

# U.S. Office of Personnel Management

## General Schedule Qualifications Operating Manual

### Overview

In accordance with 5 CFR 338, this site contains policy established by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) for General Schedule (GS) (or equivalent) white collar occupations in the Federal Government. This information is primarily for Federal agencies that need to determine whether applicants meet the minimum requirements for the positions being filled.

Qualification standards are intended to identify applicants who are likely to perform successfully on the job, and to screen out those who are unlikely to do so. The standards are not designed to rank candidates, identify the best qualified applicants for particular positions, or otherwise substitute for a careful analysis of the applicant's knowledge, skills, abilities, and competencies. The [General Schedule Qualification Standards](#) section of the Operating Manual contains group qualification standards, associated individual occupational requirements (IORs), individual qualification standards, and competency based qualification policy and guidance.

You may locate specific topics regarding qualifications policy by clicking on "[General Policies](#)" in the second tab. "General Policies" contain the following information:

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### General Policies

#### Purpose and Scope

This section contains the policies, instructions, and standards used to help determine the qualifications of applicants for Federal employment. The qualification requirements in this section are used when filling General Schedule (GS) positions at grades GS-1 through GS-15. The requirements must be met by all individuals appointed to General Schedule positions in the competitive service. The qualification requirements in this section, other than testing, may be used for excepted service positions under Schedule B and also used for Veterans' Recruitment Appointment (VRA) applicants.

Unless otherwise specified, the same policies, instructions and standards apply to both initial appointments and in-service placement actions.

## Responsibilities

### 1. The U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM)

OPM is responsible for developing and issuing minimum qualification standards, policies, and instructions. OPM is also responsible for approving qualification standards for particular positions when no standard in this section is appropriate for filling an agency's position(s).

### 2. Agencies

Federal executive branch agencies are responsible for applying the appropriate standards in individual personnel actions and when examining for positions under a delegated examining authority. Agencies are required to establish and outline policies that implement the OPM provisions prescribed in this operating manual in their agency merit promotion plans, policy, and guidance. Information provided in OPM qualification standards generally is not sufficiently specific to be used directly in examining for positions or quoted in job announcements. Therefore, agencies must include in their job announcements the general or specialized experience or education required for their positions. It is not adequate to state, "See *Qualification Standards Operating Manual for General Schedule Positions* for experience requirements. (See [\(c\)](#) on describing experience in job announcements). All job postings must include specific qualifications based on the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs)/competencies from a job analysis for each employment action (5 CFR 300.103).

Agencies are also responsible for developing [selective factors](#), when needed, to supplement the standards in this section. Selective factors may only be prescribed if the KSAs/competencies are required upon entry to the position and are essential to performing work successfully as validated by a job analysis ([Delegated Examining Operations Handbook, Chapter 2](#)).

Agencies are responsible for establishing medical standards without OPM approval for occupations for which they are the predominant employer, i.e., have 50 percent or more of the positions in the occupation (See [9\(b\)](#)).

Agencies can also modify qualification requirements for certain inservice placement actions (See [8\(c\)](#)). When agencies define or modify particular requirements, they are responsible for supporting their decisions. Agencies can also waive or modify qualification requirements when assigning employees in reductions in force or in lieu of reductions in force. ([See OPM guidance on reduction-in-force procedures.](#))

Agencies may request from OPM waivers of qualification requirements on a case-by-case basis if after careful analysis of applicant qualifications, it is determined applicants may qualify based on other qualifications gained through experience, education or training. ([See Waiver Request](#))

In those rare instances where qualification standards supplemented by selective factors will not meet agencies' needs, agencies are responsible for proposing new standards for OPM's approval.

When filling Schedule B positions, an agency's standards can include more restrictive requirements, e.g., qualifying experience, but they cannot be lower than or substantially different from the OPM standards. Agencies are responsible for justifying, based on the work of the Schedule B positions involved, any qualification requirements used in addition to those in OPM qualification standards.

Agency appointing officials are responsible for verifying employees' qualifications prior to appointment or assignment.

## Explanation of Terms

Major concepts and terms, defined for the purposes of this section, follow below in alphabetical order.

### Accredited Education

is education above the high school level completed in a U.S. college, university, or other educational institution that has been accredited by one of the accrediting agencies or associations recognized by the Secretary, U.S. Department of Education.

### Assessment

is a systematic approach to gather information about individuals; this information is used to make employment or career-related decisions about applicants and employees.

### Assessment Tool

is a device or method used to measure the degree to which an applicant possesses the KSAs/competencies necessary for successful job performance. Examples of assessment tools include occupational questionnaires, rating schedules, written tests, work samples, and structured interviews.

## Competency

is a measurable pattern of knowledge, skills, abilities, behaviors, and other characteristics that an individual need to perform work roles or occupational functions successfully. Competencies specify the "how" of performing job tasks, or what the person needs to do the job successfully. The terms competencies and KSAs are sometimes used interchangeably and serve the same function in the job analysis process. ([See OPM Assessment and Selection, Competencies](#)).

## Competency-Based Assessments

are used to test whether applicants meet the standards of performance (knowledge, skills, abilities, behaviors, and other characteristics/competencies) required for a given job.

## Competency-Based Qualifications

includes a set of required competencies and related proficiency levels by grade. A competency-based qualification provides a flexible way for agencies to determine if applicants are qualified for a position because of the many options for assessing applicants (e.g., ability tests, work samples, structured interviews). In addition, the same assessments may be used for rating purposes, enabling a more seamless assessment process for both the applicant and agency.

## Competitive Appointment

an appointment to a position in the competitive service following open competitive examination or under direct-hire authority. The competitive examination, which is open to all applicants, may consist of a written test, an evaluation of an applicant's education and experience, and/or an evaluation of other attributes necessary for successful performance in the position to be filled.

## Competitive Service

includes all positions in which appointments are subject to the provisions of Chapter 33 of title 5, United States Code. Positions in the executive branch of the Federal Government are in the competitive service unless they are specifically excluded from it. Positions in the legislative and judicial branches are outside of the competitive service unless they are specifically included in it.

### Concurrent Experience

is experience gained in more than one position, during the same period of time, with either the same employer or with a different employer.

### Education Above the High School Level (or Post High-School Education)

is successfully completed progressive study at an accredited business or technical school, junior college, college, or university where the institution normally requires a high school diploma or equivalent for admission.

### Fill-in Employment

is employment held by persons during the time period after leaving their regular occupation in anticipation of, but before entering, military service.

### First-Professional Degree

is a degree that represents a category of qualifications in professional subject areas that require students to have previously completed specified undergraduate coursework and/or degrees before enrolling. They are considered graduate-level programs in the U.S. system because they follow prior undergraduate studies, but they are in fact first degrees in these professional subjects.

### Foreign Education

is education acquired outside of any State of the U.S., the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, a Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, or any territory or possession of the U.S.

### General Competencies

reflect the cognitive and social capabilities (e.g., problem solving and interpersonal skills) required for job performance in a variety of occupations.

### Graduate Education

is successfully completed education in a graduate program for which a bachelor's or higher degree is normally required for admission. To be creditable, such education must show evidence of progress through an established graduate curriculum, i.e., it is part of a program leading to a master's or higher degree.

## Group Coverage (or Generic) Qualification Standards

are standards prescribed for groups of occupational series that have a common pattern of education, experience, and/or other requirements.

## High School Graduation or Equivalent

means the applicant has received a high school diploma, General Education Development (GED) equivalency certificate, or proficiency certificate from a State or territorial-level Board or Department of Education.

## Individual Occupational Requirements

are requirements e.g., experience or education, for particular occupational series or positions within a series and are used in conjunction with a group coverage (generic) standard.

## Inservice Placement

includes a noncompetitive action in which a position is filled with a current or former competitive service employee through promotion, reassignment, change to lower grade, transfer, reinstatement, reemployment, or restoration. Inservice placement also includes noncompetitive conversion of appointees whose Federal excepted positions are brought into the competitive service under title 5 CFR 316.702, and Department of Defense/Nonappropriated Fund (DOD/NAF) and Coast Guard NAF employees whose positions are brought into the competitive service.

## Job Analysis

a systematic examination of the tasks performed in a job and the competencies required to perform them. For more information on Job Analysis, please view the [OPM Job Analysis page](#).

## Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSAs)

are the attributes required to perform a job and are generally demonstrated through qualifying experience, education, or training. Knowledge is a body of information applied directly to the performance of a function. Skill is an observable competence to perform a learned psychomotor act. Ability is competence to perform an observable behavior, which may result in an observable product.

## Legacy Degrees

entry level occupational degrees that have evolved over time and may now legally require additional education (i.e., work that required undergraduate education may now require graduate level education, e.g., Physical Therapist, 0638). Agencies must take a holistic approach and apply further analysis of applicant's credentials and experiences to determine if minimum qualifications are met.

## Minimum Qualifications

Include the knowledge, skills, and abilities /competencies demonstrated through (1) education, (2) experience, and/or (3) training, which are job related and are valid means of qualifying for employment. Minimum qualifications are used as a first step in identifying applicants who will perform satisfactorily on the job, and to screen out those who are less likely to do so. (Note: The requirements included in a qualification standard are only those essential for performing job duties. In other words, it is unlikely an employee would be able to perform satisfactorily in a position if the applicant did not possess *at least* these qualifications.)

## Modification

of an OPM qualification standard for inservice placement actions means agency or OPM substitution of qualification requirements different from those in the published standard. While applicants who qualify under a modified standard do not meet all of the specific requirements described in the published standard, their overall background show evidence of their potential success in the position to be filled. A modified standard may apply to any number of positions in an organization.

## Multiple Assessments

involves the use of two or more assessment tools to gather information about individuals KSAs/competencies related to the job; this information is used to make employment or career-related decisions about applicants and employees.

## Multiple Hurdles

involves the administration of assessments or selection procedures in sequential steps. After each selection procedure is administered, it is then scored. Candidates scores that fall below a predetermined threshold fall out of the process. Candidates not eliminated proceed to the next step or assessment.

## Noncompetitive Action

means an appointment to or placement in a position in the competitive service that is not made by selection from an open competitive examination, and that is usually based on current or prior Federal service. A noncompetitive action includes (1) all of the types of actions described under inservice placement, above; (2) appointments of non-Federal employees whose public or private enterprise positions are brought into the competitive service under title 5 CFR 316.701; and (3) appointments and conversions to career and career-conditional employment made under special authorities covered in 5 CFR 315, Subpart F.

## Normal Line of Promotion (or Progression)

is the pattern of upward movement from one grade to another for a position or group of positions in an organization.

## Passing Grade Assessment

is a score for an assessment that is numerically rated or indicators in a quality-based assessment.

## Position

means the officially assigned duties and responsibilities that make up the work performed by an employee.

## Quality Ranking Factors

are knowledge, skills, and abilities/competencies that could be expected to significantly enhance performance in a position, but are not essential for satisfactory performance. Applicants who possess such KSAs/competencies may be ranked above those who do not, but no one may be rated ineligible solely for failure to possess such KSAs/competencies.

## Reasonable Accommodation

is any change to a job, the work environment, or the way things are usually done that allows an individual with a disability to apply for a job, perform job functions, or enjoy equal access to benefits available to other individuals in the workplace.

## Related Education

is education above the high school level that has equipped the applicant with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to successfully perform the duties of the position being filled. Education may relate to the duties of a specific position or to the occupation, but must be appropriate for the position being filled.



## Research Positions

are positions in professional series that primarily involve scientific inquiry or investigation, or research-type exploratory development of a creative or scientific nature, where the knowledge required to perform the work successfully is acquired typically and primarily through graduate study. The positions are such that the academic preparation will equip the applicant to perform fully the work after a short orientation period.

