

**U.S. Office of Personnel Management  
Classification Appeal Decision  
Under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code**

**Appellant:** [appellant's name]

**Agency classification:** Electronics Technician  
GS-856-11

**Organization:** Flight Safety Branch  
Operations Control Division  
Range Operations Directorate  
U.S. Army Test and  
Evaluation Command  
[installation]

**OPM decision:** Electronics Technician  
GS-856-11

**OPM decision number:** C-0856-11-04

//Judith A. Davis for

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Robert D. Hendler  
Classification and Pay Claims  
Program Manager  
Merit System Audit and Compliance

1/31/2013

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Date

As provided in section 511.612 of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), this decision constitutes a certificate which 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 (Introduction)*, appendix 4, Section G (address provided in appendix 4, section H).

As discussed in the decision, the appellant's position description (PD) of record must be revised to meet the PD standard of adequacy in the *Introduction*. The revised PD must be submitted to the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) office that accepted this appeal within 30 calendar days of the date of this decision.

**Decision sent to:**

[appellant's name and address]

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

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Chief, Classification Appeals  
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## **Introduction**

On August 24, 2012, the OPM's Dallas Oversight office accepted a classification appeal from [name of appellant]. The appellant's position is currently classified as Electronics Technician, GS-856-11, but he believes it should be classified at the GS-12 grade level. The position is located in the Flight Safety Branch (FSB), Operations Control Division, Range Operations Directorate, U.S. Army Test and Evaluation Command, at [installation]. We received the agency's administrative report on October 11, 2012. We have accepted and decided this appeal under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.).

## **General issues**

The appellant mentions his personal qualifications, including his Bachelor of Science degree in electronics engineering technology. Qualifications are considered in classifying a position to the extent these qualifications are required to perform the employee's current duties and responsibilities. To the extent that they were needed for this purpose, we carefully considered them along with all other information furnished by the appellant and his agency.

## **Position information**

The Range is almost [number] square miles with boundaries extending approximately [number] miles north to south and [number] miles east to west. Range customers include Department of Defense components and other Government agencies; international customers; and domestic companies such as Raytheon, Lockheed Martin, and other Defense contractors. The FSB is responsible for the safety of planes, missiles, manned or unmanned objects, and other "vehicles" undergoing flight testing at the Range. The FSB Chief (the appellant's second-level supervisor, a GS-801-14 Supervisory General Engineer) directs, manages, and allocates the branch's resources. The FSB includes approximately [number] staff members in a mix of engineer, technician, mathematician, and meteorologist positions.

The appellant's position is assigned to the FSB's Flight Safety Engineering Section. The Section Chief (the appellant's first-level supervisor, a GS-855-13 Supervisory Electronics Engineer) directs test programs involved in the analyses of vehicles to determine their design acceptability and required procedures and support criteria to verify the flight safety system is acceptable prior to and during launch. The appellant operates one of the Range's two C-band radar transponder shops. He is physically located at [specific location], roughly [number] miles away from the main Range site, and he supports the missions assigned to the North side of the Range. Another GS-856-11 electronics technician runs the other transponder shop, is physically located at the main Range site, and supports the missions assigned to the South side of the Range.

Radar transponders enhance the capability of C-band radars and provide for precision tracking of launched vehicles. The primary purpose of the appellant's work involves certifying that transponders emit a signal which can be tracked by the radar and are within acceptable specifications. His work is assigned through the Test Resource Management System (TRMS), the Range's scheduling database, which identifies current and upcoming missions, dates, vehicles, and other operational requirements. When customers provide vehicles with no

preinstalled transponder, the appellant considers mission parameters when deciding the appropriate transponder model and/or quantity from those maintained by the shop; e.g., vehicle dimensions influence the transponder size, flying distance affects the power output required by the transponder, etc. He conducts various performance tests on shop- and customer-provided transponders.

The appellant's conduct approval work involves certifying that the entire transponder system, including the transmitter and receiver, antenna, DC power, and switching operates within acceptable standards. He conducts tests including frequency, frequency stability, peak power, random triggering, etc.; evaluates test data; and determines the acceptability of the transponder system. The appellant follows Range Commanders Council (RCC) standards establishing minimum performance specification requirements for transponders. However, he develops and establishes specifications, parameters, and operational procedures to meet the Range's specific needs. For example, the appellant established different variation delay specifications to meet the Range's need for more detail for the radar. When multiple vehicles are launched simultaneously, he establishes the pulse code spacing and frequencies for each transponder so the radar can gather quality data without interference.

