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

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

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

Appellant:	[Appellant]
Agency classification:	Computer Assistant GS-335-7
Organization:	[Organization] Bureau of Land Management Department of the Interior
OPM decision:	Computer Assistant GS-335-7
OPM decision number:	C-0335-07-03

Virginia L. Magnuson
Classification Appeals Officer

February 22, 2002

Date

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

Decision sent to:

[Appellant}

[Human Resources Officer]

Ms. Carolyn Cohen
Director of Personnel
U.S. Department of Interior
Mail Stop 5221
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Introduction

On December 6, 2001, the Atlanta Oversight Division of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted an appeal, transferred from the Dallas Oversight Division, for the position of Computer Assistant, GS-335-7, [organization], Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Department of the Interior, [geographical location]. The appellant is requesting that her position be classified as Computer Specialist, GS-334, or Information Technology Specialist, GS-2210, at grade GS-9. The appellant did not identify a parenthetical specialty title. We received the complete appeal administrative report from the agency on December 4, 2001.

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

General issues

The position previously occupied by the appellant was classified as Computer Assistant, GS-335-7. The appellant's supervisor rewrote the position description to identify changes in her duties and responsibilities. The rewritten position description was submitted to the agency's Human Resources (HR) staff with a proposal for classification as Computer Specialist, GS-334-9. The HR staff evaluated the new position description and determined that, based on the duties performed, the proper classification was Computer Assistant, GS-335-7. The appellant subsequently appealed to OPM.

The appellant makes various statements regarding her agency's review and evaluation of her position during the classification process. In adjudicating this appeal, our only concern is to make our own independent decision on the proper classification of her position. By law, we must make that decision solely by comparing her current duties and responsibilities to OPM standards and guidelines (5 U.S.C. 5106, 5107, and 5112). Therefore, we have considered the appellant's statements only insofar as they are relevant to making that comparison.

In reaching our classification decision, we have carefully reviewed all information furnished by the appellant and the agency, including information obtained from telephone interviews with the appellant and her immediate supervisor.

Position information

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

The primary purpose of this position is to provide systems administration support for the [organization] networked and standalone computers running Windows NT, Windows 98 and UNIX operating systems. The appellant's responsibilities include the installation, maintenance and configuration of networked and standalone computers, servers and peripheral equipment; installing, configuring and testing system additions and upgrades; and identifying and resolving systems administration and network connectivity problems. She has primary responsibility for monitoring the overall network environment, operation and status; and providing local user support, training and general guidance on hardware and software issues and problems. The

appellant also has responsibility for setting up user accounts, establishing access rights and passwords, and setting up and maintaining data protection, backup and recovery procedures.

The appellant reports to the [title], [organization], who sets objectives for the organization and provides the appellant administrative, but not technical, supervision. The appellant identifies what needs to be done and independently plans and carries out assignments. Completed work is reviewed in terms of its effectiveness in meeting organizational goals and objectives.

Series, title, and standard determination

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

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

The IT Management Series, GS-2210, covers two-grade interval administrative positions that manage, supervise, lead, administer, develop, deliver, and support IT systems and services. This series covers only those positions for which the paramount requirement is knowledge of IT principles, concepts, and methods to perform functions such as planning, designing, analyzing, developing and implementing systems for the organization.

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

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

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

knowledge of programming languages. Some work may require knowledge of system hardware such as the number and kinds of devices, operating speeds, amount of core and other equipment characteristics. This knowledge may also be supplemented by knowledge of internal software routines. We find this work situation similar to the work performed by the appellant.

The appellant's primary responsibilities involve monitoring the operation of and maintaining the local organization's networked computer system. The system is composed of a local area network (LAN) consisting of five servers, 43 desktop and 27 laptop microcomputers and associated hardware and software that support the organization's IT requirements. The LAN consists of commercially available hardware and primarily uses commercial off-the-shelf software (COTS). The work requires knowledge of a wide variety of computer techniques, procedures, requirements and sources. The appellant installs, configures and maintains computer systems and associated hardware and software and installs and tests new or upgraded hardware and software. Her duties involve identifying system problems and their causes; testing, troubleshooting and correcting programming deficiencies; and maintaining COTS-based programs to support the requirements of local users. She implements computer data integrity and security procedures and techniques; develops and implements plans and procedures to ensure data backup and recovery in the event of system failures; and provides technical assistance, guidance and training to current and new end users.