## Selective Factors

A competency/KSAs or special qualification without which a candidate could not perform the duties of a position in a satisfactory manner. Selective factors are applied in addition to minimum qualifications. Applicants who do not meet a selective factor are ineligible for further consideration.

## Series or Occupational Series

means positions similar as to specialized work and qualification requirements. Series are designated by a title and number such as the Accounting Series, GS-510; the Secretary Series, GS-318; and the Microbiology Series, GS-403.

## Specialized Experience

is experience that has equipped the applicant with the particular knowledge, skills, and abilities/competencies to perform successfully the duties of the position and is typically in or related to the work of the position to be filled.

## Technical Competencies

are more specific than general competencies, as they are tailored to the particular knowledge, skills, and ability requirements necessary for a specific job.

## Waiver

of an OPM qualification standard involves setting aside requirements in a published standard to place an employee in a particular position, usually to avoid some kind of hardship to the employee, such as in cases of reduction in force or administrative error on the part of the agency. Extra training and/or skills development may be needed to help the employee adjust to the new position. Waivers are granted by OPM or an agency, as appropriate, on a case-by-case basis, and do not directly affect other positions in the organization. ([See Waiver Request](#))

## Work-Study Programs

are government or non-government programs that provide supervised work experience related to a student's course of study and are a part of, or a supplement to, education. Federal student-trainee programs are examples of such programs.

## Description of Qualification Standards

### 1. Purpose of Standards

The qualification standards in this section help determine which applicants would be able to perform satisfactorily in the positions to be filled. The education, training, experience, or other requirements included in the qualification standards are *minimum requirements*, i.e., it would be unlikely that an applicant for employment would be able to perform satisfactorily in a particular position or occupational series if he or she did not possess these qualifications. The standards are designed to be easy to understand and to eliminate artificial barriers that hinder entrance into Federal occupational series. The standards provide flexibility through a job analysis to identify the needed KSAs/competencies to meet agencies missions.

Many qualification standards include requirements such as the ability to communicate orally and/or in writing, or to produce information through the use of computers or other machines. Such ability requirements are not intended to limit how an applicant will physically perform a duty, i.e., they are not meant to exclude from consideration applicants with disabilities who have demonstrated that they can do the work in other ways, such as by using readers, interpreters, voice-activated equipment, or assistive technology. The required abilities are to ensure that the end product of the speaking, writing, etc., is of the appropriate level of competence. Agencies should keep in mind that reasonable accommodation, including job restructuring, must be considered in determining whether an individual meets the required KSAs/competencies.

### 2. Content of Standards

Most qualification standards permit applicants to qualify on the basis of education/training, experience, or a combination of the two. They include the patterns of education, training, and/or experience most commonly applicable to a particular occupational series. Some qualification standards, however, have specific educational, licensure, or certification requirements that may apply only to specific positions in an occupational series.

Furthermore, the requirements in OPM qualification standards can be supplemented by selective or quality ranking factors as described below in [6.](#) and

**7.** OPM qualification standards include broad requirements used governmentwide. Agencies must identify the competencies needed for their positions and not copy minimum qualifications verbatim. Agencies must conduct job analyses to supplement OPM qualification standards (5 CFR 300.103).

## Application of Qualification Standards

1. [Selecting the Appropriate Qualification Standard](#)
2. [Implementing New or Revised Standards](#)
3. [Experience Requirements](#)
4. [Educational and Training Provisions or Requirements](#)
5. [Crediting Combinations of Education and Experience](#)
6. [Competency-Based Qualification Requirements](#)
7. [Using Selective Factors](#)
8. [Using Quality Ranking Factors](#)
9. [Special Inservice Placement Provisions](#)
10. [Other Requirements or Provisions](#)
11. [Supervisory Positions](#)

### **1. Selecting the Appropriate Qualification Standard**

Agencies and examining offices should select the qualification standard that covers the occupational series to which a position has been classified. If there is more than one standard for an occupational series, they should [select the standard](#) for the applicable position(s).

*For competitive appointments,* OPM or agency examining offices will have determined the appropriate qualification standard to apply.

*For inservice placement actions,* agencies should apply the appropriate standards and instructions in this section. If, however, at the time of an inservice placement action, the qualification requirements in an open competitive examination for an occupation are different from those in this section, agencies can apply the requirements in either the competitive examination or in this section.

*For details,* employees do not have to meet the qualification requirements for the position to which they are detailed, except for any minimum educational, licensure and certification requirements.

### **2. Implementing New or Revised Standards**

New or revised qualification standards issued by OPM must be implemented immediately upon the date of publication, unless otherwise specified by OPM. Agencies may submit a request to OPM for an extension to implement new or revised qualification standards when doing so will create a burden on the agency due to other agency or governmentwide competing priorities or initiatives.

### 3. Experience Requirements

Experience is typically described in a qualification standard as either general or specialized experience.

- a. *General experience* is usually required at grade levels (i.e., GS-2 to GS-4) where the knowledge and skills needed to perform the duties of a specific position are not a prerequisite, but where applicants must have demonstrated the ability to acquire the particular knowledge and skills.
- b. *Specialized experience* is typically required for positions above the entry level where applicants must have demonstrated that they possess the ability to perform successfully the duties of a position after a normal orientation period. Specialized experience is typically in or related to the work of the position to be filled.
- c. *Describing experience in job announcements*-- The following factors must be applied when describing experience in job announcements:
  - Since a published OPM qualification standard may cover hundreds of positions in dozens of organizations, it must be broad enough to cover the range of work classified to the occupational series. Therefore, agencies and examining offices must clearly describe the specific experience or education required to qualify for the positions covered by an examination or job announcement. This will better attract applicants with appropriate qualifications to agencies, thereby greatly improving the effectiveness of the examination process.
  - The description of qualifying general experience will vary in its degree of specificity from one series to another. For some occupational series, any progressively responsible work experience may be qualifying. Others may require experience that provided a familiarity with the subject matter or processes of the broad subject area of the occupational series. For example, an entry level medical technician position may require general experience that provided a basic knowledge of the procedures and equipment in a chemical or clinical laboratory. The proper analysis of work to determine the KSAs/competencies needed to perform the work successfully is essential ([Delegated Examining Operations Handbook, Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, Section C – Create a Job Opportunity Announcement](#)).
  - A position classification standard, [job analysis](#), and [position description](#) are needed to completely account for the duties and responsibilities typical of work in an occupational series or position. An accurate and properly classified position description and the appropriate [position classification standard](#) provides information related to the duties and responsibilities typical of work in an occupational series or position. This information is useful in the staffing process in identifying specialized experience

requirements and also in determining the level of experience possessed by applicants.

1. Determining level of experience -- Most qualification standards require that a certain amount of the qualifying experience be at a level of difficulty and responsibility equivalent to the next lower or second lower grade. The grade-level criteria in the position classification standard or guide help in making this determination, particularly for applicants with experience outside the Federal Government.
2. Identifying specialized experience -- As indicated in (b) above, many qualification standards describe specialized experience as experience "related to the work of the position." This is to allow agencies to pinpoint the specific requirements in the job announcements for their positions. For example, to meet the specialized experience requirements for a medical technician position, the applicant would likely be required to have specific duties such as preparing culture media and stains and performing certain laboratory tests. The description of duties and responsibilities contained in the position classification standard, along with the position description, help in identifying the kinds of work experience that would meet this requirement. In addition, the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs)/competencies required to perform the work can also be described along with the appropriate proficiency levels from a job analysis ([Delegated Examining Operations Handbook, Chapter 3, Section C – Create a Job Opportunity Announcement](#)).

d. *Crediting experience* -- Creditable experience is experience of the type (general or specialized), level, and amount specified in the appropriate standard. Applicants are considered to have satisfied the requirement for 1 year of experience through completion of either 12 months or 52 weeks of creditable work experience, whichever comes first. Similarly, a requirement for 6 months of experience can be met by an applicant with 26 weeks of experience, and a requirement for 3 months of experience can be met by an applicant with 13 weeks of experience. Regardless of the method used to determine the *amount* of qualifying experience, agencies should again note that the qualification standards in this section describe minimum requirements only. Therefore, they should ensure that the *quality* of an applicant's experience clearly demonstrates the KSAs/competencies necessary to perform the work of the position to be filled.

- If the standard distinguishes between general and specialized experience, general experience cannot be credited as specialized experience. However, specialized experience can be credited as general experience.

- Applicants who meet the experience requirements for a higher-grade level in a given series also meet the experience requirements for lower grades in the same series.
  - Titles, military ranks and/or salary/pay rates are not used in conjunction with the evaluation of specialized experience to meet minimum qualifications for a position when agencies evaluate the equivalency of previous positions to federal qualifications. The work actually performed by the applicant must be reviewed and evaluated to determine equivalency to a grade.
  - Unpaid/volunteer work must also be evaluated using the same criteria. Experience for which the applicant received little or no pay is given the same credit as comparable paid experience.
  - Federal employees are assumed to have gained experience by performing duties and responsibilities appropriate for their official series and grade level as described in their position description. However, experience that would not normally be part of the employee's position is creditable when documented by satisfactory evidence (e.g., a memorandum from the manager or human resources director, SF-52, or other documentation). Similarly, experience gained in the Federal service under a misassignment or improper appointment is given the same credit as experience under a proper appointment if the applicant submits satisfactory evidence to substantiate his/her claim.
  - Appropriate experience gained while on detail or in "mixed-grade" or "mixed-series" positions is creditable when satisfactorily documented. Credit is given for the percentage of time that the applicant spent on the qualifying duties. Also see paragraph [\(l\)](#) on crediting experience gained on detail, and [10](#) on crediting supervisory experience.
  - An employee whose position is upgraded as a result of a reclassification is considered to meet the qualification requirements of the upgraded position, since he or she has been performing the higher-graded work. However, employees must meet any licensure or certification requirements, as well as any minimum educational requirements or the provisions in section [9\(e\)](#).
- e. *Crediting one-grade interval or wage grade experience* -- If the experience demonstrated the KSAs/competencies required to perform the work successfully, technician, paraprofessional, and substantive clerical support experience may be qualifying for two-grade interval positions, and wage grade experience may be qualifying for General Schedule positions, this is true for either lateral or promotion actions.

The basic requirements for type and level of experience and/or education apply to all applicants, whether their experience has been in the same occupation as the position being filled or in related support or wage grade occupations. Work experience that included both qualifying and nonqualifying duties is credited based on the percentage of time spent on the creditable experience.

Applicants with specialized experience can have that experience credited towards meeting the basic requirements for professional occupations that permit qualification on the basis of experience as well as education. Such experience may be creditable not only for meeting the basic requirements, but also for positions at GS-7 and above if it is comparable to that which would have been gained in a two-grade interval professional series and clearly demonstrates that the applicant has the necessary background to perform satisfactorily the duties of the position to be filled.

Since two-grade interval positions may differ significantly in the nature of the work (e.g., greater independence, responsibility, and judgment), it is important that applicants be evaluated on the variety and progressive nature of their work assignments and on any applicable training or course work completed.