The appellant maintains certifications on all shop transponders, which is required every 360 days or when a device is used on a mission. When testing customer-provided transponders, he first determines the appropriate frequencies and other specifications for that model. The appellant estimates 30 percent of his work involves certifying preinstalled transponders. If a test fails, his troubleshooting work requires inspecting the capacitors, resistors, or other components inside the transponder (e.g., when results for pulse width tests are not within acceptable specifications, he inspects the potentiometer and either makes adjustments or purchases replacement components). The appellant is prohibited from making repairs to components, as it is the Range's policy to purchase replacement components from manufacturers. If unable to certify a preinstalled transponder, he explains his test findings to the customer and recommends solutions.

The appellant participates in field readiness tests prior to the scheduled mission date. He ensures a transponder is operational after its installation on vehicles. When transponders are installed on vehicles, the appellant provides customers with instructions including a pin layout describing the proper connections between voltage and pin, schematic of the antennas running inside the vehicle, and diagram of the transponder. He occasionally installs transponders. During field tests, he interrogates transponders to ensure the signal and radar connect. If not, systems are shut down. The appellant retests the transponder, determining if the problem is related to the antenna, plug, connection, transponder failure when power transfers from a battery to the vehicle's generator, voltage, or other anomaly. On mission day, he observes transponder performance from the radar control room. If the transponder fails, the appellant removes and retests the device.

The appellant determines when testing instruments are deficient and need improvement. He also plans, develops, and implements ideas for improving radar and/or transponder performance. For example, he keeps current with state-of-the-art technology by regularly reviewing journals, conducting online research, and attending seminars, allowing him to determine if and when obtaining new transponders and/or testing equipment is desirable (e.g., he recently purchased a

new spectrum analyzer to produce better picture quality). The appellant is also working with a prospective vendor to build a radar simulator. This work entails forwarding specifications to the vendor, testing the model submitted, and providing written feedback identifying the model's weaknesses, strengths, and suggested improvements.

Other duties entail calibrating the wide variety of measurement and test equipment used in his work, following requirements established by the Calibration Laboratory of the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST). The appellant also determines when transponder components or replacements are needed, considering factors including, but not limited to, technological advancements, price, and compatibility with existing shop equipment when forwarding purchase requests and recommendations to the supervisor and higher-level management for approval. In addition, he provides technical assistance to customers on various issues including potential electromagnetic interference to the vehicle's electrical systems from the transponder.

The appellant and FSB Chief certified to the accuracy of the duties described in his official PD, number [number]. A PD is the official record of the major duties and responsibilities assigned to a position or job by an official with the authority to assign work. Major duties are normally those occupying a significant portion of the employee's time. They should be only those duties currently assigned, observable, identified with the position's purpose and organization, and expected to continue or recur on a regular basis over a period of time.

We found the appellant's PD includes work not currently being performed. The PD repeatedly mentions performing Global Positioning System (GPS) work. Contractors currently perform the Range's GPS work. PDs must meet the minimum standard of adequacy as described in the *Introduction*. Therefore, the appellant's PD must be revised so that there is a clear understanding of the duties and responsibilities representing the approved classification. Regardless, an OPM decision classifies a real operating position and not simply the PD. We have decided this appeal based on an assessment of the actual work assigned to and performed by the appellant.

To help decide this appeal, we conducted telephone audits with the appellant on November 2, November 7, and December 11, 2012. We conducted telephone interviews with the first-level supervisor on November 14, 2012, and the second-level supervisor on December 11, 2012. In reaching our classification decision, we carefully considered all of the information gained from these interviews, as well as the written information furnished by the appellant and his agency.

### **Series, title, and standard determination**

The agency assigned the appellant's position to the GS-856 Electronics Technical Series and titled it Electronics Technician. The appellant does not disagree and, after careful review of the record, we concur. We applied the grading criteria in the job family standard (JFS) for Technical Work in the Engineering and Architecture Group, GS-800.

### **Grade determination**

The GS-800 JFS is written in the Factor Evaluation System (FES) format, under which factor levels and accompanying point values are assigned for each of the nine factors. The total is converted to a grade level by use of the grade conversion table provided in the JFS. Under the FES, each factor-level description demonstrates the minimum characteristics needed to receive credit for the described level. 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 unless an equally important aspect that meets a higher level balances the deficiency. Conversely, the position may exceed those criteria in some aspects and still not be credited at a higher level.

