

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

San Francisco Oversight Division  
120 Howard Street, Room 760  
San Francisco, CA 94105-0001

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

**Appellant:** [The appellant]

**Agency classification:** Civilian Pay Technician  
GS-544-6

**Organization:** Department of Veterans Affairs

**OPM decision:** Civilian Pay Technician  
GS-544-6

**OPM decision number:** C-0544-06-01

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Carlos A. Torrico  
Classification Appeals Officer

November 22, 2000  
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:**

[The appellant's address]

### **Agency:**

[The appellant's servicing personnel office]  
Department of Veterans Affairs

Deputy Assistant Secretary for  
Human Resources Management  
Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Ave. NW, Room 206  
Washington, DC 20420

## **Introduction**

On August 3, 2000, the San Francisco Oversight Division of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) received a classification appeal from [the appellant]. His position is currently classified as Civilian Pay Technician, GS-544-6. However, he believes his position should be graded at the GS-7 level. Prior to appealing to OPM, [the appellant] filed an appeal with his agency. In a letter to him dated June 26, 2000, the agency sustained the current classification. The position is located in the [name of appellant's organization], Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA). We have accepted and decided this appeal under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code (U.S.C).

## **General issues**

This appeal decision is based on a careful review of all information furnished by the appellant and the agency. In addition, to help decide the appeal an Oversight Division representative interviewed the appellant, his immediate supervisor, and second level supervisor by telephone. Both the appellant and his supervisor have certified to the accuracy of the appellant's official position description number 570-344A. During the interview, the appellant discussed some additional duties he performs that are not recorded in his official position description which we have considered in our evaluation.

The appellant makes various statements about his agency and its evaluation of his position. In adjudicating this appeal, our only concern is to make our own independent decision on the proper classification of his position. By law, we must make that decision solely by comparing his 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.

The appellant states that the loss of another pay technician has increased his workload. However, volume of work cannot be considered in determining the grade of a position (The Classifier's Handbook, Chapter 5).

## **Position information**

The appellant serves as Civilian Pay Technician in the [name of appellant's organization]. He performs the full range of payroll duties under an automated system. His major responsibility is to perform customer service to Veterans Affairs employees primarily in the area of premium pay and leave issues. Currently there are over 800 employees employed with DVA organizations at the installation, including Outpatient Clinics, Cemetery, and DVA Outreach.

The results of our interviews, the appellant's position description and other material of record furnish much more information about his duties and responsibilities and how they are performed.

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

The agency has classified the appellant's position in the Civilian Pay Series, GS-544, and the appellant does not disagree. We concur with the agency's determination. The appellant's duties fall within the type of work performed by Civilian Pay Technicians, GS-544, as described in the Job Family Standard for Clerical and Technical Accounting and Budget Work, GS-500C, dated December, 1997. Similar to positions classified in the GS-544 series, the appellant processes pay and leave documents and maintains pay and related records. Thus, the proper title and series of the appellant's position is Civilian Pay Technician, GS-544.

The Job Family Standard for Clerical and Technical Accounting and Budget Work, GS-500C, contains grade level criteria which we have applied below for evaluating positions classified in the GS-544 series.

### **Grade determination**

The Job Family Standard for Clerical and Technical Accounting and Budget Work uses the Factor Evaluation System (FES) which employs nine factors. Under the FES, each factor level description in a standard describes the minimum characteristics needed to receive credit for the described level. Therefore, if a position fails to meet the criteria in a factor level description in any significant aspect, it must be credited at a lower level. Conversely, the position may exceed those criteria in some aspects and still not be credited at a higher level. Our evaluation with respect to the nine FES factors follows.

#### *Factor 1, Knowledge required by the position – Level 1-4, 550 points*

Factor 1 measures the nature and extent of information or facts which a technician 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 that knowledge. To be used as a basis for selecting a level under this factor, knowledge must be required and applied.

At Level 1-4 (pages 16-18), the work requires in-depth or broad knowledge of a body of payroll regulations, practices, procedures and policies related to the specific functions. This would include knowledge of extensive and diverse financial regulations (i.e., payroll regulations), and procedures governing a wide variety of types of related transactions to resolve nonstandard transactions, complaints, or discrepancies, provide advice, or perform other work that requires authoritative procedural knowledge.