- f. *Determining normal work week/work year--* Credit is given based on the normal work week and work year for the particular type of employment. Experience that involved less than the normal work week or work year is credited based on the relation it bears to the norm. Work weeks/work years are credited as follows:
- In most occupations, the normal full-time work week is 35-40 hours, and the normal work year is 12 months. Employees are not expected to work during scheduled days off, holidays, or normal vacation periods.
  - In occupations where the normal work year is less than the calendar year, e.g., teaching, an applicant who works the prevailing work year should be credited with a full year of required experience unless the applicable standard specifies otherwise. An applicant who receives a full year's credit for less than 12 months of actual work cannot gain additional credit for doing more of the same work in the remaining months (e.g., for teaching in summer school). However, credit can be given for any applicable experience gained in a different type of work, but no more than 1 year of experience can be credited for any 12-month period.
  - Part-time work is prorated in crediting experience. For example, an employee working 20 hours per week for a 12-month period should be credited with 6 months of experience. Creditable experience should generally be determined on the basis of hours in a pay status (excluding overtime) rather than scheduled hours in order to recognize the service of part-time employees who frequently are required to work additional straight-time hours.

Applicants who have the same amount of experience should generally receive the same credit. For example, a seasonal employee who worked full time for 9 months a year and a part-time employee who worked 30 hours a week for a year would receive the same credit. However, as stated in paragraph [\(d\)](#), agencies should ensure that the quality of an applicant's experience clearly demonstrates the KSAs/competencies necessary to perform the work of the position to be filled. Agencies should be careful in totaling small segments of time worked to ensure that they

materially add to a person's qualifications, e.g., that substantive knowledge or skills have been gained.

- Employees who entered military duty or who sustained compensable injuries on the job while serving under a career or career-conditional appointment will receive credit for experience on a different basis. See 5 CFR 353, *Restoration to Duty from Uniformed Service or Compensable Injury*. (Also see paragraph [\(k\)](#) on *Military experience*, that follows, to determine how to credit military leave as experience.)

Instances may occur where applicants worked significantly less than their scheduled hours. For example, applicants may have been employed normally on a full-time, part-time, or seasonal basis, but took extended leave. In such instances, it would be reasonable to evaluate any significant consecutive period of leave (e.g., 35 workdays or more in a year) to determine whether it effectively reduces the applicant's qualifications for a position.

- g. *Concurrent experience in more than one position*-- Concurrent experience can be credited as follows:
- *General experience* -- Credit may be given for general experience gained concurrently in more than one position depending on its applicability. If the experience meets the requirements of the standard, credit should be given for the time, excluding overtime, worked in each position. However, credit can be given for only 1 year of experience for any 12-month period. For example, a person who worked full time in each of two clerical positions for over 6 months during a 12-month period, performing duties comparable to the GS-3 level, can only be credited with a year of general clerical experience.
  - *Specialized Experience* -- Concurrent, straight-time experience in a second position can be credited towards meeting specialized experience requirements only if it contributes significantly to the applicant's possession of the specific KSAs/competencies required for the position to be filled. However, credit may be given for only 1 year of qualifying experience for any 12-month period.
- h. *Crediting teaching experience for non-teaching positions* -- In evaluating teaching experience for credit as specialized experience, the nature of the material taught, and the responsibility, scope, and knowledge required by the teaching position should be compared to the requirements of the appropriate standard. To be creditable as specialized experience, the teaching and non-teaching activities should have provided the applicant with the same type and level of KSAs/competencies that would be required to perform qualifying work in the field. Normally, teaching experience would have to be at the college level to be creditable for professional positions.



- i. *Education and experience gained concurrently* -- When qualifying education and experience (when applicable) have been gained concurrently, credit is given for each based on the time spent and merit of each. In many instances, supervised experience is required as part of an academic curriculum or course work (e.g., nursing, teaching, or social work). An applicant cannot receive full credit for this supervised experience as education and additional credit for the supervised experience as experience, except as may be provided in a particular standard, since the practical experience is integral to the educational curriculum. The applicant can, however, receive full credit for supervised experience that was not considered as part of the qualifying education. (Also see paragraph (j) below.)
- j. *Crediting work-study experience for initial appointment* -- Experience gained by graduates of work-study programs can be credited towards meeting specialized experience requirements if the work-study experience was related to and integrated with education above the high school level and contributed to the development of competence in the specialized field of the position being filled. To meet the specialized experience requirements, the applicant must have 12 months of work experience in a work-study program, with at least 2 months (320 hours) of work equivalent to the next lower grade level or band in the normal line of progression for the position to be filled.

(Undergraduate work-study experience is normally comparable to experience gained at GS-5 or below.) Work-study experience is creditable, even when it is a mandatory requirement of the school, unless academic credit, i.e., grades or credit hours, has been given for such experience. Note that credit cannot be granted both as education and experience for the same period of work. (See paragraph (i) above.)

- k. *Military experience* -- Military service that is creditable for veterans' preference or that is the basis for restoration to the former civilian position should either be evaluated as an extension of the work the individual was doing immediately before entry into the Armed Forces, or on its own merits, whichever is more beneficial to the individual. In instances where employment in an occupation interrupted by military service was on a part-time basis, the extension of that experience is creditable on the same part-time basis. (See 5 CFR 353 for more information on restoration rights and crediting military service.)
  - *Extension of prior civilian experience* -- Creditable military service can be counted as an extension of the work the individual was engaged in immediately prior to entry into service ("Immediately prior to" is defined as within the 90-day period preceding entry into military service). In instances where an individual accepted fill-in employment while awaiting induction, he or she is considered as having been employed in his or her regular occupation "immediately prior to" entry into military service, if the period of fill-in employment did not exceed 90 days. In crediting time spent in military service as an extension of time spent in civilian occupations,

military service can be credited either as an extension of the regular employment or of the fill-in employment, *whichever is more advantageous to the individual*. All military experience evaluated on this basis will be credited at the same level of difficulty and responsibility as the prior civilian experience.

- *Military experience on its own merits* -- If the actual military experience is to be evaluated for credit, it is particularly important that it is evaluated on the basis of the duties performed, rather than on the basis of the military rank of the individual.
  
- l. *Crediting experience gained on detail* -- Experience of employees who have been detailed to another position is credited in much the same way as military experience, described above. That is, the experience is credited as an extension of the work the employee was doing immediately prior to the detail, or on its own merits, *whichever is more beneficial to the employee*. Employees continue to be incumbents of the positions from which detailed. Thus, they should not be penalized for a detail to a position that may differ in duties and responsibilities from those of their regular position.
  
- m. *One-year specialized experience provision for General Schedule grades* -- At GS-5 and above, the qualification standards for most occupational series call for 1 year of specialized experience equivalent to at least the next lower grade level in the normal line of progression. Applicants need not meet any cumulative years of experience requirements or general or lower-level specialized experience requirements to qualify. They must, of course, meet any minimum educational, licensure, or other special qualification requirements and selective factors established for the position being filled. To be creditable, an applicant's 1 year of specialized experience must demonstrate the knowledge, skills, abilities (KSAs)/competencies necessary for successful job performance. When applicants meet the experience requirements for a given grade level, they also meet the experience requirements for positions at lower grade levels in the same occupation. *This provision applies unless the qualification standard for the occupation or position specifically states that more or less experience is required. It applies to both initial appointments and inservice placement actions.* (Also see paragraph (n) below)
  
- n. *One-year specialized experience provision for banded positions* -- If groups of positions have been placed in pay or grade bands that group two or more General Schedule grades together, agencies will need to define the type and level of experience required to perform the work of the position to be filled. Applicants need only 1 year of the identified experience, either equivalent to a lower level within the band or to the next lower-level band. (Also see paragraph [\(g\)](#) below)
  
- o. *Determining level of experience required in one-grade interval series* -- For most one-grade interval occupational series, the qualification standard calls for at least

1 year of specialized experience as described in [\(m\)](#) above. Sometimes, however, there is no position in the normal line of progression in an organization that is one grade lower than the position being filled. In such instances, 1 year of specialized experience at the second lower level is creditable for inservice applicants. However, for outside applicants (i.e., those without current or prior Federal competitive or excepted service), 1 year of specialized experience equivalent to at least the next lower level is required. (See [8.\(d\)](#) on crediting inservice applicants' experience in one-grade interval series)

- p. *Determining level of experience required in two-grade interval series* -- Most two-grade interval occupational series follow a progression pattern of GS-5, GS-7, GS-9, GS-11, GS-12, GS-13, etc., with two-grade intervals occurring from grades GS-5 through GS-11. Applicants need 1 year of experience equivalent to at least the GS-5 grade level to qualify for GS-7, 1 year equivalent to at least the GS-7 grade level to qualify for GS-9, and 1 year equivalent to at least the GS-9 grade level to qualify for GS-11. However, some positions in two-grade interval series are established at the intervening even-numbered grades, i.e., GS-6, GS-8, and GS-10. If an agency has established positions at an intervening grade as part of the normal line of progression in a series, then applicants applying for the next higher grade would be required to have 1 year of experience at that even-numbered grade. For example, if an agency advertised for a GS-9 position and had an established GS-8 in the normal line of progression, applicants would be required to have 1 year of experience equivalent to at least grade GS-8. A year of experience equivalent to GS-7 would not be considered qualifying for that position. On the other hand, if an agency advertised for a GS-10 position and had an established GS-8, but no intervening GS-9 position, applicants would be considered qualified if they had 1 year of experience at least equivalent to GS-8.
- q. *Determining level of experience based on crediting required KSAs/competencies* - Most jobs are classified and graded on the basis of the duties that constitute the primary reason for establishing the position. However, a position may include many other significant duties that are not grade-controlling, i.e., that are not the duties that determine the particular grade assigned to a position. Some of these duties may be similar to those performed at lower grade levels, or in positions in other series. Applicants must have experience performing the grade-controlling work at the next lower grade level, and work experience that demonstrates possession of the other required KSAs/competencies at the appropriate level. However, they should not be screened out if their background does not reflect 1 year of experience at the next lower grade level performing *all* of the duties in a position description.

For example, a position is classified as a GS-12 Exhibits Specialist. The grade-controlling duties as described in the position description might be planning and preparing gallery spaces for exhibits, but the position also involves analyzing how various exhibits were received by the public and providing written reports and recommendations on how such exhibits could be improved in the future. If an

applicant has at least GS-11 level skill in planning and preparing gallery spaces for exhibits and has GS-9 level experience analyzing work processes and methods and writing reports, he or she can be considered qualified if the GS-9 level experience was sufficient to perform the GS-12 Exhibits Specialist job, as described in the position description.

In systems where groups of positions have been placed in a pay or grade band, all of the duties and responsibilities of a position would typically fall within the same band. However, agencies would still need to determine the duties that constitute the primary reason for placing a position within a particular band and the level of the qualifications required to perform the work of the position.

#### **4. Educational and Training Provisions or Requirements**

The educational provisions referenced in a qualification standard normally pertain to either high school graduation or the equivalent, or to education above the high school level (post high school education). Whether at the high school or post high school level, 5 U.S.C. §3308 prohibits requiring education for positions in the competitive service, unless OPM has determined that the duties of a scientific, technical, or professional position cannot be performed by an individual who does not have the prescribed minimum education.

An agency may consider education (e.g., coursework) in determining a candidate's satisfaction of a minimum qualification only if the candidate's education directly reflects the KSAs/competencies necessary to satisfy the qualifications and the duties of a position. However, education alone may not be considered qualifying when using a multiple hurdle assessment approach.

Under 5 U.S.C. §3313, the names of disabled veterans with a compensable service-connected disability of 10 percent or more who have qualified in an examination are entered on civil service examination registers ahead of other eligibles, except on registers established for scientific and professional positions at grades GS-9 and above. The identified occupations in [Appendix K of the Delegated Examining Operations Handbook \(PDF file\)](#) [2.01 MB] should be used as the basis for determining whether such compensably disabled veterans should "float to the top" of the competitive examination Certificate of Eligibles.

