she use a high level of judgment in interpreting, adapting and applying the guidance to determine their appropriateness. The responsibility for adjusting or modifying guidelines to fit new processing requirements or developing new methods for accomplishing the work rest with the organization's IT specialists or the appellant's supervisor. The Standard Operating Procedures and software instructions the

appellant prepares are informational materials focused on assisting users avoid or resolve common hardware/software problems.

At level 3-2, guidelines are in the form of terminal and other equipment manuals, program run books or run sheets, flow charts, master schedules, and others that are detailed as to what is to be done. Selection of an appropriate guideline is usually clear. However, the guidelines may provide for judgmental deviations in the work processed, such as alternative methods for coding, applying system control language, or performing a retrieval through a terminal. Digression from guidelines which has not been established by experience and precedent actions is referred to the supervisor.

Level 3-2 is met. Similar to Level 3-2, guidance available to the appellant consists of agency and internal policy and procedural guidelines, manuals and handbooks, equipment operating manuals and instructions, and application software manuals. The problems that the appellant troubleshoots and resolves on a recurring basis require considerable reliance on established procedures and previous experience. The agency's headquarters provides additional guidance in the form of Daily Operations Guides and Technical Information Bulletins that address significant or recurring hardware/software and system problems. The appellant contacts vendors having maintenance contracts with the agency for assistance with unusual problems that cannot be resolved by internal specialists and available guidance.

Level 3-2 is credited for 125 points.

Summary

Factor	Level	Points
1. Knowledge required by the position	1-4	550
2. Supervisory controls	2-3	275
3. Guidelines	3-2	125
4. Complexity	4-3	150
5. Scope and effect	5-3	150
6. Personal contacts and	6-2	25
7. Purpose of contacts	7-2	50
8. Physical demands	8-2	5
9. Work environment	9-1	5
Total		1335

A total of 1335 points falls within the GS-6 range of 1105 to 1350 points on the Grade Conversion Table in the GS-335 standard.

Decision

The appellant's position is correctly classified as Computer Assistant, GS-335-6.