

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



**Atlanta Oversight Division**  
**75 Spring Street, SW, Suite 972**  
**Atlanta, GA 30303**

**Classification Appeal Decision**  
**Under Section 5112 of Title 5, United States Code**

<b>Appellant:</b>	Appellant
<b>Agency classification:</b>	Physical Science Technician GS-1311-8
<b>Organization:</b>	Naval Air Station
<b>OPM decision:</b>	Physical Science Technician GS-1311-7
<b>OPM decision number:</b>	C-1311-07-01

Kathy W. Day  
Classification Appeals Officer  
Date 1/30/98

As provided in section 511.612 of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations, this decision constitutes a certificate that is mandatory and binding on all administrative, certifying, payroll, disbursing, and accounting officials of the government. The agency is responsible for reviewing its classification decisions for identical, similar, or related positions to ensure consistency with this decision. There is no right of further appeal. This decision is subject to discretionary review only under conditions and time limits specified in the Introduction to the Position Classification Standards, appendix 4, section G (address provided in appendix 4, section H).

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

The personnel office must also determine if the appellant is entitled to grade or pay retention, or both, under 5 U.S.C. 5362 and 5363 and 5 CFR 536. If the appellant is entitled to grade retention, the 2-year retention period begins on the date this decision is implemented.

### **Decision sent to:**

(Appellant)

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and Compensation  
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## **Introduction**

On August 28, 1997, the Atlanta Oversight Division of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) received a classification appeal from (Appellant). The appellant's position is currently classified as Physical Science Technician, GS-1311-8. He believes his position should be classified at grade GS-9. The position is located in the {Agency}, Jacksonville, Florida. We have accepted and decided his appeal under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.).

To help decide the appeal, an Atlanta Oversight Division representative conducted an onsite audit of the appellant's position on January 27, 1998. The audit included interviews with the appellant and the appellant's immediate supervisor. In reaching our classification decision, we have reviewed the audit findings and all information of record furnished by the appellant and his agency, including his official position description number 70288.

## **General issues**

The appellant believes his responsibilities have increased and that major duties that are more critical and complex have been added to his position. He states that the additional duty of certifying negative messages occupies 60 percent of his time and that it is a duty performed by higher graded employees. His other duties occupy 40 percent of his time.

Classification law (title 5, U.S.C. 5107) requires that positions in the Federal service be classified by comparison to standards published by OPM. Consequently, other means of classification, including the volume of work and comparison to other positions, are not authorized. The assumption of additional duties and responsibilities is not sufficient to support an increase in the grade of a properly classified position, unless those additional duties are of significantly greater complexity and difficulty than those which supported the original classification of the position.

## **Position information**

The appellant serves as a technical assistant in the Laboratory Production Department. He maintains the drug screening equipment by ensuring that the equipment used for testing runs properly in the drug laboratory. He performs maintenance and repair service on the equipment that is not covered by maintenance agreements. He identifies, analyzes, and resolves failures and testing discrepancies and provides assistance and technical direction on the operation of the equipment. The appellant reviews and certifies the negative message results for accuracy and completeness. Other duties include: training employees on the operation and theory of new equipment, compiling data for testing, assisting in implementing new testing procedures and equipment, assisting in altering testing procedures in some instances, ordering supplies, and assisting to safeguard and protect employees from radiological hazards.

The appellant receives work direction from the Laboratory Officer/Production Manager who assigns work objectives, special projects, and resources. The appellant works independently to produce the required assignments. Work is reviewed for completeness, timeliness, and compliance with operating procedures.

## **Series**

The appellant does not disagree with the series determination made by the agency. The agency placed the position in the Physical Science Technician Series, GS-1311. This series includes positions which involve nonprofessional technical work in the physical sciences and which are not specifically included in other series in the Physical Sciences Group. Positions in this series require a knowledge of the principles and techniques of physical science, but do not require competence equivalent to that represented by the completion of a full 4-year college curriculum leading to a bachelor's degree in physical science. We agree that the GS-1311 series is appropriate.

## **Title determination**

The appellant's position is properly titled Physical Science Technician.

## **Standard determination**

Physical Science Technician Series, GS-1311, April 1967.  
Grade Level Guide for Clerical and Assistance Work, June 1989.