OPM also recognizes generally accepted professional credentials, such as engineering registration, successful completion of certain actuarial examinations, or a Certified Public Accountant certificate as being equivalent to meeting minimum educational requirements. Examples of such alternate provisions are included in the qualification standard for the occupational series if applicable.

Agencies should use the following criteria to determine the acceptability of post high school education or training at an accredited business or technical school, junior college, college, or university. It is the applicant's responsibility to provide

documentation or proof that he or she has met the applicable educational provisions described in this subsection. An official transcript; statement from the institution's registrar, dean, or other appropriate official; or equivalent documentation is acceptable. Agencies must ensure that the applicants' education or credentials meet the criteria below.

a. *Acceptability of Higher Education for Meeting Minimum Qualification Requirements*

1. *Accredited and Pre-Accredited/Candidate for Accreditation*—This category includes only those institutions that grant academic degrees. Such institutions must meet one of the following criteria for Federal employment:

- Conventional/Accredited Institutions — At the time the education was obtained, the entire institution, applicable school within the institution, or the applicable curriculum was appropriately accredited by an accrediting body recognized by the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education. Military schools or military educational programs that meet this criterion are also acceptable. For additional information, refer to the U.S. Department of Education web site at <http://www.ed.gov> (external link). A complete listing of all institutions accredited by recognized agencies, including those located outside of U.S. territories may be found in *Accredited Institutions of Post-Secondary Education*, a handbook published annually by the American Council on Education (ACE). Institutions located within the United States that have attained accreditation as well as recognized accrediting agencies are listed on the U.S. Department of Education web site at <http://www.ed.gov> (external link).
- Correspondence or distance learning course work is also acceptable if the applicable school within the institution or applicable curriculum is accredited by an accrediting body that is recognized by the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education. The distance learning courses should indicate the credit hours for each course and be indicated on the degree transcript together with traditional course work and credits.
- Pre-Accredited/Candidate for Accreditation Status — At the time that the education was obtained, the entire institution, applicable school within the institution, or applicable curriculum had acquired "preaccreditation" or "candidate for accreditation status" that is recognized by the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education.
  - Exceptions: Preaccredited or Candidate for Accreditation status is not acceptable for the following Federal programs:
    - Student Loan Repayments; or
    - Academic Degree Training.

For the above programs, the institutions must be fully accredited by an accrediting body recognized by the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education at the time the education was obtained.

2. *Non-Accredited/Other*— This category includes institutions that do not meet the criteria above but offer a curriculum which is equivalent to "conventional/accredited institutions." Such institutions are either outside the jurisdiction or have decided not to seek accreditation from accrediting bodies recognized by the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education. Examples of "Non-Accredited/Other" education or institutions include, but are not limited to:
- Foreign education [see paragraph (c) below];
  - Non-accredited military education or schools;
  - Continuing education units; or
  - Academic credit for work or life experience.

Non-Accredited/Other Education may be considered during the rating/ranking process when evaluating qualified job applicants who already meet minimum qualification standards. Such education may not, however, be used to meet minimum education requirements, unless it meets one of the following criteria with respect to a college, university, or institution accredited as described in (a) above:

- The specific courses have been accepted for college-level credit by an accredited U.S. college or university, or institution because they would be creditable if the student were to further his or her education at that institution.
- The academic credit earned through a special credit program such as the College Level Examination Program (CLEP) has been awarded by an accredited college, university, or institution.
- An accredited college, university, or institution has identified the course work area(s) or courses for which credit was given for life experience. There must be a direct link between credits given and the course objectives or syllabus, i.e., the course and the life experience must be comparable in nature, content, and level. Life experience credit for courses that are not identified in its course catalog as part of a college or university's curriculum is not acceptable, unless the college or university is giving credit for course work that is a prerequisite for more advanced courses included in its curriculum.
- An accredited U.S. university or college reports the other institution as one whose transcript is given full value, or full value is given in subject areas applicable to the curricula at that university or college.

Education or training that cannot be accepted under the above criteria may still be valuable and may be considered in the ranking process when evaluating an applicant's overall qualifications for a position.

3. *Foreign Education* — Education completed outside of the United States must be deemed equivalent to that gained in conventional/accredited U.S. education programs to be acceptable for Federal employment. Most foreign education is not accredited by an accrediting body that is recognized by the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education. A few medical schools are accredited under country standards that have been determined to be "comparable" to U.S. standards by the U.S. Department of Education's National Committee on Foreign Medical Education and Accreditation. For foreign education that is not so accredited, agencies should follow the provisions below before considering such education for Federal employment.

Unless the foreign education meets the criteria in paragraph (a) above, applicants must submit all necessary documents to a private U.S. organization that specializes in interpretation of foreign educational credentials, commonly called a credential evaluation service. To be acceptable, the foreign credential evaluation must include/describe:

- The type of education received by the applicant;
- The level of education in relation to the U.S. education system, and state that its comparability recommendations follow the general guidelines of the International Evaluation Standards Council;
- The content of the applicant's educational program earned abroad and the standard obtained;
- The status of the awarding foreign school's recognition and legitimacy in its home country's education system; and
- Any other information of interest such as what the evaluation service did to obtain this information, the qualifications of the evaluator, and any indications as to other problems such as forgery.

Foreign credential evaluations that do not contain the above information or that state there is insufficient information provided by the applicant on which to base an evaluation should not be accepted. If the requested evaluation shows the foreign education to be legitimate and comparable to that expected of a candidate with U.S. credentials, it may be accepted at the discretion of the agency. For further information on the evaluation of foreign education, refer to the U.S. Department of Education's web site at <http://www.ed.gov> (external link).

Professional Licensure: Possession of a valid and current U.S. professional license by a graduate of a foreign professional school or

program is sufficient proof that the foreign education has been determined to be equivalent to the requisite U.S. professional education in that occupational field.

4. *Non-Qualifying Education* — Non-qualifying education is education that is not accredited or determined to be equivalent to conventional, accredited educational programs as described in paragraphs (a), (b), or (c) above. This category includes educational institutions or sources commonly known as "diploma mills".

The [Higher Education Opportunity Act](#) defines a diploma mill as follows:

DIPLOMA MILL- The term 'diploma mill' means an entity that--  
(A)(i) offers, for a fee, degrees, diplomas, or certificates, that may be used to represent to the general public that the individual possessing such a degree, diploma, or certificate has completed a program of postsecondary education or training; and (ii) requires such individual to complete little or no education or coursework to obtain such degree, diploma, or certificate; and

(B) lacks accreditation by an accrediting agency or association that is recognized as an accrediting agency or association of institutions of higher education (as such term is defined in section 102) by--  
(i) the Secretary pursuant to subpart 2 of part H of title IV; or (ii) a Federal agency, State government, or other organization or association that recognizes accrediting agencies or associations.

(Source: Department of Education [Diploma Mills and Accreditation - Diploma Mills](#))

Agencies must not consider or accept such education, degrees, or credentials for any aspect of Federal employment, including basic eligibility and the rating/ranking process.

- b. *Qualifying Education or Training*

The following table shows the amount and level of education typically required for each grade for which education alone can be qualifying. At GS-13 and above, appropriate specialized experience is required for *all* positions (education alone is not qualifying for work at the GS-12 grade level and above, except research positions at the GS-12 grade level only).



## Qualifying Education

Grade	Qualifying Education
GS-1	None
GS-2	High school graduation or equivalent
GS-3	1 academic year above high school
GS-4	<p>2 academic years above high school</p> <p style="text-align: center;">or</p> <p>Associate's degree in a course of study that directly reflects the job-related KSAs/competencies necessary to satisfy the minimum qualifications and perform the duties of the position.</p>
GS-5	<p>4 academic years above high school leading to a bachelor's degree</p> <p style="text-align: center;">or</p> <p>Bachelor's degree in a course of study that directly reflects the job-related KSAs/competencies necessary to satisfy the minimum qualifications and perform the duties of the position.</p>
GS-7	<p>Bachelor's degree with Superior Academic Achievement for two-grade interval positions in a course of study that directly reflects the job-related KSAs/competencies necessary to satisfy the minimum qualifications and perform the duties of the position.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">or</p> <p>1 academic year of graduate education (or law school, as specified in qualification standards or individual occupational requirements) in a course of study that directly reflects the job-related KSAs/competencies necessary to satisfy the minimum qualifications and perform the duties of the position.</p>
GS-9	<p>Master's (or equivalent graduate degree such as LL.B. or J.D. as specified in qualification standards or individual occupational requirements) in a course of study that directly reflects the job-related KSAs/competencies necessary to satisfy the minimum qualifications and perform the duties of the position,</p> <p style="text-align: center;">or</p> <p>2 academic years of progressively higher-level graduate education in a course of study that directly reflects the job-related KSAs/competencies necessary to satisfy the minimum qualifications and perform the duties of the position.</p>

Grade	Qualifying Education
GS-11	<p>Ph.D. or equivalent doctoral degree in a course of study that directly reflects the job-related KSAs/competencies necessary to satisfy the minimum qualification and perform the duties of the position.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">or</p> <p>3 academic years of progressively higher-level graduate education, in a course of study that directly reflects the job-related KSAs/competencies necessary to satisfy the minimum qualifications and perform the duties of the position,</p> <p style="text-align: center;">or</p> <p><i>For research positions only</i>, completion of all requirements for a master's or equivalent degree (See information on research positions in the qualification standard for <a href="#">professional and scientific positions</a>) in a course of study that directly reflects the job-related KSAs/competencies necessary to satisfy the minimum qualifications and perform the duties of the position.</p>
GS-12	<p><i>For research positions only</i>, completion of all requirements for a doctoral or equivalent degree (See information on research positions in the qualification standard for <a href="#">professional and scientific positions</a>) in a course of study that directly reflects the job-related KSAs/competencies necessary to satisfy the minimum qualifications and perform the duties of the position.</p>

*\*Qualifying education as provided above coincides with title 5 USC § 5104.*

- c. *Academic year*-- An academic year is computed as follows:
1. At the undergraduate level, successfully completed education that has not led to possession of a degree is credited based on its relationship to 120 semester hours or 180 quarter hours. For example, 30 semester hours or 45 quarter hours is comparable to 1 year of undergraduate education. Four years of progressive study or 120 semester hours meets the degree requirements. *Additional credit cannot be given for duplicate course work.*
  2. For study at a business or technical school, 36 weeks of study (20+ classroom hours per week) is comparable to 1 academic year above high school.
  3. An academic year of graduate education is considered to be the number of credit hours that the school attended has determined to represent 1 academic year of full-time study. This determination is made based on normal course loads for a full year of study in the graduate program. If that information cannot be obtained from the school, 18 semester hours or 27 quarter hours should be considered as satisfying the 1 year of full-time study requirement. Part-time graduate education is creditable in

accordance with its relationship to a year of full-time study at the school attended.

4. When academic credit is expressed in contract months, units, or other terms that differ from conventional semester or quarter hours, it is the responsibility of the applicant to provide an interpretation of such credits from the appropriate institution in order to equate them to the semester or quarter hours specified in the standard.
- d. *College or university education* -- Educational course work may be at either the undergraduate or graduate level. Successful completion of graduate level courses will be accepted as evidence that an applicant also possesses the knowledge taught in courses at lower levels in the same field.

Applications can be accepted from students who expect to complete qualifying education within 9 months from the date of application. However, agencies must verify that the education was completed successfully before the applicant can be appointed.

