

U.S. Office of Personnel Management
Division for Human Capital Leadership & Merit System Accountability
Classification Appeals Program

Dallas Field Services Group
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Classification Appeal Decision
Under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code

Appellant: [appellant]

Agency classification: Office Automation Clerk
GS-326-4

Organization: Engineering Plans & Services Division
Directorate of Public Works
[installation]
U.S. Department of the Army
[location]

OPM decision: Office Automation Clerk
GS-326-4

OPM decision number: C-0326-04-03

Robert D. Hendler
Classification and Pay Claims
Program Manager

August 25, 2005

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:

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Introduction

On January 14, 2005, the Dallas Field Services Group of the U. S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted a classification appeal from [appellant]. Her position is assigned to the Engineering Plans and Services Division (EPSD), Directorate of Public Works, [installation], U.S. Department of the Army, in [location]. The agency has classified the position as Office Automation Clerk, GS-326-4. The appellant believes the position should be classified as an Office Automation Assistant, GS-326-5. We received the agency's administrative report on February 22, 2005. We have accepted and decided this appeal under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.).

Background information

In response to a Negotiated Settlement Agreement between the appellant and the U.S. Department of the Army dated February 23, 2004, the installation "conducted a position review" of the appellant's assigned duties and modified her position description (PD) to accurately reflect her current assigned duties. The revised PD was then forwarded to the [name] Civilian Personnel Operations Center [CPOC] and was classified as Office Automation Clerk, GS-326-4, on September 22, 2004. The [CPOC] used the Office Automation Clerical and Assistance Series, GS-326, and the Office Automation Grade Evaluation Guide (OAGEG) to evaluate the work. The appellant disagrees with the agency's classification of two factors: Factors 2 and 4.

General issues

The appellant believes that her duties are similar to the duties of Office Automation Assistant, GS-326-5, positions. She believes she is the only Office Automation Clerk at the installation and that her position should be titled Office Automation Assistant. By law, we must classify positions solely by comparing their current duties and responsibilities to OPM position classification standards (PCSs) 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, which may or may not be classified correctly, as a basis for deciding this appeal.

Like OPM, the appellant's agency must classify positions based on comparison with OPM standards and guidelines. The agency has primary responsibility for ensuring that its positions are classified consistently with OPM appeal decisions. If the appellant considers her position so similar to others that they all warrant the same classification, she may pursue the matter by writing to her human resources office. In doing so, she should specify the precise organizational location, classification, duties, and responsibilities of the positions in question. If the positions are found to be basically the same as hers, the agency must correct their classification to be consistent with this appeal decision. Otherwise, the agency should explain to her the differences between her position and the others.

Position information

The EPSD is one of five divisions located in the Directorate of Public Works. It provides facility engineering and natural resources support to the [installation]. The EPSD conducts concept and feasibility studies, develops criteria for preliminary plans and cost estimates, and prepares technical data packages for real property and service contracts. The division has major responsibilities to design and prepare drawings, estimates, specifications and other required documents for all Directorate of Public Works projects. EPSD is headed by the appellant's supervisor who occupies a Supervisory General Engineer, GS-801-13, position. The other positions in the division are a Natural Resources Specialist, GS-401-12; four GS-12 Engineers (two GS-850 Electrical, one GS-810 Civil, and one GS-830 Mechanical); a Realty Specialist, GS-1170-11; two GS-802 Engineering Technicians, one GS-11 and one GS-9; and the appellant's position.

The appellant's major duties that account for 65 percent of her time involve word processing for standard, pre-established, or continuing office automation tasks, entering data and text from construction projects into a Web-based 1391 processing system, and receiving and dispatching electronic mail for the organization. She also inputs time and attendance for EPSD employees, prepares travel vouchers, makes reservations for employees, prepares requisitions for supplies and equipment, greets visitors, answers telephone calls and maintains office files. These duties occupy approximately 35 percent of her time. The PD provides more specific details about the duties and responsibilities.

In reaching our classification decision, we have carefully reviewed all information furnished by the appellant and her agency, including the official PD, number [number]. Both the appellant and her supervisor agree that the PD is accurate. The information in the written record was supplemented by a telephone audit with the appellant on March 5, 2005, and a telephone interview with the appellant's supervisor on March 22, 2005. We find that the appellant's PD contains the major functions that she performs and we incorporate it by reference into this decision.

Series, title, and standard determination

The GS-326 Office Automation (OA) Clerical and Assistance Series includes positions whose primary duties are to perform office automation work which includes word processing, either solely or in combination with clerical work when such work is performed in the context of general office clerical support. The agency has placed the appellant's position in this series. We concur with that determination. The appellant agrees with the series determination, but believes that the position should be titled OA Assistant. The titling instructions prescribed by the GS-326 PCS are dependent on grade level; i.e., positions at GS-4 and below are titled OA Clerk while the title OA Assistant is reserved for positions at the GS-5 and above level. Based on the grade level analysis that follows, we find the position to be properly allocated to the GS-326 Series and titled OA Clerk.