Although the work does involve administering the operation of a computer system, the appellant is not involved in the planning, design, or development of systems typical of GS-2210, IT Specialists. The [organization] LAN is small and does not have the same level of complexities addressed in the GS-2210 series which are typically found at the [organization] or higher levels within the agency. Additionally, the appellant's position is limited in scope by the fact that the BLM has responsibility for establishing agency-wide systems, hardware and software requirements and making decisions on the need for system upgrades and/or software migrations. BLM also makes decisions on equipment purchases and deployment throughout the bureau. The type of work performed by the appellant is characteristic of that described in the Computer Clerk and Assistant Series, GS-335, and is properly classified using that standard.

Grade determination

The GS-335 standard uses the Factor Evaluation System (FES) format. Under the FES, positions are evaluated on the basis of the duties, responsibilities, and the qualifications required in terms of nine factors common to non-supervisory General Schedule positions. A point value is assigned to each factor based on a comparison of the position's duties with the factor level descriptions in the standard. Under FES, positions which significantly exceed the highest factor level or fail to meet the lowest factor level described in a classification standard must be evaluated by reference to the Primary Standard, contained in Appendix 3 of the *Introduction to the Position Classification Standards.* The Primary Standard is the "standard-for-standards" for FES.

The factor point values mark the lower end of the ranges for the indicated factor level. For a position factor to warrant a given point value, it must be fully equivalent to the overall intent of the selected factor level description. If the position fails in any significant aspect to meet a

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

Factor 1, Knowledge required by the position

This factor measures the nature and extent of information or facts which the worker must understand to do acceptable work (e.g., steps, procedures, practices, rules, policies, theories, principles, and concepts) and the nature and extent of the skills needed to apply those knowledges. The agency credited Level 1-4 for this factor.

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

Level 1-4 is met. The appellant's duties primarily involve carrying out assignments related to administering and maintaining the organization's LAN and its hardware and software. She monitors the network's functioning and availability; resolves performance and speed problems; troubleshoots and resolves problems related to network hardware and software conflicts; and installs system upgrades (e.g., software, hard disks, CD-ROM drives, additional memory, network hardware, etc.). Because the appellant supports a system comprised of commercially available products that primarily uses COTS software, most of the problems encountered are recurring in nature and are generally resolved through the application of well documented standard procedures and techniques.

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

Level 1-5 is not met. The appellant is primarily responsible for supporting the users of commercially available, standardized hardware and software. The work requires knowledge of precedent and applicable manufacturer's installation, maintenance, repair and troubleshooting procedures. The appeal record contains no indications that the appellant's regular and recurring work requires Level 1-5 knowledge to develop, test, implement, or modify computer programs and operating procedures.

Level 1-4 is credited for 550 points.

Factor 2, Supervisory controls

This factor covers the nature and extent of direct or indirect controls exercised by the supervisor, the employee's responsibility, and the review of completed work. The agency credited Level 2-3 for this factor.

At Level 2-3, the highest level described in the standard, the supervisor provides directions on objectives and priorities for new work, deadlines, and deadline changes for new and established work. The employee identifies the work to be done, plans and carries out the steps required, and submits completed work to users (programmers, operators, functional users) without supervisory review. The employee independently deviates from instructions to provide for situations such as changing priorities or other changes based on past experience and flexibility within processing specifications. The employee commonly adapts or develops new work procedures and instructions for application by self and others. The employee seeks supervisory assistance and discusses problems related to the work when processing requests appear to exceed system capacity or could have adverse effect on other processing requirements. Completed work is reviewed for conformity to deadlines and accepted practices. Work methods are not normally reviewed unless a recurring common pattern of problems develops.

The appellant's position meets, but does not exceed, Level 2-3. The appellant's supervisor sets overall objectives for the organization. The appellant independently identifies the work that must be done and plans and carries out the steps required to accomplish the work. Completed work is typically passed on to end users without technical review by the supervisor. When technical assistance is required, the appellant requests it from specialists at higher levels within the agency. The supervisor is kept informed of progress of the appellant's work and any problems she has encountered. The appellant confers with the supervisor on issues and matters that require managerial intervention. Supervisory review of work is in terms of timeliness and effectiveness in achieving desired results.