Generally, courses in the same or a related major taken at one institution can be assumed to be progressively more difficult and, thus, credited at full value. However, the educational record of applicants who have changed majors, attended several different institutions, or taken courses only sporadically should be reviewed closely. Course titles and numbers may help determine level. (Courses entitled "Introduction to..." or with numbers beginning with A or 1 are almost always lower-level courses.) Transcripts noting the level of the student, e.g., freshman or junior, when the courses were taken may help also. If the level of an applicant's courses is not clear, the degree to which the courses relate to each other should be considered in determining whether the education meets the requirements of the position being filled.

When qualifying applicants on the basis of years of graduate education in lieu of an advanced degree, care must be exercised in determining credit for post-baccalaureate education. Such education must show evidence of progress through a set curriculum or program leading to an advanced degree. Extra credit for graduate education should not be given because a person has taken longer than the usual time to complete the educational program. It is OPM's intent that 2 years of graduate study be substantially equivalent to a master's degree, and 3 years be substantially equivalent to a Ph.D. degree. Graduate-level credit should not be given for undergraduate level course work unless it is a requisite part of the graduate-level curriculum. If an applicant had to complete undergraduate course work as a prerequisite for pursuing an advanced degree, that undergraduate-level study should not be credited as graduate education.

First-Professional Degree is a degree that represents a category of qualifications in professional subject areas that require students to have previously completed specified undergraduate coursework and/or degrees before enrolling. They are considered graduate-level programs in the U.S. system because they follow prior

undergraduate studies, but they are in fact first degrees in these professional subjects. Holders of first-professional degrees are considered to have an entry-level qualification and may undertake graduate study in these professional fields following the award of the first-professional degree. Several of these degrees use the term “doctor” in the title, but these degrees do not contain an independent research component or require a dissertation (thesis) and should not be confused with PhD degrees or other research doctorates. A first-professional degree is an award that requires completion of a program that meets all of the following criteria: (1) completion of the academic requirements to begin practice in the profession; (2) at least 2 years of college work prior to entering the program; and (3) a total of at least 6 academic years of college work to complete the degree program, including prior required college work plus the length of the professional program itself.

First-professional degrees may be awarded in the following 10 fields currently:

Doctor of Chiropractic (D.C. or D.C.M.)

Doctor of Dental Science (D.D.S.) or Doctor of Dental Medicine (D.M.D.)

Doctor of Jurisprudence or Juris Doctor (J.D.)

Doctor of Medicine (M.D.)

Doctor of Optometry (O.D.)

Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine/Osteopathy (D.O.)

Doctor of Pharmacy (Pharm.D.)

Doctor of Podiatric Medicine/Podiatry (D.P.M., D.P., or Pod.D.)

Master of Divinity (M.Div.), Master of Hebrew Letters (M.H.L.) or Rabbinical Ordination (Rav)

Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (D.V.M.).

- e. *Crediting education in one-grade interval occupations* -- For one-grade interval occupations, when education is used to meet specialized experience requirements at grade GS-5, the level of the course work must have been equivalent to at least the junior- and senior-year levels of a baccalaureate program. (See paragraph [\(d\)](#) above for discussion of level of education.)
- f. *Superior academic achievement (S.A.A.)* -- This provision covers advanced trainee positions that provide opportunities for advancement upon attaining required job skills and knowledge, require no prior experience, and have work

classified at two-grade intervals. It recognizes students who have achieved superior academic standing as evidenced by one of the three methods described below. In order to be creditable under this provision, superior academic achievement must have been gained in a curriculum that is qualifying for the position to be filled.

The superior academic achievement provision applies to both initial appointment and inservice placement actions. It is to be used to determine eligibility for applicable GS-7 level positions of persons who have completed (or expect to complete within 9 months) all the requirements for a bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university.

Senior students can apply for positions prior to graduation and be considered for a GS-7 appointment based on their grades at the time of application. However, some applicants may not receive their final grades in a timely fashion after graduation. Therefore, agencies can either:

1. Require that senior students provide evidence that they maintained the required grades during their senior year prior to entry on duty; or
2. Appoint applicants based on their claimed academic achievement, pending verification of final grades. Agencies should inform such applicants that if the required grades were not maintained through their senior year, there is a possibility that they may not be able to retain either the GS-7 grade or the position.

S.A.A. is based on (1) class standing, (2) grade-point average, or (3) honor society membership.

*1. Class standing* -- Applicants must be in the upper third of the graduating class in the college, university, or major subdivision, such as the College of Liberal Arts or the School of Business Administration, based on completed courses.

*2. Grade-point average (G.P.A.)*-- Applicants must have a grade-point average of:

- **3.0 or higher out of a possible 4.0 ("B" or better)** as recorded on their official transcript, or as computed based on 4 years of education, or as computed based on courses completed during the final 2 years of the curriculum; or
- **3.5 or higher out of a possible 4.0 ("B+" or better)** based on the average of the required courses completed in the major field or the required courses in the major field completed during the final 2 years of the curriculum.

Grade-point averages are to be rounded to one decimal place. For example, 2.95 will round to 3.0 and 2.94 will round to 2.9.

The G.P.A should be credited in a manner that is most beneficial to the applicant. For example, applicants may list their G.P.A. as recorded on their final transcript, or they may choose to compute their G.P.A. The specific provisions are detailed below:

- G.P.A. as recorded on the final transcript. The final transcript must cover the period being used to determine G.P.A., i.e., all 4 years or last 2 years.
- G.P.A. including course work after bachelor's degree. Undergraduate course work obtained after an applicant has received a bachelor's degree can be credited in computing the G.P.A. of applicants who need those courses to meet minimum qualification requirements, i.e., the courses are required by the standard or by the individual occupational requirement. They are treated as described in the following example:
  - An applicant for a Biologist position has a bachelor's degree that included no biology course work, but has taken 24 semester hours in undergraduate biology courses after obtaining the bachelor's degree. The grades earned in the biology courses should be included in the computation to determine this applicant's eligibility for GS-7 under the Superior Academic Achievement provision. These courses should be counted in determining (1) the overall grade-point average, (2) the average obtained during the final 2 years of the undergraduate curriculum, and/or (3) the average in the major field of study. For purposes of this example, biology would be considered the major field of study.
- G.P.A. excluding pass/fail courses. Applicants usually cannot claim credit based on their *overall* G.P.A. if more than 10 percent of their total credit was based on pass/fail or similar systems rather than on traditional grading systems. However, if they can document that only their freshman-year courses (25 percent or less of their total credit) were credited on a pass/fail or similar system, they can use their overall G.P.A. to claim Superior Academic Achievement. If 10 percent or fewer credits or only freshman-year courses were based on pass/fail or similar systems, such credits can be ignored and the G.P.A. computed on the graded courses. Applicants can, however, still claim credit based on their last 2 years if 10 percent or fewer credits were based on pass/fail or similar systems. Applicants who cannot claim credit under the G.P.A. requirements may claim credit for superior academic achievement only on the basis of class

standing or honor society membership.

3. *Election to membership in a national scholastic honor society* -- Applicants can be considered eligible based on membership in one of the national scholastic honor societies recognized by the [Association of College Honor Societies](#) listed below. Agencies considering eligibility based on any society not included in the following list must ensure that the honor society meets the minimum requirements of the Association of College Honor Societies. Membership in a freshman honor society cannot be used to meet the requirements of this provision.

Alpha Beta Gamma  
Alpha Chi  
Alpha Epsilon  
Alpha Epsilon Delta  
Alpha Epsilon Rho  
Alpha Eta Mu Beta  
Alpha Iota Delta  
Alpha Kappa Delta  
Alpha Kappa Mu  
Alpha Lambda Delta  
Alpha Phi Sigma  
Alpha Pi Mu  
Alpha Sigma Lambda  
Alpha Sigma Mu  
Alpha Sigma Nu  
Beta Gamma Sigma  
Beta Kappa Chi  
Beta Phi Mu  
Chi Epsilon  
Chi Sigma Iota  
Delta Epsilon Sigma  
Delta Mu Delta  
Delta Tau Alpha  
Epsilon Pi Tau  
Gamma Theta Upsilon  
Kappa Mu Epsilon  
Kappa Omicron Nu  
Kappa Tau Alpha  
Lambda Iota Tau  
Lambda Pi Eta  
Lambda Sigma  
Mortar Board  
Mu Kappa Tau  
National Society of Scabbard and Blade

NSCS (The National Society of Collegiate Scholars)  
Omega Chi Epsilon  
Omega Rho  
Omicron Delta Epsilon  
Phi Beta Delta  
Phi Sigma  
Phi Sigma Iota  
Phi Sigma Tau  
Phi Upsilon Omicron  
Pi Alpha Alpha  
Pi Delta Phi  
Pi Gamma Mu  
Pi Kappa Lambda  
Pi Omega Pi  
Pi Sigma Alpha  
Pi Tau Sigma  
Pi Theta Epsilon  
Psi Beta  
Psi Chi  
Rho Chi  
Sigma Beta Delta  
Sigma Delta Pi  
Sigma Lambda Alpha  
Sigma Lambda Chi  
Sigma Pi Sigma  
Sigma Tau Delta  
Sigma Theta Tau  
Tau Alpha Pi  
Tau Beta Pi  
Tau Sigma Delta  
Theta Alpha Kappa  
Upsilon Pi Epsilon

*g. Interpreting minimum educational requirements* -- Title 5 U.S.C. 3308 permits the establishment of minimum educational requirements only when OPM has determined that the work cannot be performed by persons who do not possess the prescribed minimum education. This includes instances where it would not be cost-effective for an individual to acquire, through on-the-job training, the KSAs and competencies necessary for successful performance of the critical duties within a reasonable period of time. In addition, education is sometimes required by law for a position because of, e.g., the impact on public health and safety or national security.

An agency may prescribe a minimum educational requirement (e.g., coursework) for employment in the Federal competitive service only when a minimum educational qualification is legally required to perform the duties.



An agency may consider education in determining a candidate's satisfaction of a minimum qualification only if the candidate's education directly reflects the KSAs/competencies necessary to satisfy that qualification and perform the duties of the position and align with job analysis.

The same minimum educational requirements apply to all applicants and employees including employees detailed to an occupational series with minimum educational requirements.

On rare occasions there may be applicants who may not meet exactly the educational requirements for a particular series, but who, in fact, may be demonstrably well qualified to perform the work in that series because of exceptional experience or a combination of education and experience. In such instances, a more comprehensive or holistic evaluation must be made of the applicant's entire background, with full consideration given to both education and experience. To be considered qualified, the applicant's work experience must reflect significant full performance-level accomplishment directly applicable to the position to be filled and be verified by a review of at least two persons (e.g., Human Resources, technical subject matter experts) who have professional standing in the field. Such verification is necessary to ensure that the applicant's background is compared to the appropriate duties and responsibilities required at the full performance level in the occupation. It is important that the comparison be based on a correctly classified position description or on OPM position classification standards or grade level criteria as well as an analysis of the work.

The following are examples of such situations:

- An applicant with a Ph.D. in mathematics applies for a GS-1701, Educational Research Specialist position at the GS-13 grade level. Because the qualification standard for GS-1701 requires courses in education or in a field appropriate to the work of the position, it might appear that this person is not qualified for the GS-1701 position because the applicant's Ph.D. is in mathematics. However, a review of the applicant's 20 years of experience shows that previous positions held include the post of Dean of Academic Affairs at a large university, as well as several years' experience in educational research comparable to the work of the position being filled. In this example, the applicant should be rated qualified, since it is obvious that the lack of the specific educational requirement is more than offset by the long history of successful, high-level, directly applicable experience.
- An applicant concluded his formal education at the end of the first semester of his senior year to pursue a research opportunity in his major field with a private company. The research led to advancement of the state of the art in his field. The applicant became a permanent employee with the company and worked there for 6 years, advancing to a senior

position. During this time, the applicant took continuing education courses in his field.