The knowledge required of the appellant to perform his assigned duties and responsibilities best meets Level 1-4. Like that level, the appellant has broad knowledge of the regulations, practices, procedures and policies related to the specific payroll functions. His work favorably compares to that described in the fifth and seventh work illustrations under Level 1-4 (page 18). Similar to the illustrations, the appellant conducts comprehensive reviews of pay transactions (civilian) which includes determinations on such items as allowances, special incentive pay, debt collections, determinations of underpayments and overpayments and the like.

At Level 1-5 (pages 18-19), in addition to the knowledge required from Level 1-4, the work at that level requires a broad, in-depth practical knowledge of financial management (payroll) technical methods, transactions, techniques, precedent cases, and procedures to resolve especially difficult or sensitive problems. The technician must have knowledge of the interrelationships of various systems applications and computer file systems and content. At this level, the technician requires knowledge of related financial regulations (payroll) and rulings covering diverse types of transactions to typically function as a technical authority for the resolution of an extensive range of issues or problems.

The knowledge required by the appellant's assignments does not fully meet Level 1-5. While the appellant may occasionally resolve difficult or sensitive problems assigned by the supervisor, the majority of his work requires application of payroll knowledge to routine assignments, and he does not function as a technical authority for the resolution of a wide range of issues or problems. Unlike Level 1-5 and its illustrations, the work performed by the appellant requires him to follow strict guidance and does not allow him to analyze data in great depth. Rather, much of his work involves straight forward data input.

The appellant inputs codes into a system known as the Paid Olde System which is an online payroll system directly connected to the Austin Finance Center. This is where a majority of the appellant's data input takes place. Other systems that the appellant has access to and occasionally uses are the VISTA system (local database) and the Decentralized Hospital Computer Program (DHCP) which is the main database to which all DVA employees are connected. Thus, the work performed by the appellant does not fully meet the interrelationships of various pay systems as described and illustrated at Level 1-5.

This factor is evaluated at Level 1-4 and 550 points are credited.

*Factor 2, Supervisory controls – Level 2-2, 125 points*

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.

At Level 2-2 (page 20), the supervisor or other designated employee provides general standing instructions on recurring assignments by indicating what is to be done, applicable policies, procedures and methods to follow, data and information required, quality and quantity of work expected, priority of assignments and deadlines. They provide additional, specific instructions for new and difficult or special assignments including suggested procedures, sources of information including the location and type of written material that may be used as an aid in completing the assignment. Recurring assignments are reviewed for technical accuracy through quality control procedures and selected work products may be spot-checked.

Level 2-2 is met. Similar to Level 2-2 the supervisor provides specific instructions for new and difficult or special assignments as well as recommended procedures to follow. The assignments performed by the appellant are recurring in nature so he operates under general standing instructions, and work may be checked through quality control procedures.

At Level 2-3 (page 21), the supervisor or other designated employee assigns work with standing instructions on objectives, priorities and deadlines and provides guidance for unusually involved situations. At this level the technician processes the most difficult procedural and technical tasks or actions and handles problems and deviations in accordance with instructions, policies, previous practices or accepted practices. The supervisor or designated employee evaluates completed work for overall technical soundness and conformance to agency policies, legal or system requirements. Completed work is reviewed by sampling in a quality review system and/or spot checked by the supervisor or senior worker for results and conformity to established requirements and deadlines. The methods used to complete the assignment are seldom reviewed in detail.

Level 2-3 is not met. Unlike Level 2-3 the appellant does not process the most difficult procedural and technical tasks or actions, and thus is not confronted with handling deviations from established procedures as described at this level. The supervisor provides guidance when problems with a higher degree of difficulty are encountered.

This factor is evaluated at Level 2-2 and 125 points are credited.

*Factor 3, Guidelines – Level 3-2, 125 points*

This factor covers the nature of guidelines and the judgment necessary to apply them.

At Level 3-2 (page 22) there are a number of established procedures and specific guidelines which are readily available for doing the work, and are clearly applicable to most transactions. The number and similarity of guidelines and work situations require the employee to use judgment to identify and select the most appropriate procedures to use, choose from among several established alternatives, or decide which precedent action to follow as a model. There may be omissions in guidelines, and the employee is expected to use some judgment and initiative to handle aspects of the work not completely covered. In locating, selecting and applying the most appropriate instructions, references, or procedures, the employee may make minor deviations in guidelines to adapt to specific cases. The employee refers situations in which the existing guidelines cannot be applied or significant deviations must be made to the supervisor or designated employee.