The GS-326 PCS does not contain evaluation criteria and directs that office automation work be evaluated using the OA Grade Evaluation Guide (OAGEG). The clerical support work

performed by the appellant is general rather than specialized and is appropriately evaluated by application of the Grade Level Guide for Clerical and Assistance Work (Guide).

Grade determination

Evaluation using the OAGEG

The OAGEG is written using the Factor Evaluation System (FES) format. Positions graded under the FES format are compared to nine factors. Levels are assigned for each factor, and the points associated with the assigned levels are totaled and converted to a grade level by application of the Grade Conversion Table. Under the FES, a factor level description in a standard 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 a lower level. Conversely, the position may exceed those criteria in some aspects and still not be credited at a higher level.

The agency credited the appellant's position with Levels 1-3, 2-2, 3-2, 4-2, 5-2, 6/7-1a, 8-1 and 9-1. The appellant believes that her position should be credited at Levels 2-3 and 4-3 and agrees with the agency's determination for the other factors. After careful review of the appeal record, we concur with the crediting of Levels 1-3, 3-2, 6/7-1a, 8-1 and 9-1. Our analysis of the remaining factors follows.

Factor 2, Supervisory controls

This factor covers the nature and extent of direct or indirect controls exercised by the supervisor, the employee's responsibility, and the extent of review of completed work.

At Level 2-2, the supervisor provides general instructions for standard, pre-established, or continuing office automation tasks, e.g., priorities, deadlines, or quantity. When the work is unusual or difficult, more specific instructions are provided regarding desired format, electronic storage requirements, maintenance requirements, hardware/software selection, etc. The employee works independently in carrying out familiar assignments in accordance with previous instructions, standard procedures for creating documents or entering or retrieving data, and established use of software packages. The employee seeks further guidance when new or unusual assignments call for deviations from established procedures or otherwise require special instructions. Completed work is usually checked for compliance with office procedures or instructions, technical accuracy, and appearance. When the work is unusual, it is also checked for adherence to special instructions provided.

Level 2-2 is met. The appellant occupies the office's only clerical position and has responsibility for providing support to the engineers. Assignments are given with information on standard, pre-established tasks with the priorities and deadlines. The appellant carries out assignments independently based on her familiarity with the software and from previous instructions. Similar to Level 2-2, when the work is uncommon or complicated regarding the format or software selections, the appellant seeks guidance from the supervisor or engineer. All completed work is reviewed in terms of correctness and compliance with specific instructions provided.

At Level 2-3, assignments are given with information on general administrative changes, deadlines, and priorities. For work that has not previously been automated, the supervisor defines overall objectives. The employee works independently to plan and carry out steps for completing assignments in accordance with established office instructions and practices for office automation. When current practices or deviations in an assignment cause problems, the employee uses initiative to resolve them and coordinates efforts with other employees involved in or affected by the nonstandard procedures. Completed work is evaluated for technical soundness, usefulness, and conformance with office operating requirements and needs. The methods used to produce work normally are not reviewed.

Level 2-3 is not met. The appellant's assignments are given with general and more specific instructions, like Level 2-2. Her assignments have all previously been automated. She is not responsible for resolving questions or problems based on general instructions or general administrative changes, deadlines, and priorities as typical of Level 2-3. The appellant refers problems or issues that deviate from the standard instructions or work methods to her supervisor or the engineers for recommendations. The review of the appellant's work is typical of Level 2-2, i.e., work is reviewed for accuracy, completeness, appearance, and compliance with office procedures before release.

Level 2-2 is credited for 125 points.

Factor 4, Complexity

This factor covers the nature, number, variety, and intricacy of tasks, processes, or methods in the work performed; the difficulty in identifying what needs to be done; and the difficulty and originality involved in performing the work.

At Level 4-2, the documents, formats, and specific processing functions involved require a varying number of sequence of steps and use of different functions from one assignment to another. Some assignments at this level involve using one type of software to create or edit a variety of standard documents requiring differing procedures and functions or to process lengthy documents with a variety of format changes within each document. Other assignments involve using two or more types of software, such as word processing and database management, to process different types of documents, paragraphs, tables, reports, etc. Processing steps and procedures required to complete assignments are varied and numerous, differing in terms of the type of software used, the type of document or specific report to be produced or edited, the specific formatting required for a document, the existence of prerecorded formats and other differences of a factual nature. In addition, employees at this level are expected to recognize discrepancies and correct or question originators in such matters as improper formatting; errors in spelling, grammar, or punctuation; missing information; or discrepancies between the nature of the material and the processing instructions.