The basic educational requirement specified in a standard is considered to be met if the applicant has (1) successfully demonstrated the ability to perform work at the full performance level in the appropriate professional field, and (2) demonstrated a good knowledge of the specialty field of the position to be filled and the related and underlying discipline comparable to at least a bachelor's degree.

- The qualification standard for the Microbiology Series, GS-403, requires 20 semester hours of microbiology plus 20 semester hours in the physical and mathematical sciences. An applicant has 23 semester hours in microbiology and 17 semester hours in the physical and mathematical sciences.

Since the applicant meets the 20-semester-hour requirement in microbiology, the primary requirement, the 3 hours in excess of 20 can be used to meet the 20-semester-hour requirement in the physical and mathematical sciences.

- An applicant with a B.S. in Occupational Therapy applies for a GS-631, Occupational Therapy position at the GS-13 grade level. Because the qualification standard for GS-631 requires a graduate or higher-level degree appropriate for the occupation, it might appear that this person is not qualified for the GS-631 position because the applicant's Bachelor's level degree. However, a review of the applicant's 15 years of experience shows that previous positions held include direct patient care activities related to the practice of Occupational Therapy, as well as experience in research comparable to the work of the position being filled. The research led to advancements in the field of occupational therapy. The applicant continued to advance their expertise by taking continuing education courses in the field. In this example, the applicant should be rated qualified, since it is obvious that the lack of the specific educational requirement is more than offset by the long history of successful directly applicable experience.

Health care (e.g., Occupational Therapy, 0631; Physical Therapy, 0633; Pharmacy, 0660; etc.) and other occupations where entry level occupational or First-Professional degrees have evolved over time are prime examples where agencies must apply further analysis of applicant credentials and experience to determine if minimum qualifications are met.

The basic educational requirement or individual occupational requirement specified in a standard is considered to be met if an applicant possesses

the particular education and licensure requirements when they are performing their occupation.

Applicants may also be considered to have satisfied the minimum qualification requirements for a position if they can present evidence that clearly justifies a high evaluation of their competence, such as one of the following:

1. Registration as a professional engineer or architect; or
2. A substantial record of experience, achievement, and publications that demonstrates eminence in the appropriate professional/scientific field.

## **Waiver Request**

Agencies can make minimum qualifications determinations as described above independently without having to request a waiver approval from OPM. An agency waiver may include verifying alternative substitution of a minimum qualifications, but not the omission of a legal requirement. In cases in which agencies prefer to request a waiver from OPM, agencies may submit a waiver request to qualification standards through their agency Chief Human Capital Officer for OPM's consideration and decision to approve the waiver request. An OPM qualifications waiver may involve complex requests involving unusual scenarios requiring qualifications policy interpretation by OPM. Agency requests to OPM for a waiver must include the following basic information in order to be properly considered:

- a) Request to waive the Individual Occupational Requirements of an OPM Qualification Standard including the rationale or need for the waiver and impact on meeting the agency's mission;
- b) Copies of current official position descriptions with evaluation statements and other related position classification information;
- c) Job Opportunity Announcement;
- d) Job Analysis supporting required knowledge, skills and abilities and/or competencies required;
- e) The Applicants resume and other credentials;
- f) Summary of the assessment approach; and
- g) Required knowledge, skills, and abilities and/or competencies required for performing work.

Requests for waivers of OPM qualification standards should be sent to [fedclass@opm.gov](mailto:fedclass@opm.gov). An OPM representative will contact you regarding your request. Incomplete requests will be returned to requesting agencies.

## **5. Crediting Combinations of Education and Experience**

Education and experience can be combined to meet the minimum qualification requirements, as allowed in the applicable standard. To combine education and

experience, determine the applicant's total qualifying experience as a percentage of the experience required for the grade level. Then determine the applicant's education as a percentage of the education required for the grade level. Finally, add the two percentages. The total percentage must equal at least 100 percent to qualify an applicant for that grade level. The [group coverage standards](#) contain examples of how to combine education and experience.

*Note that only graduate education in excess of the amount required for the next lower grade level can be combined with the appropriate level of experience to qualify applicants for positions at grades GS-9 and GS-11. For example, if a school's requirement for 1 year of graduate study is 18 semester hours, only graduate education beyond the first 18 semester hours or 27 quarter hours can be combined with GS-7 level experience to qualify for a GS-9 level position. Thus, 9 semester hours of graduate education and 6 months of GS-7 level experience cannot be combined to qualify for a GS-9 position.*

## **6. Competency-Based Qualification Requirements**

Screening an applicant for minimum qualifications is not the same as assessing applicants for the competencies and proficiency levels necessary to perform the job. Agencies are required to use validated (i.e., job-related) assessment tools when examining applicants for competitive service positions. Assessment tools include, but are not limited to, cognitive ability tests, work samples, situational judgment tests, job knowledge tests, and structured interviews. [OPM's Assessment and Selection](#) webpage contains multiple competency-based assessment options and the [Assessment Decision Guide](#) that agencies can use to make assessment decisions.

Job applicants must be assessed appropriately using a passing grade assessment to demonstrate their KSAs/competencies for positions ([Delegated Examining Operations Handbook, Chapter 4](#)). Assessment tools are effective for determining if job applicants possess KSAs/competencies based on their work, education, or training experiences. Agencies' assessment of applicants may not rely solely on a self-assessment of KSAs/competencies. Applicants should be assessed to determine the quality of their KSAs/competencies aligned with the position as demonstrated by their educational attainment, experience, or a combination of the two.

Agencies must finalize assessment methods and prompts before posting a job announcement. In the "How You Will Be Evaluated section" of the job announcement, the job posting must clearly spell out each assessment hurdle and whether or not they are pass/fail and/or also used for ranking and rating for categories. Applicants must know how they will be evaluated when they apply, and agencies must treat all applicants equally ([Delegated Examining Operations Handbook, Chapter 3](#)).

In an effort to enhance competency-based hiring practices agencies may use competency-based approaches for assessing and selecting job applicants. Agencies are required to conduct job analysis as the basis for employment practices in the

Federal Government (5 CFR 300.103). A job analysis is used to identify the competencies and proficiency levels for work. KSAs/competencies identified via job analysis along with proficiency levels can be used to develop competency-based assessments. Competencies may be general (e.g., Problem Solving), meaning they may be required for many occupations, or technical, meaning they are required for a specific occupation. The [Delegated Examining Operations Handbook, Chapter 2](#) provides guidance on conducting a job analysis and identifying proficiency levels for application by agencies to carry out their hiring functions.

OPM develops, for agency use, governmentwide competency models that may be used to conduct job analysis as well as identify competencies for their positions. OPM has been conducting Governmentwide occupational studies using its *Multipurpose Occupational Systems Analysis Inventory - Close-Ended* (MOSAIC) methodology for more than two decades. MOSAIC, a multipurpose, survey-based occupational analysis approach, is used to collect information from incumbents and supervisors on many occupations for a wide range of human resource management functions. Through these studies, OPM has identified the critical competencies and tasks employees need to perform successfully in nearly 200 Federal occupations, as well as for leadership positions. OPM provides agencies with a basis for building integrated human resource management systems that use a common set of tasks and competencies to structure job design, recruitment, qualification and assessment, selection, performance management, training, and career development so that employees receive a consistent message about the factors on which they are selected, trained, and evaluated.

Competency-based qualifications approaches incorporate required proficiency levels for competencies that may be used to qualify talent. Agencies can identify through a job analysis and following the guidance in the [Delegated Examining Operations Handbook, Chapter 2](#), KSAs/competencies for their positions. OPM provides tools and resources for agencies to develop and implement competency-based qualification requirements. OPM will continue work with agencies to ensure they have the rights policy, tools, and guidance to employ competency-based assessments and practices. This is part of a larger OPM effort to revise the way OPM establishes qualification requirements to encourage agencies to measure the critical competencies required to perform effectively in Federal occupations and to transition Federal agencies to use competency-based assessments in the hiring process.

Competency-based qualifications may be used for minimum qualifications screening and subsequent assessments, which represents two separate steps in the examining process. Screening for minimum qualifications is usually the first hurdle in the selection process

When using competency-based qualifications, applicants are required to meet the proficiency level on all required competencies through various means, including experience, education, or training. If any applicant fails to meet the required proficiency level on any of the competencies through any assessment even after the minimum qualifications step but before the certificate is issued, the applicant is ineligible and is

automatically disqualified from further consideration for the position ([Delegated Examining Operations Handbook, Chapter 4](#)).

Competency-based qualification requirements may be used in conjunction with the appropriate individual and/or group qualification standard. However, the use of competencies and proficiency levels are mandatory when using competency-based approaches to determine if applicant's meet qualification requirements.

## **7. Using Selective Factors**

It is critical that agencies clearly and adequately identify the requirements of a position in the job announcement so that applicants understand the basis on which their application will be evaluated. In most instances, this explicit description of required general or specialized experience in the job announcement will ensure that applicants possess the necessary KSAs/competencies to perform the work of a position. (See [3\(c\)](#).)

There are some positions, however, where specific qualifications are absolutely required because a person cannot perform successfully in the position without such qualifications. These can include requirements for specific KSAs/competencies or Federal or State requirements for licensure or certification. In such instances, it may be appropriate to consider the use of selective factors. A selective factor becomes part of the minimum requirements for a position, and applicants who do not meet it are ineligible for further consideration. A selective factor can be used for positions at any grade level where its use would be appropriate.

The use of selective factors is especially helpful in situations where an agency uses an OPM list of eligibles, since individuals on the register would meet the requirements of the published qualification standard, but might not meet any additional, agency-specific requirement(s). Their use would also be helpful in those situations in which an agency has a nationwide job announcement, but has a special requirement for positions in a particular location because a duty performed is not routinely associated with the occupation, e.g., a contact representative position that requires fluency in Spanish.

If an agency wishes to use a selective factor when filling a vacancy through use of a civil service list of eligibles, it must complete a request and provide justification for the examining office's consideration and approval. The request should list the selective factor(s), include the position description, job analysis, or other official communication describing the duties and responsibilities of the position, and describe why selective factors are necessary for successful performance.

Selective factors cannot (1) be so narrow that they preclude from consideration applicants who could perform the duties of the position, (2) require KSAs/competencies that could be learned readily during the normal period of orientation to the position, (3) be so specific as to exclude from consideration applicants without prior Federal experience, or (4) be so restrictive that they run counter to the goal of placing applicants

from priority placement lists established to assist in the placement of employees affected by reductions in force.

It is essential that any selective factors used in filling a particular vacancy be included in the job announcement. Agencies cannot require applicants to meet selective factors that were not established prior to advertising a position, nor can they require selective factors that were not made known to applicants. This disclosure in the job announcement must include as well how agencies will assess applicants for selective factors.

The KSAs and competencies gained from experience and education may be used as selective factors in accordance with the following instructions:

- a. *Experience* -- Agencies can request that examining offices honor selective factors that could have been acquired only through experience where the position requires program, regulatory, and/or procedural knowledge, such as knowledge of personnel, budget, laboratory, or purchasing procedures. Education alone may not have provided all the KSAs/competencies required for such a position; however, education supplemented by work such as internships, field work, and cooperative education that provided the program, regulatory, or procedural knowledge may be qualifying for the position. It is important to note that agencies cannot make experience requirements so specific that only employees of the agency could meet the minimum requirements, as this would inappropriately restrict competition.
- b. *Education* – If the applicable standard allows for qualifying either on the basis of experience and/or education, an agency cannot require that applicants qualify on the basis of education only. However, the restriction in title 5 U.S.C. 3308 does not preclude agencies from evaluating an applicant's education to determine if it provided the KSAs/competencies required to meet selective or quality ranking factors. Additionally, agencies can request that consideration be limited to fields of study that provide the specific KSAs/competencies for a particular position when considering the qualifications of individuals applying on the basis of education. (For example, an agency has a vacancy for a physicist position specializing in a branch of solid-state physics).