Level 3-2 is met. The appellant's guidelines include specific Payroll Administration Manuals such as MP4, MP5, and MP6, all of which can be found in hard-copy form or via the internet. The appellant has the VHA Office of Financial Management, VHA Directives Management, the US Government Printing Office and other numerous web sites available to him to obtain the latest information pertaining to payroll issues. Similar to Level 3-2, he uses judgment to select and apply the most appropriate guideline and sometimes makes minor deviations from the reference for application to a specific case. However, any significant deviations from the guidelines must be referred to the supervisor for resolution.

At Level 3-3 (page 22), the guidelines are the same as Level 3-2 but because of the complicating nature of assignments they lack specificity, frequently change, or are not completely applicable to the work requirements, circumstances or problems. The employee uses judgment to interpret

guidelines, adapt procedures, decide approaches and resolve specific problems. The employee analyzes the results of applying guidelines and recommends changes.

Level 3-3 is not met. The guidelines used by the appellant are more specific in how they are defined and applied than those typical of Level 3-3. Because of the limited nature of his assignments, the appellant does not apply the same degree of judgment in interpreting guidelines, adapting procedures, deciding approaches and resolving specific problems as described at Level 3-3. Moreover, he does not analyze the results of applying certain guidelines and recommend changes.

This factor is evaluated at Level 3-2 and 125 points are credited.

*Factor 4, Complexity – Level 4-3, 150 points*

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.

At Level 4-3 (page 23), the work involves various duties or assignments that use different and unrelated processes, procedures or methods. The use of different procedures may result because transactions are not completely standardized; deadlines are continually changing; functions assigned are relatively broad and varied; or transactions are interrelated with other systems and require extensive coordination with other personnel. The employee decides what needs to be done by identifying the nature of the problem, question or issue and determining the need for and obtaining additional information through oral or written contacts or by reviewing regulations and manuals. The employee makes recommendations or takes actions based on a case-by-case review of the pertinent regulations, documents or issues involved in each assignment or situation.

Level 4-3 is met. Like that level the appellant uses different methods and procedures to process various types of payroll actions, some of which are not completely standardized. He decides what needs to be done by identifying the nature of the problem, question or issue and determining the need for and obtaining additional information through oral or written contacts or by reviewing regulations and manuals. He takes action based on a case-by-case review of the appropriate payroll regulation.

At Level 4-4 (page 24), typically the work may require analysis, development or testing of a variety of established techniques and methods to evaluate alternatives and arrive at decisions, conclusions or recommendations. 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, unreliable or conflicting data. The work requires originality to determine, develop or otherwise make correct and accurate interpretations regardless of the technical difficulties encountered. The employee must sort complicated factual information and apply a variety of methods to resolve issues. The work requires making decisions, devising solutions and taking actions based on program knowledge.

Level 4-4 is not met. The work performed does not typically require analysis, development or testing of a variety of established techniques and methods to evaluate alternatives and arrive at decisions, conclusions or recommendations. He is not faced with making decisions in situations involving unusual circumstances, or where data is incomplete, unreliable or conflicting. Unlike Level 4-4, the work the appellant performs does not typically allow him to use originality to determine, develop or otherwise make correct and accurate interpretations regardless of the difficulties.

This factor is evaluated at Level 4-3 and 150 points are credited.

*Factor 5, Scope and effect – Level 5-2, 75 points*

This factor covers the relationship between the nature of the work; i.e., the purpose, breadth, and depth of the assignment, and the effect of the work products or services both within and outside the organization.

At Level 5-2 (page 25), the purpose of the work is to apply specific rules, regulations, or procedures to perform a full range of financial management technical tasks covered by well-defined and precise program procedures and regulations. The employee completes standard clerical transactions in the functional area by reviewing documents for missing information, searching records and files; verifying and maintaining records of transactions; and answering routine procedural questions. The work affects the adequacy and efficiency of the financial function, and can affect the work of analysts and specialists in related functions. The work may also affect the accuracy of further processes performed by related personnel in various organizations.

Level 5-2 is met. Similar to that level, the appellant performs work covered by generally specific and well-defined regulations. The purpose of the appellant's position is to perform customer service by completing standard (and sometimes nonstandard) clerical transactions in the payroll function, including reviewing documents for missing information, searching records and files, verifying and maintaining records of transactions, and answering routine procedural questions. The appellant's work affects the accuracy and reliability of the unit's payroll support services provided to employees.

At Level 5-3 (pages 25-26), the purpose of the work is to apply conventional practices to treat a variety of problems in financial management transactions. The employee treats these or similar problems in conformance with established procedures. The work affects the quality, quantity and accuracy of the organization's records, program operations and service to clients.

