

**OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT
ATLANTA OVERSIGHT DIVISION
ATLANTA, GEORGIA**

CLASSIFICATION APPEAL DECISION

Under section 5112(b) of title 5, United States Code

Appellant: [the appellant]

Position: Engineering Technician
GS-0802-09

Organization: Engineering Services Branch
Engineering Plans and Services Division
Directorate of Public Works
[Army installation]
[city, state]

Decision: Engineering Technician
GS-0802-09
(Appeal Denied)

OPM decision number: C-0802-09-01

Kathy W. Day Date 3/26/97
Classification Appeals Officer

Background

On November 1, 1996, the Atlanta Oversight Division, Office of Personnel Management, accepted an appeal for the position of Engineering Technician, GS-802-09 , Engineering Services Branch, Engineering Plans and Services Division, Directorate of Public Works, [Army installation], [city, state]. The appellant is requesting that his position be changed to Engineering Technician, GS-802-11.

The appeal has been accepted and processed under section 5112(b) of title 5, United States Code. This is the final administrative decision on the classification of the position subject to discretionary review only under the limited conditions and time outlined in part 511, subpart F, of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations.

Sources of Information

This appeal decision is based on information from the following sources:

1. The appellant's undated letter with enclosures, received on October 31, 1996, appealing the classification of his position.
2. The agency's letter of January 23, 1997, providing position and organizational information.
3. A telephone interview with the appellant, on February 6, 1997.
4. An interview with the servicing personnel management specialist, on February 5, 1997.
5. An interview with the immediate supervisor, on February 10, 1997.

Position Information

The appellant is assigned to Position Number [PD number], which was classified on June 12, 1996. The appellant, supervisor, and agency have certified to the accuracy of the position description.

During the process of adjudicating the appeal, inconsistencies were found between the position description of record and the actual duties and responsibilities of the position. The position description states that the appellant performs work of broad scope and complexity that requires application of demonstrated ability to interpret, select, adapt and apply many guidelines, precedents, and engineering practices for installation, tenant, basefields, stagefields, lease facilities and reserve center projects. It further states the appellant develops projects, applying sound engineering principles

and practices to solve complex problems. These statements are almost verbatim from the GS-11 grade level criteria in the Engineering Technician Series, GS-802. However, the actual work performed by the appellant is of limited scope and complexity.

The appellant is assigned to conventional projects. His work does not have complex characteristics requiring independent adaptation of a general fund of background data and information and interpretation of precedents, nor is the appellant confronted with a variety of complex problems in which considerable judgment is needed to make sound engineering compromises and decisions.

The position description also states the appellant works under general supervision of the Chief, [division name], who assigns work in terms of major objectives, and work is only generally reviewed for achievement of the basic objective. The appellant's supervisor indicated that the appellant's work is assigned through a work order, is subject to his review for technical accuracy, overall project concept and signatory approval. This is not reflected in the position description.

Our findings indicate the actual duties and responsibilities performed by the appellant are as follows:

The appellant prepares a variety of conventional design projects including plans and specifications and cost estimates for installation facilities including tenant, basefields, stagefields, lease facilities and reserve centers. He prepares architectural layouts, plans and drawings, designs, specifications and cost estimates for new construction, roofing repair and replacement, and custodial maintenance and repair contract projects, and he prepares completed detailed sets of drawings including three dimensional projections as required. This includes designs and specifications for utility systems such as heating, plumbing, lighting, electrical and power systems, site surveys and investigations. He applies and adapts engineering design guidelines, standards, precedents, and practices to meet project objectives. He also develops the annual work plan for installation roofer program and conducts annual inspections to determine conditions.

The appellant coordinates customer requirements and contract specifications prior to contract award for new construction projects to determine construction practicability; locates and points out areas of construction difficulty and determines availability of materials. He applies cost savings techniques to determine the most economical methods of accomplishing the work for competitive bidding to support the installation mission.

The appellant reviews and evaluates proposals for work prepared by contractors and determines if shop drawings, samples, certificates of compliance, laboratory analyses, other submittals and technical data from contractors meet government specifications. He approves or rejects all or part of the submission or proposals. He confers with government design, procurement and contractor personnel and with customers of all levels including the [the agency] personnel to resolve any problems or conditions. The appellant operates a motor vehicle up to a 1/2 ton truck to conduct site visits and inspections.

The appellant receives direction from the Chief, [division name], who assigns work in terms of major objectives and priorities. The appellant independently carries out assignments from a work order, coordinating requirements, and making recommendations for changes or modifications to designs or drawings to meet the desired objectives within established cost limitations. He consults with the supervisor on design problems that do not have clear precedents or require deviation from normal engineering practices. Completed designs and plans are reviewed by the supervisor for technical soundness of overall project concept, technical accuracy and for achievement of the basic objectives. The supervisor has signatory approval authority over all designs and drawings.