## **Grade determination**

The appellant's position combines laboratory work evaluated against the Physical Science Technician Series, GS-1311, standard and clerical work best evaluated against the grading criteria in the Grade Level Guide for Clerical and Assistance Work. The duties representing the paramount requirements of the position are considered grade-controlling.

### Physical Science Technician Series, GS-1311, Standard:

The GS-1311 classification standard is written in the narrative format and contains grade-level criteria expressed in two factors: *responsibility* and *complexity*. The various combinations of the two factors are converted to grade levels by use of a conversion chart provided in the standard.

#### *Element 1 - Responsibility*

This factor includes the kind and degree of supervision over the work that is performed, the extent of the employee's authority to accomplish the assignments, and the nature of available instructions and guides. The agency credited Level IV; the appellant disagrees.

At Level IV, the technician performs with a greater degree of independence. This usually is the result of the worker's long-term experience. In some instances, it may also be due to additional education and training, and/or the absence of a supervisor well-versed in the technical intricacies of the work. Although usually assigned to a specific function, the technician is often called upon to aid as a "troubleshooter" in the solution of technical problems occurring in other segments of the organization. Also found at this level is the technician who, because of his capacity to act independently on a variety of assignments, is designated as a "floater" to fill in where needed or is assigned to work where decisions must be made without benefit of supervisory or professional guidance.

Level IV is met. The appellant functions with a considerable amount of independence because of his experience and training. His responsibilities include preventive maintenance on the TECAN and AU800 testing equipment. He checks the equipment reagents solution for proper usage and disposal, and he checks for radiation safety and monitors the presence of radiation in the laboratory. He is called upon to resolve equipment failures and test procedures.

Level V differs from Level IV in that assignments are given in terms of long-range projects on which the technician will be working with an unusual amount of autonomy. The supervisor, who is usually a professional scientist, gives initial instructions concerning the primary goal(s) and relative parameters of a project. Applicable methods and techniques contain gaps, deviations, or differences which usually must be critically examined prior to conducting the full project. To resolve such matters, the technician conducts a search of available literature and/or may perform preliminary experiments in a laboratory setting. At the completion of these initial steps, he presents his preliminary findings to the project leader who determines the feasibility of conducting the full study. During the course of a project of considerable duration, the technician may report on completed phases of the work. Upon conclusion of the full assignment, he usually renders a written report to the project leader. Guides developed by the technician at this level are often used as precedents for additional studies of similar phenomena.

Level V is not met. The appellant does not normally work on long-range projects of the type described. He usually works on projects that require him to identify, analyze, and resolve discrepancies for preventive maintenance. Level V requires research work, experiments, preliminary findings, and developing guidelines to be used for studies. There is no evidence in the appeal record that the appellant performs work of this nature.

Level IV is credited for this factor.

#### *Element 2 - Complexity*

This factor covers the nature and variety of work and the knowledges, skill, and judgment required to adequately perform the duties of the position. The agency credited Degree E; the appellant believes that Degree F is appropriate. We believe that Degree D is more appropriate.

At Degree D, the nature and scope of the technical work is quite demanding in terms of knowledges and skills required to accomplish assigned tasks adequately. These attributes may be gained through additional education, training, and/or experience in the theoretical and practical aspects of the technical work. In many instances, procedures followed consist of a large number of delicate and exacting steps in gathering reliable data and/or the instrumentation is very elaborate. This degree differs from Degree C in that the technician not only has to apply skill and knowledge in gathering significant data, but also must analyze, evaluate, consolidate, and report his findings.

Degree D is met. The appellant's work is demanding and requires knowledge and skills typically gained through additional education, training, and experience. He performs technical work which requires a comprehensive knowledge of the basic principles and theories, practices, and equipment operations related to physical science methodology and techniques. This knowledge is used to

perform immunoassay testing and drug screening, to apply quality control procedures, to maintain and repair equipment, and to train others.

At Degree E, the technician is typically involved in the development of new procedures and techniques such as for the more effective utilization of complex equipment. The skills, practical and theoretical knowledges, and the need for use of sound judgment are evident in that the phenomena to be examined contain a number of unknown variables and the equipment utilized is highly complex. The chief difference between this degree and Degree D is that the technician must apply a knowledge of physical science methodology and techniques in developing new procedures and recording them for more conventional use by others.