Level 4-2 is met. The appellant uses the Web-based 1391 processing system to enter text and data from drafts for the engineers, Microsoft Word for correspondence, and other agency standard software used for electronic mail, supply documents, and time and attendance reporting. Like Level 4-2, she uses two or more types of software to process different documents requiring

a variety of steps and different functions keys to create, enter, store, update, edit, revise, and print documents. Similar to the illustration in Level 4-2, the appellant reviews letters for engineers to ensure that they are grammatically correct, properly formatted, etc.

At Level 4-3, the work involves using several types of software packages for different office needs. The employee considers many factors that are varied and that are not always clearly established. For example, these include the nature and capability of different software packages of the same type; the similarities, differences, and integration compatibilities among software types and software packages; the general operations of the unit such as the source and timing of data for reports; and the current and long term use of the subject document or report and how its use may change. In performing the work, the employee applies judgment in considering and selecting from among many different software types in light of the range and peculiarities of the unit's information processing capabilities and requirements. The employee regularly develops methods and procedures for office automation tasks and identifies and solves problems in existing methods or procedures.

Level 4-3 is not met. Although the appellant uses more than one type of software package, the intent of this level is that more than one software package is used in combination to prepare reports, briefing documents, financial records, etc. This does not occur in the appellant's work situation. The software is prescribed for each work assignment. The appellant uses different software for preparing correspondence, entering data and text into the WEB based 1391 system, receiving and distributing electronic mail, inputting time and attendance records, preparing travel vouchers, and ordering supplies. Unlike Level 4-3, she is not involved in identifying new areas to automate.

Level 4-2 is credited for 75 points.

Factor 5, Scope and effect

This factor covers the relationship between the nature of the work; that is, the purpose, breadth and depth of the assignment, and the effect of work products or services both within and outside the organization.

At Level 5-1, the purpose of the work is to perform specific, recurring tasks required to maintain electronic records such as calendars, directories, spreadsheets, and databases, and/or to produce various items, e.g., correspondence, memos, publications, manuscripts, reports, or forms, in draft or final form according to the most recent data. Production usually includes steps such as selecting and adhering to the proper format; determining the spacing and arrangement of material; making entries to and retrieving data from electronic records; and checking references, distribution requirements, grammar, punctuation and spelling. The services performed facilitate the work of the originator of the documents or the users of the data maintained.

Level 5-1 is met. The appellant's assignments include inputting information for time and attendance, travel, and supply requisitions as well as preparing correspondence, engineering projects and proposals and electronic mail. Comparable to Level 5-1, she must assure proper distribution, grammar, punctuation, and spelling. This work assists the work of the EPSD staff.

At Level 5-2, the highest level described in the PCS, the purpose of the work is to collect, select, organize and provide information in oral or written form. This may involve telephone conversations, electronic mail, reports, on-line databases, etc. The work is performed in accordance with established rules, regulations, procedures, and office automation practices. The work affects the way in which other employees document, store, receive, or transmit information, and increases the availability and usefulness of the information involved. This level was credited by the agency.

Level 5-2 is not fully met. As the sole support person for the office, the appellant facilitates the work of the office. However, her work does not affect the way other employees document, store, receive, or transmit information, nor does it increase the usefulness of the information involved. Work at Level 5-2 is more concerned with collecting, selecting, and organizing information, whereas the appellant's work is primarily concerned with the recording of information. Since Level 5-2 is not fully met, Level 5-1 must be credited for 25 points.

Summary

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

<i>Factors</i>	<i>Level</i>	<i>Points</i>
1. Knowledge required by the position	1-3	350
2. Supervisory controls	2-2	125
3. Guidelines	3-2	125
4. Complexity	4-2	75
5. Scope and effect	5-1	25
6. & 7. Personal contacts and Purpose of contacts	1a	30
8. Physical demands	8-1	5
9. Work environment	9-1	<u>5</u>
<i>Total points</i>		740

A total of 740 points falls within the GS-4 grade level range of 655 to 850 points in the OAGEG for the appellant's office automation work.

Evaluation using the Guide

The Guide provides general criteria for use in determining the grade level of non-supervisory clerical and assistance work. The Guide describes the general characteristics of each grade level from GS-1 to GS-7 and uses two criteria for grading purposes: *Nature of assignment* (which includes knowledge required and complexity of the work) and *Level of responsibility* (which includes supervisory controls, guidelines, and contacts).