The appellant's appeal request includes an evaluation of his position based on application of the Primary Standard (PS), the FES's "standard-for-standards" in Appendix 3 of the *Introduction*. He disagrees with the agency's evaluation of Factors 2, 3, 8, and 9. The PS is not to be used alone to classify a position except when a factor level fails to meet the lowest, or exceed the highest, level in the applicable FES standard. See *The Classifier's Handbook*, Chapter 2, *Using the Primary Standard*. We reviewed the agency's determination for Factors 1, 4, 5, and 6, concur, and have credited the position accordingly. Therefore, our evaluation using the appropriate FES standard will focus on the remaining factors.

#### *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 degree to which the work is reviewed by the supervisor.

At Level 2-4, the highest level identified in the JFS, the supervisor outlines overall objectives and available resources; discusses the projects and timeframes with the employee; and determines the parameters of the employee's responsibilities. The employee determines the most appropriate avenues to pursue; decides the practices and methods to apply in all phases of assignments including the approach to take and the depth and intensity needed; and interprets regulations or policy frequently on own initiative. At Level 2-4, the employee also applies new methods to solve complex, intricate, sensitive, and/or unprecedented problems and resolves most conflicts as they arise; coordinates projects or cases across units, organizations, or agencies; and keeps the supervisor informed of progress and of potentially controversial matters. The supervisor reviews completed work for soundness of overall approach; effectiveness in producing results; feasibility of recommendations; and adherence to requirements.

The appellant seeks to credit his position at Level 2-5, stating in his appeal request:

I'm in sole control over my work environment because I am working at a remote location which forces me to work *independently and in isolation*. Because of this unique situation in which I must work, I have sole responsibility in the planning, designing, and carrying out of all programs and projects with no supervision at all. I also *independently and without any supervision* resolve all conflicts that arise. In short, I am my own supervisor.

The appellant concludes that he operates with no supervision partly due to his being physically removed from the main Range site. However, the record shows the appellant does not operate in the absence of supervisory controls. For example, his supervisor outlines objectives (we note the

appellant's fiscal year 2011 performance appraisal standard states: "The supervisor provides definitions of support objectives in general terms outlining the workload and projects to be accomplished.") and available resources as described at Level 2-4. The appellant forwards purchase requests to his supervisor and higher-level managers for supplies and equipment including oscilloscopes, spectrum analyzers, and transponders. Higher-level agency officials alone control available resources. The appellant checks TRMS daily for his assigned projects and mission dates. He prioritizes his work based on projected mission dates. Within these timeframes, he determines the most appropriate avenues to pursue, decides the practices and methods to apply, and interprets regulations or policy on own initiative as described at Level 2-4. Also like this level, the appellant certifies to the performance of all transponders for his assigned projects, applying methods to solve complex, intricate, sensitive, or unprecedented problems and resolving conflicts that arise (e.g., when a vehicle contains a preinstalled transponder, he conducts necessary research or contacts the customer's functional counterpart to gather sufficient information to test and verify the transponder's frequency and other performance characteristics).

The supervisor keeps informed of the appellant's progress (i.e., the current mission schedule, equipment needs, project failures, etc.) and potentially controversial matters through weekly status reports. This type of supervisory control is an exact match at Level 2-4 where the supervisor keeps informed of progress and potentially controversial matters. The review of the appellant's work, focused mainly on whether his assigned missions are completed timely and with few to no failures, is also characteristic of the Level 2-4 review involving adherence to requirements, soundness of overall approach, and effectiveness in producing results. Therefore, the appellant's position fully meets but does not exceed Level 2-4, the highest level in the JFS.

Level 2-4 is credited for 450 points.

### *Factor 3, Guidelines*

This factor considers the nature of guidelines and the judgment needed to apply them.

At Level 3-3, the employee uses a variety of guidelines, manuals, and standard reference materials; however, they are not completely applicable to the work or have gaps in specificity. The employee uses judgment and initiative in interpreting and adapting guidelines, such as agency policies, regulations, precedents, and work directions for application to specific cases or problems. The employee analyzes results and recommends changes.

At Level 3-4, the employee uses guidelines, manuals, and standard reference materials that are stated in general terms. Guidance for performing the work is scarce or of limited use. The employee uses judgment, initiative, and resourcefulness in deviating from established methods to modify, adapt, and/or refine broader guidelines to resolve complex and/or intricate issues and problems; treat specific issues or problems; research trends and patterns; develop new methods and criteria; and/or propose new policies and practices.