The appellant expressed disagreement with the methods and techniques used by the agency to classify his position. The techniques and procedures used by the agency to develop information about a position are selected by the agency and are not relevant to our decision, as long as sufficient information has been developed about the duties and responsibilities of the position. Since the agency and the appellant have had an opportunity to present information, it is our opinion that sufficient information is available on which to base a decision.

The appellant believes his job has changed in recent years and that he is now responsible for design of complete projects of more complexity. He also believes the Primary Standard for the Factor Evaluation System (FES) should be used to determine the appropriate grade of his position. All occupations change over a period of time, some more rapidly and profoundly than others, but the fundamental duty and responsibility patterns and qualifications required within an occupation generally remain stable. Thus, careful application of the appropriate standard to the work performed should yield the correct grade for the position. Major duties not specifically referenced in the applicable standard can be evaluated by comparison with similar or related standards.

He appellant compares his assignments to the work performed by other employees within his organization. OPM is obligated by law to classify positions on the basis of their current duties, responsibilities, and qualification requirements and the application of standards published by OPM. Since comparison to standards, not other positions, is the intended and exclusive method for classifying positions, we may not consider the classification of other positions as a basis for deciding an appeal.

Although the appellant does not contest the agency's title and series determination, he believes his work requires knowledge of professional engineering and architecture.

The Introduction to the Position Classification Standards defines professional work as follows:

“Professional work requires knowledge of a field of science or learning characteristically acquired through education or training equivalent to

a bachelor's or higher degree with major study in or pertinent to the specialized field, as distinguished from general education."

In addition, the Introduction to the Engineering and Architecture Group, GS-800, defines professional engineering as:

"A professional position in a recognized branch of engineering comprises duties which require in their successful performance (1) the practical application of basic scientific principles, particularly those of higher mathematics, and physical and engineering concepts and terminology, the units of measurement, and their interrelationship common to all branches of engineering; (3) a thorough understanding of engineering techniques and methods such as can be gained through 4 years of engineering training in a recognized college or university, or training equivalent in *type, scope and thoroughness.*"

The appellant is assigned conventional projects most of which are repetitive designs that require limited reference to the basic scientific considerations associated with professional engineering or architecture. For example, the appellant follows the installation's master design guide, established engineering standards and codes to accomplish designs, drawings, specifications and cost estimates that require modification to accommodate specific requirements. The tasks associated with these projects, e.g., cost estimating, drawing, specification writing, surveying, inspection and site investigation, while similar to professional engineering work, do not involve substantial analysis of alternatives where precedents are unavailable or not applicable to the solution of engineering design or construction problems. Since the appellant's assignments are performed by application and adaptation of established empirical methods, design precedents, and application of practical judgment and ingenuity, the position is excluded from coverage in a professional engineering or the professional architecture series.

Standards Referenced

Engineering Technician Series, GS-802, June 1969.
Civil Engineering Series, GS-810, June 1969.

Series and Title Determination

The appellant did not contest the occupational series of his position. However, he believes his work requires specialization in architecture. The agency placed the position in the Engineering Technician Series, GS-802, which includes technical positions that require primarily application of a practical knowledge of (a) the methods and techniques of engineering or architecture; and (b) the construction, application, properties, operation, and limitation of engineering systems, processes, structures, machinery, devices, and

materials. The positions do not require professional knowledge and abilities for full performance and, therefore, do not require training equivalent in type and scope to that represented by the completion of a professional curriculum leading to a bachelor's degree in engineering or architecture. We agree with the agency's determination that the position is properly placed in the GS-802 series. The title Engineering Technician applies to positions that cover two or more of the subject-matter specializations and to positions for which none of the authorized specializations is appropriate. Since the work involves a practical knowledge of civil, electrical, mechanical, architecture, and structural engineering, the positions properly titled and coded as Engineering Technician, GS-802.

Grade Determination

The grading criteria in the GS-802 standard is written in the narrative format. Grade levels are discussed in terms of two factors: (1) Nature of Assignment, and (2) Level of responsibility. The position is evaluated as follows:

Nature of Assignment

This factor considers the scope and difficulty of the project, and the skills and knowledge required to complete the assignment.