Level 5-3 is not met. The appellant's position does not meet that level because the purpose of the appellant's work is not to apply conventional practices to treat a variety of payroll problems, but rather to apply well-defined regulations to a variety of specific technical payroll tasks.

This factor is evaluated at Level 5-2 and 75 points are credited.



*Factor 6, Personal contacts, and Factor 7, Purpose of contacts, Levels 6-2/7-b – 75 points*

Factor 6 covers the types of personal contacts that occur with persons not in the supervisory chain. Factor 7 covers the purpose of personal contacts that may range from factual exchanges of information to resolving problems affecting the efficient operation of the office.

*Personal contacts*

At Level 6-2 (page 26), contacts are with employees in the same agency, but outside the immediate organization. For example, contacts may be with personnel in other functional areas. Contacts also may be with employees in other agencies who are providing requested information.

At Level 6-3 (page 26), contacts are with members of the general public. The contacts are not recurring or routine and the purpose, role and authority of each party must be established each time in order for the employee to determine the nature and extent of information that can be discussed or released.

The appellant's position meets Level 6-2, but falls short of Level 6-3. Like Level 6-2, his contacts are with employees in the same agency, but outside the immediate organization. The appellant deals with Veterans Affairs employees from various locations such as Outpatient Clinics, Cemetery, and VA Outreach. Unlike Level 6-3, although the appellant occasionally has contacts with persons outside the employing agency (e.g. courts), the role and authority of each party does not have to be established each time in order for him to determine the nature and extent of information that can be discussed or released.

*Purpose of contacts*

At Level 7-b (page 27), the purpose of the contacts is to plan and coordinate actions to correct or prevent errors, delays, or other complications occurring during the transaction cycle.

Level 7-b is met. The purpose of the appellant's contacts is to gather the necessary information to correct or change employee pay records to reflect changes/adjustments made to ensure that employees are paid correctly.

At Level 7-c (page 27), the purpose of the contacts is to persuade individuals who are fearful, skeptical, uncooperative or threatening to provide information, take corrective action, and accept findings in order to gain compliance with established laws and regulations.

Level 7-c is not met. The purpose of contacts in the appellant's position is not to persuade individuals who are fearful, skeptical, uncooperative or threatening to provide information, take corrective action, and accept findings in order to gain compliance with established laws and regulations.

Factor 6 is evaluated at Level 6-2 and Factor 7 at Level 7-b. By reference to the chart on page 27 of the standard, that combination results in a total of 75 points credited for these factors.

*Factor 8, Physical demands – Level 8-1, 5 points*

The factor covers the requirements and physical demands placed on the employee by the work assignment. This includes physical characteristics and abilities and physical exertion involved in the work. Both the agency and the appellant agree that the appellant's level of physical demands is comparable to Level 8-1 (page 27), and we concur with that determination. Level 8-1 is the only level for this factor described in the standard.

Similar to Level 8-1, the appellant's work is sedentary, and no special physical demands are required. However, occasional walking, standing, or bending is required.

This factor is evaluated at Level 8-1 and 5 points are credited.

*Factor 9, Work environment – Level 9-1, 5 points*

This factor considers the risks and discomforts in the employee's physical surroundings or the nature of the work assigned and the safety regulations required. Both the agency and the appellant agree that the appellant's work environment is comparable to Level 9-1 (page 27), and we concur. Level 9-1 is the only level for this factor described in the standard.

Similar to Level 9-1, the appellant works in an office setting involving everyday risks or discomforts where normal safety precautions are required.

This factor is evaluated Level 9-1 and 5 points are credited.

*Summary*

Our comparison of the appellant's current duties and responsibilities to the nine FES factors reflected in the Job Family Standard for Clerical and Technical Accounting and Budget Work results in the following:

Factor	Level	Points
1. Knowledge Required by the Position	1-4	550 Points
2. Supervisory Controls	2-2	125 Points
3. Guidelines	3-2	125 Points
4. Complexity	4-3	150 Points
5. Scope and Effect	5-2	75 Points
6 & 7, Personal Contacts/Purpose of Contacts	6-2/7-b	75 Points
8. Physical Demands	8-1	5 Points
9. Work Environment	9-1	<u>5 Points</u>
Total points:		1110 Points

The appellant's position warrants 1110 total points. Therefore, in accordance with the grade conversion table on page 28 of the standard, his position falls within the GS-6 range (1105-1350). Thus this position is properly graded at the GS-6 level.

**Decision**

The appellant's position is properly classified as Civilian Pay Technician, GS-544-6.