## **8. Using Quality Ranking Factors**

Agencies can request quality ranking factors to help determine which of the basically qualified applicants are likely to be better qualified for a position. Quality ranking factors are KSAs/competencies that could be expected to significantly enhance performance in a position, but, unlike selective factors, are not essential for satisfactory performance. (For example, skill in public speaking might be used as a quality ranking factor for a position in an organization where policy changes are communicated to the public in several ways, and oral communication is one of the ways.) Applicants who possess the quality ranking factors can be ranked above those who do not, but no one can be rated ineligible solely for failure to possess a quality ranking factor.

The KSAs/competencies used as quality ranking factors may have been obtained through either experience or education. Therefore, relevant academic courses can provide evidence of possession of quality ranking factors even for occupations where their use as selective factors is prohibited by title 5 U.S.C. 3308. This would be particularly true at entry grade levels where many applicants may not possess experience that demonstrated the applicable KSAs/competencies. For example, a budget analyst position may involve duties such as determining whether the budget requests of several divisions in an agency are justified based on economic forecasts. While no particular courses are required for basic eligibility as a budget analyst, for applicants who meet the minimum qualification requirements on the basis of education, courses such as business administration, finance, or economics might reasonably be expected to enhance performance in the position.

## 9. Special Inservice Placement Provisions

Inservice placement applicants may meet minimum qualification requirements based on education (including superior academic achievement) and/or experience, as specified in the appropriate qualification standard. To qualify, they must usually have the same level and type of experience or education that is required for initial appointment. However, there are some special provisions, as follows:

- a. *Minimum educational requirements* -- When there is a change to or addition of minimum educational requirements to an occupational series, Federal employees currently classified to that series do not have to meet the new educational requirements. (Also see (b) below.)
- b. *The "add-on rule"* -- If an employee qualified for his or her current position by meeting the provisions of the appropriate standard (either an OPM standard or an agency-modified standard, as described in (c) below), the agency need only add on the difference between the length of experience required for the current position and the length of experience required for the proposed position. For example, a GS-2 employee in a clerical position qualified for his or her current position on the basis of high school graduation. The employee would be eligible for promotion to GS-3 after 3 months of employment since the difference between the experience requirements for GS-2 (3 months) and the experience requirements for GS-3 (6 months) is 3 months. Note that at the GS-2 level, a high school diploma is credited the same as 3 months of experience.

The "add-on rule" can be used even when the current and proposed positions are classified in different series if the level and quality of the experience required for the two series are not significantly different. The "add-on rule" can be used for any inservice placement action; however, the following restrictions apply:

- o If minimum educational requirements have been established or changed for an employee's former series, the "add-on rule" can be used to return the employee to that series only if:



1. The employee has maintained current occupational knowledge through employment or education and meets any licensure or certification requirements; and
  2. Comparison of the position descriptions or other documentation of work performed shows clearly that the employee's former position included all the basic duties of the position to be filled and provided the knowledge, skills, abilities (KSAs)/competencies necessary to perform the duties of the new position. (This is particularly important when a minimum educational requirement has been added to an occupational series that did not have one when the employee served in it. In that instance, some positions formerly classified in the series may not have required full occupational knowledge and are now classified in a different series.)
    - o If an employee has been placed in a position based on waiver of qualification requirements, the "add-on rule" does not apply, since the waiver provisions are normally applicable to that position only.
- c. *Modifying experience requirements for certain inservice placement actions* -- An agency may determine that an individual can successfully perform the work of a position even though that person may not meet all the requirements in the OPM qualification standard. In that situation, agencies are authorized to modify OPM qualification standards for reassignments, voluntary changes to lower grades, transfers, reinstatements, and repromotions to a grade not higher than a grade previously held when the applicant's background includes related experience that provided the KSAs/competencies necessary for successful job performance. This authority should be used only when there is a reasonable likelihood that the employee will successfully make the transition to the new position and cannot be used for directed reassignments to positions in which an employee obviously would not be able to perform the work.

This authority is **not** to be used for placement to a higher grade, except where the employee previously held a position at that grade or higher-grade levels.

This authority can be used to place an employee in a position with greater promotion potential than the position currently or previously held. If an agency's merit promotion plan requires employees to compete for the position, the agency must specify in the job announcement the qualification requirements to be met. The experience accepted as qualifying should equip the employee to meet the critical elements set out in the performance standard for the position. This provision does not authorize agencies to disregard minimum educational, licensure, or certification requirements in OPM standards.

The agency's use of a modified standard should be documented sufficiently to show that it was intentional, and that the assignment did not result from misinterpretation of the OPM standard. When an employee has been placed in a

position based on modification of a qualification standard under this provision, the "add-on rule" may be applied in any subsequent inservice placement action.

- d. *Experience level required for promotion in one-grade interval series.* In a one-grade interval series, experience at the second lower grade level can be credited when there is no position in the normal line of progression that is one grade lower than the position being filled. When this provision is used for promotions requiring competition under the agency's merit promotion plan, the fact that employees can qualify with at least 1 year at either the next lower level or the second lower level must be stated in any job announcement. (Also see p. II-9, [3\(o\)](#)).
- e. *Crediting education or training for promotion* -- Education or training can be credited as experience towards promotion for employees who are detailed or are granted leave without pay for the purpose of obtaining specialized knowledge and skills. The agency must determine that the education or training contributes materially to the competence of the employee in his/her work and that the employee possesses the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs)/competencies needed for successful performance in the position to be filled. This education cannot be credited again towards meeting the basic educational requirements in a standard. (See [3\(i\)](#))

## 10. Other Requirements or Provisions

- a. *Citizenship* -- Agencies must adhere to the following restrictions regarding United States citizenship when evaluating persons seeking Federal civil service employment:

-- Executive Order 11935, which requires citizenship for the competitive civil service, i.e., only a United States citizen or national may be appointed to the competitive service. This requirement applies to all types of appointments. In noncompetitive conversions from the excepted service, the citizenship requirement must be met as of the effective date of the action. (A national is a person who owes allegiance to or is under the protection of a nation, but is not a citizen or subject. However, a native is typically born in the particular place.) Natives of the following areas are United States citizens: Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, including Saipan, Rota, and Tinian; Puerto Rico; and the Virgin Islands of the United States, including St. Croix, St. Thomas, and St. John. At present, only natives of American Samoa and Swains Island are nationals of the United States;

-- The annual Treasury, Postal Service, and General Government Appropriation Act ban on paying aliens from many countries; and

-- The immigration law ban (title 8 U.S.C. 1324a) on employing aliens, unless they are lawfully admitted for permanent residence or otherwise authorized to be employed.

In specific cases, OPM may authorize the appointment of aliens to competitive service jobs to promote the efficiency of the service, as an exception to the Order, and to the extent permitted by law.

Each agency is responsible for applying any additional citizenship restrictions or exceptions that are authorized by its own enabling and appropriation statutes.

- b. [Medical/Physical](#) -- The basis on which agencies may establish specific medical standards or physical requirements is discussed in 5 CFR 339. In general, there must be a direct relationship between the medical standard or physical requirement and the actual duties of the position being filled. Failure to meet an established medical standard or physical requirement means that the individual is not qualified for the position *unless* there is sufficient evidence that he or she can perform the duties of the position safely and efficiently despite a condition that would normally be disqualifying. Agencies must provide reasonable accommodation to qualified individuals with disabilities in accordance with Equal Employment Opportunity Commission regulations.

Positions with sedentary, light, or moderately active duties are covered by the following medical standard:

Applicants must be physically and mentally able to perform efficiently the essential functions of the position, with or without reasonable accommodation, without hazard to themselves or others. Depending on the essential duties of a specific position, usable vision, color vision, hearing, or speech may be required. However, in most cases, a specific physical condition or impairment will not automatically disqualify an applicant for appointment. The loss or impairment of a specific function may be compensated for by the satisfactory use of a prosthesis or mechanical aid. Reasonable accommodation, in accordance with title 29 CFR 1613.704, must also be considered in determining an applicant's ability to perform the duties. Also, all positions involving Federal motor vehicle operation carry the additional medical requirements specified in *(f)* below.

Positions with specific medical requirements and that involve arduous/hazardous duties or require a high standard of human reliability are identified in the [Medical Requirements](#) section. For such positions, the medical requirements are based on the arduous or hazardous nature of the duties typically performed in most of the positions covered. However, since individual positions may not include all such duties, a physical condition or impairment may be disqualifying for employment only if there is a direct relationship between the condition and the nature of the duties of the specific position to be filled. In some instances, a physical impairment will not disqualify an applicant for appointment if the condition is compensated for by a satisfactory prosthesis, mechanical aid, or by reasonable accommodation. Also, all positions involving Federal motor vehicle operation carry the additional medical requirements specified in *(f)* below.

- c. *Age -- (1) Minimum entry age requirements.* Under 5 U.S.C. 3301, OPM is authorized to establish standards with respect to a minimum entry age that applicants must meet to be admitted to or rated in examinations. A minimum age requirement ensures that applicants have the maturity necessary for successful job performance and that Federal Government hiring practices are not in conflict with the general objective of encouraging students to complete their basic education. Minimum entry age requirements must be waived for persons entitled to veterans preference, unless OPM determines that such an age restriction is essential for performance of the duties of the position.

Generally, unless a different minimum entry age is contained in the standard or examination announcement for a particular position, applicants for any position in the competitive service must be (1) at least 18 years old, or (2) at least 16 years old *and*:

- Have graduated from high school or been awarded a certificate equivalent to graduating from high school; or
- Have completed a formal vocational training program; or
- Have received a statement from school authorities agreeing with their preference for employment rather than continuing their education; or
- Be currently enrolled in a secondary school *and* either work only during school vacation periods or work part-time during the school year under a formal student employment program.

Applications may be considered from individuals who meet one of the above conditions and will reach the age of 16 prior to or on the date they report to work.

Title 5 U.S.C. 3307 authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to establish the minimum age requirement for initial appointment to U.S. Park police positions.

In addition to the above, agencies must observe the provisions of the Fair Labor Standards Act, as well as Federal, State, and local laws that relate to the employment of minors in hazardous positions or in positions requiring the use of firearms.

*(2) Maximum entry age restrictions.* Title 5 U.S.C. 3307(a) prohibits the establishment of a maximum entry age for Federal positions, except as provided below. The prohibition against establishing maximum entry age limits applies to noncompetitive actions as well as to competitive appointments, to the excepted as well as to competitive services, and to all agencies, including OPM. Consequently, agencies cannot apply a maximum entry age limit under merit promotion procedures or in selection through any type of noncompetitive action, except as provided in the applicable Sections of the United States Code. There are no maximum entry age restrictions for most positions in the competitive service, except as follows:

- Title 5 U.S.C. 3307, authorizes the Secretary of Transportation and the Secretary of Defense to establish a maximum entry age for original appointment to air traffic controller positions in their respective Departments. The Secretary of the Interior is authorized to establish a maximum entry age for original appointment to U.S. Park police positions. The head of any agency is authorized to establish a maximum entry age for original appointment to positions of law enforcement officers or firefighters; and
- Title 29 U.S.C. 633a permits agencies to establish a maximum age requirement only in instances where they have proven to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission that age is a bona fide occupational qualification necessary for the performance of the duties of a particular position.