Nature of assignment

At the GS-4 grade level, the work involves performing a full range of standard clerical assignments and resolving recurring problems. Work consists of related steps, processes, or methods which require the employee to identify and recognize differences among a variety of recurring situations. The actions taken or responses made differ in nature and sequence because of differences in the particular characteristics of each case or transaction. The work requires some subject-matter knowledge of an organization's programs and operations; or of a type of business practice such as maintaining inventory records and replenishing supplies; or of a body of standardized rules, processes or operations.

The GS-4 grade level is met. The appellant's position requires her to perform a variety of clerical support tasks for the office. She receives and dispatches mail, maintains files, answers telephones, maintains the supervisor's calendar, answers general work questions, and identifies and refers calls to staff members. She types purchase requests and obtains supplies from the supply store. The appellant types performance plans and appraisals, travel orders, and serves as the alternate key control officer during the absence of the division chief. She serves as the division timekeeper and point of contact for training requests. The work requires that the appellant be knowledgeable of her organization's programs and operations as well as the specific rules and processes applicable to her areas of responsibility to provide information and answer general questions.

At the GS-5 grade level, the employee performs work consisting of a full range of standard and non-standard clerical assignments and resolving a variety of non-recurring problems. Work includes a variety of assignments involving different and unrelated steps, processes, or methods. The employee must identify and understand the issues involved in each assignment and determine what steps and procedures are necessary and the order of their performance. Completion of each transaction typically involves selecting a course of action from a number of possibilities. The work require extensive knowledge of an organization's rules, procedures, operations, or business practices to perform the more complex, interrelated, or one-of-a-kind processing procedures.

The GS-5 grade level is not met. The appellant's assignments are standard and normally accomplished through a series of related steps, processes and methods. The appellant's work assignments do not require her to become engaged in the more technical aspects of developing data and text regarding major construction projects nor does she make decisions on information received from various sources. Her work does not require extensive knowledge of the organization's rules, procedures, operations or business practices to perform the more complex, interrelated, or one-of-a-kind processing procedures described as typical for the GS-5 grade level.

Level of responsibility

At the GS-4 grade level, the supervisor provides little assistance with recurring assignments, and the employee uses initiative to complete work in accordance with accepted practices. Unusual situations may require the assistance of the supervisor or higher level employee, and the

completed work may be reviewed more closely. Procedures for doing the work have been established and a number of specific guidelines are available. The employee uses judgment in locating and selecting the most appropriate guidelines, references and procedures. The employee has contacts with co-workers and people outside the organization to exchange information and to resolve problems in connection with the immediate assignments.

The GS-4 grade level is met. The appellant exercises judgment in locating, selecting and using standard procedures to carry out assignments involving clerical duties. When difficult or unusual situations arise, the appellant seeks guidance from her supervisor. The responsibilities and tasks performed by the appellant are completed using established procedures and specific guidelines. For example, the appellant prepares purchase requests and obtains supplies that are normally required for the division. If the appellant receives a request to purchase items that deviate from her normal routine supply order, she brings the matter to the attention of her supervisor. The appellant's contacts are with co-workers and employees within the EPSD to resolve questions, schedule and fill training slots, to direct visitors, and to provide information as requested by the caller or visitor.

At the GS-5 grade level, the supervisor assigns work by defining objectives, priorities, and deadlines and provides guidance on assignments that do not have clear precedents. The employee works in accordance with accepted practices and completed work is evaluated for technical soundness, appropriateness, and effectiveness in meeting goals. Extensive guides in the form of instructions, manuals, regulations and precedents apply to the work. The number and similarity of guidelines and work situations require the employee to use judgment in locating and selecting the most appropriate guidelines for application and adapting them according to circumstances of the specific case or transaction. A number of procedural problems may arise which also require interpretation and adaptation of established guides. Often, the employee must determine which of several alternative guidelines to use. If existing guidelines cannot be applied, the employee refers the matter to the supervisor. Contacts are with a variety of persons within and outside the agency for the purpose of receiving or providing information relating to the work or for the purpose of resolving operating problems in connection with recurring responsibilities.

The GS-5 grade level is not met. The appellant's work is performed in accordance with standard procedures, office policies, and organizational and agency instructions as at the GS-4 grade level. Specific procedures/instructions are provided where the present procedures do not address a problem. The tasks assigned are routine and limited in number and do not require the appellant to use extensive guidelines, regulations or past precedents described at the GS-5 grade level. The appellant's work is normally checked for accuracy and completeness and compliance with office procedures and instructions as described at the GS-4 grade level.

Both *Nature of assignment* and *Level of responsibility* are evaluated at the GS-4 grade level. Therefore, the appellant's clerical duties equate to the GS-4 grade level.

Summary

In summary, both the appellant's office automation duties and her general clerical duties are evaluated at the GS-4 grade level. Therefore, her position is properly graded at that level.

Decision

The appellant's position is properly classified as Office Automation Clerk, GS-326-4.