Level 2-3 is credited for 275 points.

Factor 3, Guidelines

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

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

The appellant's position meets, but does not exceed, Level 3-3. Guidance available to the appellant consists of departmental and bureau general program policies, rules, regulations and standards; handbooks and manuals; and procedural materials developed and provided by hardware/software manufacturers or vendors. While COTS guidance is specific, other guidance available is of a more general nature and lacks specificity to the problems encountered by the

appellant. She is required to use a high level of judgment in interpreting, adapting and applying this guidance to determine which is most appropriate for resolving local system operations' problems, e.g., determining local user hardware requirements to support local user needs. The appellant must also determine the best approach for meeting specific user needs.

Level 3-3 is credited for 275 points.

Factor 4, Complexity

This factor covers the nature, number, variety, and intricacy of tasks, steps, processes, or methods in the work performed; the difficulty in identifying what needs to be done; and the difficulty and originality involved in performing the work. The agency credited Level 4-3 for this factor.

At Level 4-3, the employee performs a variety of tasks involving discrete methods and procedures, or a variety of related tasks that require a sequence of actions involving differing methods and procedures. The decision regarding what is to be done results from studying each assignment or processing problem situation.

Level 4-3 is met. The appellant performs a variety of systems administration support tasks. Her determination of actions to take to resolve processing problems is based on the results of a series of standard, sequenced diagnostic procedures to isolate and identify the problem. After identifying the problem, she then determines if resolution can be accomplished through the use of routine or standard corrective procedures and selects the one most appropriate for the situation. When problems are beyond the appellant's experience or knowledge, assistance is sought from computer specialists at the [organization] level, contractor personnel, hardware/software manufacturers, vendors and technical websites (e.g., Technet, etc.).

Level 4-4, the highest level described in the standard, is distinguished from Level 4-3 by: (1) the variety and complexity of operating systems monitored; (2) the nature and variety of problems encountered and resolved; and (3) the nature of independent decisions made by the employee. The employee at this level typically monitors the operations of several major computer systems. Programs run on these systems are a mix of independent and interdependent applications. Employees at this level perform problem solving duties involving a wide range of problem or error conditions in equipment, program data, and processing methods and procedures. The diagnosis and resolution of error and problem conditions involve equipment configurations having different operating characteristics, a wide variety of data and programs, and many different processes and methods to arrive at solutions or develop new procedures. Decisions regarding what needs to be done include assessing unusual circumstances or conditions, developing variations in approach to fit specific problems, or dealing with incomplete or conflicting data. The employee makes decisions and devises solutions based on program, equipment, and systems knowledge.

Level 4-4 is not met. The appellant's work involves overall responsibility for the day-to-day operations of the organization's networked system, consisting of a small LAN running three operating systems to provide automation support for the field office. This environment does not

equate to Level 4-4 where the employee works with major systems containing multiple processors, a variety of underlying operating systems and programs that are a mixture of independent and interdependent applications. Although the appellant is responsible for resolving a wide variety of problems or error conditions related to the networked system, the problems she encounters are not of the unusual nature, magnitude, or complexity as those typically found in major computer systems.

Level 4-3 is credited for 150 points.

Factor 5, Scope and effect

This factor covers the relationship between the nature of the work and the effect of the work products or services both within and outside the organization. The agency credited Level 5-3 for this factor.

Level 5-3, the highest level described in the standard, is distinguished from Level 5-2 by the addition of requirements for solving problems and answering technical questions about control, scheduling, and/or direct support functions. The problems encountered are conventional to data processing although solutions are not always covered by established or standardized procedures. Results of the work affect the efficiency of processing services and adequacy of products used in subsequent activities and processing procedures and methods.

The appellant's position meets, but does not exceed, Level 5-3. The appellant is responsible for supporting the field office's networked microcomputers, terminals, file servers, network communication devices, printers, scanners, plotters, etc. She provides technical assistance and guidance to local users in the event of system problems, provides training for existing and new users for new or updated systems, and coordinates and assists in the installation of new or revised systems. The appellant provides advice and assistance to users on operating problems and provides or arranges for training on various systems and applications. She determines what the organization's hardware needs are based on user requirements (e.g., regular machine user, user of specialized software programs, etc.) and makes recommendations to higher levels based on those needs. The appellant's work affects the local computer operations of the field office and effectiveness of the system in meeting the organization's needs.