The appellant's guidelines meet Level 3-3. As at this level, his guidelines do not always directly apply to an assignment and require adapting to cover new situations. While the types of decisions he handles are not clear cut, whether to certify transponders for a mission launch and



most other decisions can be resolved by interpreting and adapting available technical materials including manufacturer's publications; catalogs; project materials provided by Range customers (e.g., from the customer's transponder section or other functional unit); standards established by NIST for calibrations and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration for safety; RCC standards; and agency-specific policies and procedures.

The appellant seeks to credit his position at Level 3-4, stating that he designs test procedures and setups to certify transponders, along with developing new techniques to meet the specific needs of Range customers. However, his position's guidelines do not meet Level 3-4. The appellant certifies to the performance of transponders by following RCC standards, manufacturer's specifications, electrical characteristics, and previous experience regarding its operations. The available guidelines are not characterized as either scarce or of limited use as expected at Level 3-4. The appellant's assignments typically do not require deviating from established methods to modify, adapt, and/or refine broader guidelines to resolve complex and/or intricate issues and problems; treat specific issues or problems; research trends and patterns; develop new methods and criteria; and/or propose new policies and procedures as expected at Level 3-4.

Transponders are physically bolted down to the vehicle on standard missions, or hooked up by battery on others. If the transponder cannot be bolted down, the appellant prepares a schematic for the customer to pinpoint the optimal location for the device. He also provides instructions regarding how to install the transponder safely in the vehicle, collaborating with the customer if they disagree with the setup. Transponders are electrical inside. The appellant determines how much power is surging through the device to ensure mission success and the safety of pilots on manned vehicles. If an antenna runs through the vehicle, the appellant calculates radiation outputs and any hazards to the pilot based on OSHA safety standards. When dealing with preinstalled transponders, he conducts research and contacts the customer's functional unit to gather information about the device and also completes various tests to identify correct frequencies and other characteristics. This and other work examples are of his using judgment and initiative when interpreting and adapting guidelines for application to specific cases or problems, which is consistent with Level 3-3. References at Level 3-4 to developing new methods and criteria and/or proposing new policies and practices do not refer to developing new methods for an employee's own work, but instead refer to exercising judgment and ingenuity in deviating from traditional methods to develop, e.g., major component, agency- or nation-wide technical guidelines.

Level 3-3 is credited for 275 points.

#### *Factor 7, Purpose of Contacts*

This factor includes face-to-face and 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.

The agency credited the appellant's position at Level 7-c. However, we find his position meets Level 7-b, where the purpose of contacts is to plan, coordinate, or advise on work efforts or to

resolve operating problems by influencing or motivating individuals or groups who are working towards mutual goals and who have basically cooperative attitudes. As at this level, his contacts require planning and coordinating work efforts with Range customers, discussing the technical requirements of transponders, resolving problems concerning its certification and installation, and reaching agreement on overall plans and schedules. Similar to Level 7-b, the persons contacted by the appellant are reasonably cooperative and are working towards the shared goal of ensuring project missions are accomplished safely and timely.

The appellant's position does not meet Level 7-c, where the purpose of contacts is to influence, persuade, or control people or groups. At this level, contacts require skill in dealing with fearful, skeptical, or uncooperative people to obtain desired results. Often the employee must persuade, influence, or gain compliance from others in performing tasks at Level 7-c. In contrast, the purpose of the appellant's contacts is more collaborative with each party sharing a common goal. As a result, his contacts do not require influencing, persuading, or controlling Range customers and others to adopt methods about which there are conflicts, to negotiate agreements where there are conflicting interests or opinions, etc. Since his work does not normally conflict with the interests of Range customers, his contacts do not require dealing with fearful, skeptical, or uncooperative people to obtain cooperation with his work as described at Level 7-c.

Levels 6-3 and 7-b are credited for 110 points.

#### *Factor 8, Physical Demands*

This factor covers the requirements and physical demands placed on the employee by the work assignment. This includes physical characteristics and abilities, as well as the extent of physical exertion involved in the work.

At Level 8-2, work requires some physical exertion such as long periods of standing; walking over rough, uneven, rocky, or slippery surfaces; recurring bending, crouching, stooping, stretching, climbing, or similar activities; recurring lifting of light to moderately heavy items weighing less than 50 pounds, such as testing or measuring equipment; and/or regular visits to construction, industrial, marine, or outdoor sites.