At the GS-9 level, engineering technicians typically perform a variety of work relating to an area of specialization that requires the application of a considerable number of different basic but established methods, procedures, and techniques. Assignments usually involve independent responsibility for planning and conduct of a block of work which is a complete conventional project of relatively limited scope, or a portion of a larger and more diverse project. Assignments require study, analysis, and consideration of several possible courses of action, techniques, general layouts, or designs, and selection of the most appropriate. This generally requires consideration of numerous precedents and some adaptation of previous plans or techniques. Often changes or deviations must be made during the progress of an assignment to incorporate additional factors requested after commencement of the project or to adjust to findings and conclusions which could not be predicted accurately in the original plans. The GS-9 assignments typically require coordination of several parts, each requiring independent analysis and solution. When phases or details of the project are performed by other groups or personnel outside the organizational unit, the technician reviews, analyzes, and integrates their work. In addition, assignments at this level require a good understanding of the effect that recommendations made or other results of the assignment may have on an item, system, or process and its end-use application.

At the GS-11 level, engineering technicians perform work of broad scope and complexity that requires application of (1) demonstrated ability to interpret, select, adapt, and apply many guidelines, precedents, and engineering principles and practices related to the area

of specialization; and (2) some knowledge of related scientific and engineering fields. GS-11 technicians plan and accomplish complete projects or studies of a conventional nature requiring independent adaptation of a general fund of background data and information, and interpretation and use of precedents. They are typically confronted with a variety of complex problems in which considerable judgment is needed to make sound engineering compromises and decisions. Other related interests must often be considered, entailing frequent coordinative action with personnel in the fields concerned. There is a continuing requirement for contact work. Initiative, resourcefulness, and sound judgment are needed in planning and coordinating phases of assignments and in selecting which of several sound alternatives is to be used in arriving at acceptable engineering compromises. Ingenuity and creative thinking are required in devising ways of accomplishing objectives, and in adapting existing equipment or current techniques to new uses.

By comparison, technicians at lower levels receive assignments which are usually segments or phases of the type independently carried out at grade GS-11 or which involve less complex systems and facilities requiring design adaptation. GS-9 technicians apply standard engineering methods and techniques whereas GS-11 technicians are typically required to be creative in devising ways to accomplish the work. Assignments typically found at the GS-11 level include: (1) Develops cost estimates for competitive bidding for a variety of multiple-use construction projects. Determines (a) construction operations and methods involved and the time required to complete each phase or feature, (b) various types and capacities of construction equipment required and cost of operation and maintenance, (c) material types and quantities, and (d) overhead, tax, and other costs, or; (2) Prepares designs and specifications for various utility systems such as heating, plumbing, air conditioning, ventilating, pumping, gas supply, and pneumatic control systems. Assignments characteristically involve utility systems for office buildings, pumping stations, and flood control facilities, where the complexity or nonconventional nature of the buildings and facilities entails design problems requiring considerable adaptation of precedents or design of features for which precedents are not directly applicable. Performs technical review of contractor-prepared designs and specifications for such systems.

Current Assignments:

The appellant provided a list of current projects, as well as samples of work performed between 1991-1996. In determining the appropriate grade level of work performed, OPM may only consider the current duties and responsibilities. The appellant's current projects consist of three maintenance and repair contracts, an Indefinite Quality Roofing contract, Renovation project-Chapel of Wings, and two construction projects.

The maintenance and repair projects meet the GS-9 level. This work involves the development and coordination of contract specifications for custodial, grounds, mechanical and electrical equipment and components, elevators, architectural hardware and finishes.

The appellant uses as-built drawings, electrical and mechanical equipment operations manuals to identify the type, number and frequency of tasks to be completed by the contractor, as well as the materials to be used for maintenance and repair. He determines costs associated with the work, as well as the manpower required to complete the job. He also establishes the bidding schedule to ensure all maintenance is completed. Contract specifications are modified to accommodate specialized requirements.

The Indefinite Quality Roofing contract meets the GS-9 level. This contract is a continuous contract for repair, replacement and general maintenance of all types of roofing systems, including installation, deck types, metal work, roof drains, equipment supports and other roofing components and warranties for new roofing. The appellant considers a variety of factors and determines specifications for each contract based on the type of damage, level of deterioration as determined by inspection, wear and tear due to inclement weather conditions, maintenance or repair records, and materials. Roofing contracts require application of established precedents, repair techniques, materials, replacement requirements and general maintenance work.

The appellant's new construction and renovation project work also meets the GS-9 level. The appellant's work involves the design of complete construction projects which include: a) a new US Air Force administrative facility, a 3,000 square foot administrative facility on the main post which will include classrooms, offices, restrooms, and life support, and; b) a classroom for the Aviation Test Center at [the installation], a 6,000 square foot two story administrative facility. The appellant prepares designs, plans, specifications and cost estimates using standard industry building, safety, environmental, and construction standards and codes, agency master plans, and other established guidelines. This meets the GS-9 level.