Level 5-3 is credited for 150 points.

Factor 6, Personal contacts

This factor considers face-to-face and telephone contacts with persons not in the supervisory chain. The agency credited Level 6-2 for this factor.

At Level 6-2, the highest level described in the standard, contacts are with specialists and recipients of services who are employees of the same agency but outside the data processing organization; with employees of other agencies who use the facility; or with contractors' representatives such as vendor repair technicians or customer engineers. These contacts are structured and routine, and the role of each participant is readily determined.

The appellant's position meets, but does not exceed, Level 6-2. The appellant's personal contacts are with employees within her immediate work unit, end users within the field office, counterparts at similar organizations within her agency, and specialists at higher levels of the agency. She also has regular contacts with representatives of manufacturers, vendors, and contractors providing information systems' related goods and services. These contacts are relatively structured and routine in nature and the roles of all parties involved are easily determined.

Level 6-2 is credited for 25 points.

Factor 7, Purpose of contacts

This factor deals with the purpose of the contacts selected in Factor 6. The agency credited Level 7-2 for this factor.

At Level 7-2, the highest level described in the standard, the purpose of contacts is to plan or coordinate changes in scheduling requirements or priorities due to data or equipment related problems; to participate with users in planning and coordinating new or modified requirements; or to plan user participation, methodology, and deadlines for new projects.

Similar to Level 7-2, the appellant's contacts are for the purpose of coordinating work; resolving hardware/software problems; providing technical advice and assistance to users; training new and existing users on new or upgraded systems' hardware/software; and seeking and exchanging technical information with counterparts or computer specialists at higher levels in the agency. There is no indication in the record that the appellant's contacts exceed Level 7-2.

Level 7-2 is credited for 50 points.

Factor 8, Physical demands

This factor covers the requirements and physical demands placed on the employee by the work assignment. This includes physical characteristics and abilities and the physical exertion involved in the work. The agency credited Level 8-2 for this factor.

At Level 8-2, the position requires extended periods of standing, walking, stretching, bending, stooping or carrying loads of paper, tapes, or cards that may weigh as much as 45 pounds.

Level 8-2 is met. The appellant's work routinely requires long periods of activity involving standing, stretching, or bending to move, operate and work on equipment. The appellant also carries loads, e.g. computer monitors, weighing up to 45 pounds.

At Level 8-3, the work requires regular and recurring lifting and carrying of objects of heavy weight (over 50 pounds) and occasional lifting and carrying of heavier materials.

Level 8-3 is not met. The appellant is not routinely subjected to the degree of physical exertion described at this level.

Level 8-2 is credited for 20 points.

Factor 9, Work environment

This factor covers the risks and discomforts in the physical surroundings and the safety precautions needed. The agency credited Level 9-1 for this factor.

At Level 9-1, the work involves common risks or discomforts requiring normal safety precautions typical of offices, meeting rooms, libraries, etc. The work area is adequately lighted, heated, and ventilated.

Level 9-1 is met. The majority of the appellant's work is performed in an adequately lighted, heated, and ventilated office environment. The work requires observance of normal safety precautions that are typical of offices.

At Level 9-2, some work involves moderate risk requiring exercise of safety precautions when operating or working around equipment with exposed moving parts. Special clothing or protective equipment is not required although there is moderate risk of bodily injury.

Level 9-2 is not met. The appellant is not routinely exposed to moderate risks requiring other than normal safety precautions.

Level 9-1 is credited for 5 points.

Summary

	Factor	*Level*	*Points*
1.	Knowledge required by the position	1-4	550
2.	Supervisory controls	2-3	275
3.	Guidelines	3-3	275
4.	Complexity	4-3	150
5.	Scope and effect	5-3	150
6.	Personal contacts and	6-2	25
7.	Purpose of contacts	7-2	50
8.	Physical demands	8-2	20
9.	Work environment	9-1	5
	Total		1500

A total of 1500 points falls within the GS-7 point level range of 1355 to 1600 points on the Grade Conversion Table in the GS-335 standard.

Decision

The appellant's position is correctly classified as Computer Assistant, GS-335-7.