At Level 8-3, work requires considerable and strenuous physical exertion such as frequent climbing of tall ladders, staging, or scaffolding in dry-dock and vessel areas; working in areas where footing can be treacherous (e.g., on rocky banks of bodies of fast-water, slippery docks, or steep hillsides); lifting heavy objects weighing 50 pounds or more; and frequent crouching or crawling in restricted areas.

The appellant's position meets Level 8-2. As at this level, his work requires long periods of standing; walking over the rough, uneven, rocky, and slippery surfaces of an airfield and desert environment; recurring bending, crouching, stooping, and stretching; recurring lifting of test equipment, transponders, and tools weighing less than 50 pounds; and regular visits to outdoor sites.

The appellant seeks to credit his position at Level 8-3, stating his work requires lifting test equipment and other devices weighing over 50 pounds. He lifts, carries, and/or moves heavy objects including transponder pods weighing up to 80 pounds from his shop to truck for transport and test equipment weighing from 35 to 75 pounds. When heavy lifting is required, a dolly is available but is normally difficult to maneuver when in the desert sand. The appellant's work also requires some degree of agility and dexterity when working in tight spaces to install transponders on vehicles. However, his work does not meet Level 8-3 where duties require regular and prolonged periods of considerable and strenuous physical exertion. The appellant's work requires bursts of strength to do the heavy lifting and physical exertion when working in tight spaces, but this and other work do not require sustaining strenuous physical exertion on a regular basis and for a protracted period of time as described at Level 8-3.

Level 8-2 is credited 20 points.

#### *Factor 9, Work Environment*

This factor considers the risks and discomforts in the employee's physical surroundings. Additionally, any safety regulations related to the work assigned are considered.

At Level 9-2, work involves regular and recurring exposure to moderate risks and discomforts such as: dust, strong odors, or fumes from fuels, chemicals, or engine exhaust; high levels of noise and vibration, dust, grease, electrical hazards, uncovered moving parts of machinery, moving machinery; or outdoor conditions involving moderate exposure to rain, cold/hot weather, etc. At Level 9-2, the work environment requires staying alert continually and taking special safety precautions including wearing special protective clothing items.

At Level 9-3, the work environment involves high risks of exposure to potentially dangerous situations or unusual environmental stress requiring a range of safety and other precautions where conditions cannot be controlled (e.g., working at great heights under extreme outdoor weather conditions).

The appellant's position meets Level 9-2. Similar to this level, his work involves exposure to moderate risks and discomforts such as dust, odors, or fumes; high levels of dust, sand, grease, electrical hazards, etc.; and varying weather conditions. Also as at this level, his work on and near active airfields exposes him to moving propellers and other machinery, loud noises, and fumes. The appellant's airfield and shop work requires taking safety precautions including wearing steel-toed boots, ear protection, safety glasses, and hard hat as expected at Level 9-2.

The appellant seeks to credit his position at Level 9-3, stating his position involves exposure to explosive materials in rockets and missiles. However, his work environment does not rise to Level 9-3, at which the work involves regular and recurring exposure to potentially dangerous situations where conditions cannot be controlled. He performs work on the transponders attached to or in vehicles containing hazardous materials, thus risking potential exposure to the chemicals. But unlike the high-risk positions described at Level 9-3, his work involves risks from working in close proximity to the chemicals rather than the more immediate, direct risks typical when working with/handling the hazardous materials. In addition, the appellant's regular

participation on night missions involves working in and driving through the desert, where dangers include exposure to snakes, antelopes, and high winds and other weather conditions. However, the safety precautions normally exercised by him are no more extensive than that described at Level 9-2. He does not perform work in an environment where conditions cannot be controlled such as working at great heights under extreme weather conditions, working directly with unstable explosives as part of the testing process and/ or similar situations where the potentially dangerous conditions cannot be controlled as expected at Level 9-3.

Level 9-2 is credited for 20 points.

*Summary*

<i>Factor</i>	<i>Level</i>	<i>Points</i>
1. Knowledge Required by the Position	1-7	1250
2. Supervisory Controls	2-4	450
3. Guidelines	3-3	275
4. Complexity	4-4	225
5. Scope and Effect	5-3	150
6. & 7. Personal Contacts and Purpose of Contacts	3-b	110
8. Physical Demands	8-2	20
9. Work Environment	9-2	<u>20</u>
<i>Total</i>		2,500

A total of 2,500 points falls within the GS-11 range (2,355 to 2,750) on the grade conversion table in the JFS.

**Decision**

The position is properly classified as Electronics Technician, GS-856-11.