Maximum age restrictions established under 29 U.S.C. 633a or under the special authorities in 5 U.S.C. 3307 are not waived for persons entitled to veterans' preference.

- d. *Written and performance tests* -- Occupational series/positions with written and/or performance test requirements are identified in the section entitled [test requirements](#). Written and performance tests are to be used as follows:
- *Initial appointments* -- Tests are required for some occupational series, either for all applicants or for those applicants who do not meet specific requirements indicated in the standard. If a test is required, applicants who are subject to that test must pass or have previously passed it to be eligible for initial appointment. This includes competitive appointments, and appointments under most noncompetitive appointing authorities.
  - *Inservice placement -- (1) Tests required by OPM.* There are a few occupational series for which a test is required by OPM for inservice placement. For such series, agencies must use and applicants must pass the appropriate OPM test. Occupational series with such requirements are also identified in the [Test Requirements](#) section.
 

(2) *Tests required by agencies.* For positions for which OPM does not require a test, agencies may develop and use tests without OPM approval, as long as the test is part of a comprehensive set of assessment procedures used in ranking employees. The use and appropriateness of such tests are the responsibility of the agency. Agencies cannot, however, use existing OPM tests for such positions, unless specific approval has been received from OPM.

(3) *How inservice applicants can be examined.* In occupations other than those where OPM requires a test for inservice placement, if an agency prefers to use alternatives to testing (e.g., evaluation of training and experience, interview, performance appraisal) to measure qualifications, it

can do so, or it may use a test as *one of several tools* in evaluating applicants. Tests can be used to determine basic eligibility (i.e., on a pass-fail basis) or as the sole basis for ranking inservice placement applicants, *only* when specific approval has been received from OPM.

(4) *Performance tests.* As a general guide, performance tests (e.g., typing proficiency tests) can be used to evaluate inservice placement applicants when, within the past 3 years, they have not performed successfully in a position that required proficiency in the skills needed for the position to be filled.

- e. *Assessments* –The use of effective assessments can improve the validity of the selection process and improve the quality of hires. Agencies must evaluate applicants on all required KSAs/competencies including selective factors and quality ranking factors determined by the agency. Agencies are responsible for developing an appropriate assessment method for evaluating applicants on job related KSAs/competencies. In most cases, many agencies currently determine qualifications using occupational questionnaires that applicants complete when first applying for a position. However, the competency-based approach goes beyond minimum qualifications and provides agencies the flexibility to confirm through other assessment methods that the required competencies and proficiencies are met. Using effective assessment tools is one of the most critical parts of examining candidates. For more information on assessments and designing an assessment strategy, please refer to OPM’s [Assessment Decision Guide](#), the [Assessment and Selection](#) website [and, the Delegating Examination Operations Handbook, Chapter 5](#).
- f. *Licensure, certification, and other requirements or provisions* -- Applicants for positions in some occupational series must by relevant state law meet certification, licensure, or registration requirements in addition to meeting experience and/or educational requirements.

In other series, applicants can qualify fully on the basis of licensure, certification, registration, or special training as an alternative to experience and/or educational requirements. Such requirements or provisions are noted in the qualification standards or individual occupational requirements for those series.

Agencies can establish requirements for specific credentials (e.g., registration, licenses, or certificates) when such credentials are necessary for satisfactory job performance. However, it is important that agencies not overemphasize the possession of credentials as a means of determining whether applicants meet minimum qualification requirements in a series where the standard permits qualification on the basis of experience or education. Staffing personnel must examine the background of all applicants and give full credit to any acceptable experience, as well as to education or training.

Licensure and certification requirements may not be waived unless specified in the qualification standard.

- g. *Motor vehicle incidental operator requirements* -- Title 40 U.S.C. 471 requires OPM to issue regulations governing executive agencies in authorizing their civilian personnel to operate Government owned or leased motor vehicles within the United States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the possessions of the United States. OPM's regulations are found at title 5 CFR 930.

Incidental operators are employees, other than those occupying a position officially classified as a motor vehicle operator, who are required to operate a Government owned or leased motor vehicle to properly carry out their assigned duties. To qualify as an incidental operator, an employee must possess a valid State license, have a safe driving record, pass a road test, and demonstrate that he or she is medically qualified to operate the appropriate motor vehicle safely.

OPM waives the road test for incidental operators:

(1) who operate vehicles of one-ton capacity or less and who possess a current driver's license from one of the 50 States, the District of Columbia, or Puerto Rico, where domiciled or principally employed, except for incidental operators of buses or vehicles used for transportation of dangerous material, law enforcement, or emergency services;

(2) who possess a current driver's license, for the specific class of vehicle operated, from one of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, or Puerto Rico, where domiciled or principally employed; or

(3) in accordance with a specific authorization by OPM to the agency concerned.

An agency head may waive the road test when it is not practical to apply it, and then only for an employee whose competence as a driver has been established by his/her past driving record.

In general, no medical condition may be considered disqualifying unless there is evidence that it is likely to adversely affect job performance or safety to an unacceptable degree. At least once every 4 years, each agency will ensure that employees who operate Government owned or leased vehicles are medically able to do so without undue risk to themselves or others. Where there is a question about an employee's ability to operate a motor vehicle safely, the employee may be referred for a medical examination in accordance with provisions of title 5 CFR 339.

## 11. Supervisory Positions

All [supervisory positions](#) require a combination of subject-matter knowledge and skills and managerial abilities related to getting work done through other people, e.g., planning, assigning, and reviewing work, and evaluating performance. The relative importance of supervisory skills and subject-matter knowledge will depend on the specific duties of the position being filled. Therefore, applicants for supervisory positions may be evaluated using the appropriate standard for the series *and/or* the [Supervisory Guide](#). In determining the level of subject-matter knowledge required, it should be kept in mind that the subject-matter duties are not always classified at the same grade level as the supervisory duties.

In some instances, employees are assigned to supervise work in a series other than the one to which their positions are classified, and it will be necessary to determine whether this supervision provided them with appropriate experience to qualify for a position in the series supervised. For example, was the supervision purely administrative in nature, or was the supervisor also required to have substantial subject-matter knowledge of the work performed to provide technical direction? If it is determined that the supervisor provided technical direction, the grade-level of the subject-matter duties involved should be determined so that they may be appropriately credited.

### Updating Qualification Standards

OPM's goal is to keep the requirements in the qualification standards as current as possible. Therefore, agencies are requested to inform Talent Acquisition and Workforce Shaping of substantive changes to occupational or agency requirements so that the appropriate qualification standard can be revised. Additionally, if agencies are having difficulty in obtaining well qualified applicants on the basis of current qualification requirements, they should contact Employee Services, Talent Acquisition, Classification and Veterans Programs Center so that a determination can be made on whether the standard is in need of revision.

### Establishment of Additional Standards

The standards contained in this section, adapted by use of agency selective factors, when necessary, should fit most jobs. Agencies may submit requests for updates to standards through their Chief Human Capital Officers for OPM to consider establishing new or revising existing standards at any time. The formal request must come through an agency's Headquarters Human Resources Office.

Agency requests for new standards and revisions must include the following basic information in order to be properly considered:

- A proposed qualification standard and a job analysis showing how the proposed requirements at entry, full-performance, and higher levels relate to the work to be performed at those levels;



- Approximate number of jobs in the agency that would be covered by the proposed standard, with their grade levels and organizational and geographic locations;
- Representative position descriptions, including at least one at the full-performance level, evaluation statements, and related classification information;
- Employment data - the number of impacted positions and their current classification (e.g., pay plan, title, occupational series, and grade);
- Organizational charts clearly identifying positions;
- Explanation of why the current qualification standard(s) and the use of selective factors are not effective;
- Job analysis for required knowledge, skills, abilities, and/or competencies for performing work;
- Copies of current performance standards for the work;
- Copies of job opportunity announcements used to fill positions;
- Statistical data/information on current recruitment efforts and challenges filling positions;
- Statistical data/information illustrating current retention and turnover issues;
- Information concerning use of Hiring Flexibilities, such as, 3Rs and Special Salary Rates;
- Related agency studies/surveys of positions;
- Other agencies with similar positions (e.g., any other agencies likely to have covered positions); and
- Any other pertinent information related to this work at your agency.

OPM conducts comprehensive occupational studies to substantiate the need for updating or establishing classification and qualification standards. OPM may request additional information based on the scope of the study and evidence needed to inform policymaking efforts.

Requests for updates to qualification standards, new qualification standards, and waivers of OPM qualification standards should be sent to [fedclass@opm.gov](mailto:fedclass@opm.gov). An OPM representative will contact you regarding your request. The timeframe is contingent upon the work that has to be completed, current priorities, and current projects. Incomplete requests will not be processed.

Requests to establish additional standards or to update standards may also be sent to:

U.S. Office of Personnel Management  
 Employee Services  
 Talent Acquisition, Classification, and Veterans Programs  
 Classification and Assessment Policy  
 1900 E Street, NW  
 Washington, DC 20415

## References and Sources

1. Title 5 U.S.C., Chapters 11, 21, 23, 31, 33, 35, and 51.
  2. Title 5 CFR 300, *Employment (General)*
  3. Title 5 CFR 307, *Veterans Recruitment Appointments*
  4. Title 5 CFR 332, *Recruitment and Selection through Competitive Examination*
  5. Title 5 CFR 335, *Promotion and Internal Placement*
  6. Title 5 CFR 337, *Examining System*
  7. Title 5 CFR 338, *Qualification Requirements (General)*
  8. Title 5 CFR 339, *Medical Qualification Determinations*
  9. Title 5 CFR 353, *Restoration to Duty from Military Service or Compensable Injury*
  10. Title 5 CFR 930, *Programs for Specific Positions and Examinations (Miscellaneous)*
  11. [Executive Order \(13932\) on Modernizing and Reforming the Assessment and Hiring of Federal Job Candidates](#)
  12. Introduction to the *Position Classification Standards*
  13. *Handbook of Occupational Groups and Series*
  14. [The Delegated Examining Operations Handbook](#)
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1. *Directory of Postsecondary Institutions*  
U.S. Department of Education  
Public Information Division  
Education Information Branch  
Washington, DC 20208-1404  
(202) 219-1651
2. *Nationally Recognized Accrediting Agencies and Associations*  
U.S. Department of Education  
Office of Postsecondary Education  
Higher Education Management Services  
Washington, DC 20202  
(202) 708-8922
3. *Guides to the Academic Placement of Students from Foreign Countries in Educational Institutions of the United States of America*  
American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO)  
One Dupont Circle, N.W., Suite 330  
Washington, DC 20036-1110  
(202) 293-9161
4. *Accredited Institutions of Postsecondary Education*  
American Council on Education (ACE) published for The Commission on Recognition of Postsecondary Accreditation (CORPA)  
One Dupont Circle, N.W., Suite 305  
Washington, DC 20036  
(202) 452-1433

5. *The hep Higher Education Directory*  
Higher Education Publications, Inc. (HEP)  
2946 Sleepy Hollow Road  
Falls Church, Virginia 22044  
(703) 532-2300
6. *Peterson's Guides to Two-Year Colleges*  
*Peterson's Guides to Four-Year Colleges*  
Peterson's Guides, Inc.  
P.O. Box 2123  
Princeton, New Jersey 08543-2123A
7. *Association of College Honor Societies - Booklet of Information*  
4990 Northwind Drive, Suite 140  
East Lansing, Michigan 48823-5031  
(517) 351-8335
8. *Baird's Manual of American College Fraternities*  
Baird's Manual Foundation  
3901 West 86th Street, Suite 390  
Indianapolis, Indiana 46268