The [project name] project involved the upgrading of an historical WWII type building on post, to be used as a show place for special events such as weddings and guest speakers. Although the age of the building and construction materials used in the original design had to be considered, the appellant coordinated all phases of the design adapting standard engineering practices, methods, and techniques to upgrade specific portions of the building, as well as bringing the facility up to code. He prepared drawings for the site plan, first floor demolition plan and floor plan, second floor plan, finish schedule and details, door schedule, and the handicap ramp and window schedule. He also co-designed plans on other phases of the design such as elevations, roof plan and lighting protection plans, foundation plans, framing plan and the wall section and toilet with another employee. The more critical aspects of the project such as the stress levels on the stained glass were referred to a specialist. Designs and drawings for the mechanical and electrical, heating and cooling systems, power, and communication systems were prepared by other employees. However, the appellant coordinated the phases of the overall project with other employees. This compares with the GS-9 level.

The GS-11 level is not met. The appellant's assignments deal with conventional construction projects, design features, drawings and contract specifications for portions or complete buildings and facilities. The work requires the use and application of established engineering principles, methods and techniques. The more difficult or complex design features of his projects which require adaptation of precedents or the selection of alternative solutions to unconventional design problems are handled or referred to a specialist or other personnel within the organization, or contracted out to architect-engineer firms. None of his projects required him to devise new ways to accomplish the work, or make sound engineering compromises and decisions because standard practices or engineering principles were not applicable. Therefore, his work does not meet the GS-11 level.

Since all of the appellant's projects meet the GS-9 level, this factor is credited at GS-9.

Level of Responsibility

This factor considers the nature and purpose of person-to-person work relationships, and the supervision received in terms of intensity of review of work and of guidance received during the course of the work cycle.

At the GS-9 level, the supervisor provides information on any related work being performed, and furnishes general instruction as to the scope of objectives, time limitations, priorities, and similar aspects. The supervisor is available for consultation and advice where significant deviations from standard engineering practices must be made, and he gives more detailed instructions when distinctly new criteria or new techniques are involved. The supervisor observes the work for progress and for coordination with work performed by other employees or other sections and for adherence to completion and cost schedules. Standard methods employed are seldom reviewed, but review is made for adequacy and for conformance with established policies, precedents and sound engineering concepts and usage. Personal work contacts typically are more frequent and demanding and are primarily to resolve mutual problems and coordinate the work with that of personnel in related activities. Some contacts are made with using agencies for whom work is done, and with contractors and architecture-engineer firms. The contacts are made to clear up doubtful points, to advise as to discrepancies found in meeting contract terms, to consider recommendations for acceptable substitutes, and to promote adherence to agency standards and concepts of good engineering. Contacts outside the agency are usually arranged under supervisory guidance.

At the GS-11 level, technicians have considerable freedom in planning work and carrying out assignments. The supervisor makes assignments in terms of the major objectives, providing background information and advice on specific unusual problems which are anticipated or on matters requiring coordination with other groups. Unusual or controversial problems, or policy questions arising in the course of a project, may be

discussed with the supervisor, but technical supervisory assistance is infrequently sought or required. The supervisor is usually informally advised regarding progress but there is little review during progress of typical assignments. Completed work in the form of recommendations, plans, designs, reports, or correspondence is reviewed for general adequacy, conformity to purpose of the assignment, and sound engineering judgment. Contacts in the course of their work are with the same groups of individuals at lower grade levels and the purpose of the contacts is similar. Because of the increased scope of GS-11 assignments, these contacts tend to become more extensive than at lower levels. Contacts with contractors and other personnel regarding complex engineering and administrative problems are carried out without close supervision. However, the technician generally discusses with the supervisor the approach to be taken.

The GS-9 level is met. Although the appellant's position description reads as though his level of responsibility is at the GS-11 level, his supervisor indicates his work is subject to closer supervisory review and approval. For example, the work is controlled by the installation's master guide, agency regulations and guides, and engineering and construction industry standards. The appellant does not handle projects that require deviation from standard engineering principles, practices, or guides, or deal with complex coordination problems requiring negotiation of contract modifications and terms. In addition, the supervisor reviews and has signatory authority over all drawings, plans, and designs completed by the appellant. The more complex engineering projects are normally contracted out to architect-engineering firms because of the accountability factor involved in design projects. In addition, the conventional and limited scope of the projects handled by the appellant preclude personal contacts equivalent to those described at GS-11.

This factor is evaluated at GS-9.

Summary

Since both factors are evaluated at the GS-9 level, that is the proper grade level for the position.

Decision

This position is properly classified as Engineering Technician, GS-802-9 . This decision constitutes a classification certificate issued under the authority of section 5112(b) of title 5, United States Code. This certificate is mandatory and binding on all administrative, certifying, payroll, disbursing, and accounting officials of the Government.