Degree E is not met. The appellant falls short of meeting the full intent of this level. He works with highly complex equipment, e.g., the AU800 and TECAN equipment, and must understand how the equipment works. He tests and implements new procedures and provides direction on the operation of the equipment. He is not typically involved in the development of new procedures as indicated in Degree E. He does assist with making changes to the procedures. For example, the laboratory operating procedures are already developed for the use and maintenance of the equipment. If the procedures do not work properly or are not adequate, the appellant will manipulate the procedures within given parameters to make them work. The appellant gives his findings to the supervisor to write up. Our onsite interview reflected that the appellant spends less than 25 percent of his time assisting with altering the procedures. Degree E is not fully met.

Degree D is credited for this factor.

The combination of Level IV and Degree D equates to GS-7 according to the Grade Determination Chart on page 16 of the GS-1311 standard.

#### Clerical Assignments:

The appellant's clerical duties are evaluated by reference to the Grade Level Guide for Clerical and Assistance Work. The guide describes the general characteristics of each grade level from GS-1 through GS-7 and uses 2 factors for grading purposes: Nature of Assignment (which includes the elements of knowledge required and complexity of the work), and Level of Responsibility (which includes the elements of supervisory controls, guidelines, and contacts).

#### *Nature of Assignment*

At the GS-4 level, the work consists of performing a full range of standard clerical assignments and resolving recurring problems. Work consists of related steps, processes, or methods which require the employee to identify and recognize differences among a variety of recurring situations. Actions to be taken or responses to be made differ in nature and sequence because of differences in the particular characteristics of each case or transaction. In addition to knowledge of how to carry out procedures, the work requires some subject-matter knowledge of an organization's programs and operations; or of a type of business practice such as maintaining inventory records and replenishing supplies; or of a body of standardized rules, processes, or operations. These knowledges are needed to determine what is being done, why the action is being taken, and how it must be accomplished.

The appellant meets the GS-4 level. The negative results message review compares to clerical work that involves resolving recurring problems that consist of related steps and processes. The appellant must be knowledgeable of the background of the laboratory, be familiar with the procedures that take place during the drug testing and the end results, and know the terminologies used in laboratory and administrative offices. This knowledge is used to identify and recognize differences in printed data such as bar codes, number of batches, number of messages, and correct commands. The appellant receives batches of negative drug results messages which can be comprised of 200 samples per batch and which contain raw data from the lab and written messages from the administrative office. He reviews the folder of messages for quality control parameters, checks the chain of custody, compares the information to documents, and certifies that the batches are correct and complete. He follows step-by-step procedures when reviewing and comparing the data and refers to a code list to determine codes for the initial screen blind quality control review. The procedures for doing the work have been established and a number of specific guidelines are available or he may receive oral instructions from the supervisor. According to the appellant's supervisor, judgment calls are not necessary, and the error rate is small since the messages are reviewed several times by others before the appellant certifies the work.

#### *Level of Responsibility*

At the GS-4 level, the supervisor provides little assistance with recurring assignments. The employee uses initiative to complete work in accordance with accepted practices. Unusual situations may require the assistance of the supervisor or a higher level employee, and the completed work may be reviewed more closely. Procedures for doing the work have been established and a number of specific guidelines are available. The number and similarity of guidelines and work situations require the employee to use judgment in locating and selecting the most appropriate guidelines, references, and procedures. The employee makes minor deviations to adapt the guidelines in specific cases. The employee has contact with co-workers and those outside the organization to exchange information, and in some cases to resolve problems in connection with the immediate assignment.

The GS-4 level is met. The appellant works independently on recurring clerical assignments. The procedures for doing the work are established and judgment is used to locate appropriate guidelines and make adaptations if needed. Contacts include laboratory professionals, administrative personnel, and other employees onsite for the purpose of exchanging information and obtaining data.

This factor is evaluated at GS-4.

#### **Summary**

The appellant's position combines clerical work evaluated at GS-4 and physical science technician work evaluated at GS-7. The physical science technician work takes 40 percent of the appellant's time and represents the higher level knowledge and skills required.

#### **Decision**

This position is properly classified as Physical Science Technician, GS-1311-7.