

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



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

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

Appellant: [appellant's name]

Agency classification: Secretary (OA)
GS-318-5

Organization: [appellant's activity]
U.S. Department of Air Force

OPM decision: Secretary (OA)
GS-318-5

OPM decision number: C-0318-05-06

Signed by Denis J. Whitebook
Denis J. Whitebook
Classification Appeals Officer

March 5, 1998
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's name and address]

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Introduction

On September 2, 1997, the San Francisco Oversight Division of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) received a classification appeal from [the appellant]. Her position is currently classified as Secretary (Office Automation), GS-318-5. However, she believes her position should be graded at GS-6. She works in [her activity, U.S. Department of Air Force]. We have accepted and decided her appeal under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.).

General issues

The appellant compares her position to several secretary positions at other Air Force bases. By law, we must classify positions solely by comparing their current duties and responsibilities to OPM standards and guidelines (5 U.S.C. 5106, 5107, and 5112). Since comparison to standards is the exclusive method for classifying positions, we cannot compare the appellant's position to others as a basis for deciding her appeal.

The appellant makes various statements about her agency, its evaluations of her position, and her loss of future pay. In adjudicating this appeal, our only concern is to make our own independent decision on the proper classification of her position. As stated above, we are required by law to make that decision solely by comparing her current duties and responsibilities to OPM standards and guidelines. 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 the information furnished by the appellant and her agency, including her official position description (Air Force Core Personnel Document CD 01X37002).

Position information

The appellant performs a broad range of secretarial duties in support of the Director and Deputy Director of [her organization] and their staff. [Her organization] is staffed by approximately 42 employees organized into five divisions and a management office where the appellant's position is located. Her duties include establishing, maintaining, controlling, protecting, and disposing of records; processing and routing correspondence and other written material; scheduling appointments, arranging travel, coordinating meetings, and scheduling conferences; editing and composing letters and reports; monitoring and reporting time and attendance; using office automation equipment in performing her duties; and referring, scheduling, and contacting staff, visitors, the public, and officials of other government agencies. The appellant's position description and other material of record furnish much more information about her duties and responsibilities and how they are carried out.

Series determination

The agency has classified the appellant's position in the Secretary Series, GS-318, and she does not disagree. We concur with the agency's determination. As specified in the classification standard for the GS-318 series, employees assigned to positions in that series assist one individual, and sometimes

subordinate staff of that individual, by performing general office work auxiliary to the work of the organization. Like the appellant's position, jobs in that series must serve as the principal office clerical or administrative support position. Her duties require knowledge of clerical and agency administrative procedures, various office skills, and the ability to apply such skills in a way that increases the effectiveness of others.

Title determination

The title for positions classified in the GS-318 series is Secretary. However, the appellant's position requires significant knowledge of office automation systems and a fully qualified typist to perform word processing duties. Therefore, as prescribed in the titling instructions of the Office Automation Grade Evaluation Guide, the parenthetical title Office Automation, abbreviated as OA, is added to the position title.

The proper title and series for the appellant's position is Secretary (OA), GS-318.

Standard determination

The appellant's secretarial duties are evaluated by reference to the grade level criteria in the classification standard for the Secretary Series, GS-318. As indicated earlier, the appellant's position includes regular and recurring use of office automation equipment and software. The agency has evaluated this work using the Office Automation Grade Evaluation Guide and found it graded at GS-4. The appeal record is clear that the appellant's office automation work could not in any case exceed the GS-5 level as evaluated by the Office Automation Grade Evaluation Guide. Thus, the office automation duties cannot affect the overall grade level of her position. Therefore, our decision will not include application of the Office Automation Grade Evaluation Guide.

Grade determination

The GS-318 standard 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.

Neither the appellant nor her agency disagrees with our evaluation of factors 2, 3, and 5 through 9. We therefore discuss those factors very briefly, while discussing factors 1 and 4 more thoroughly. Our evaluation with respect to the nine factors follows.

Factor 1, Knowledge required by the position

Factor 1 contains two basic elements: Knowledge type and Work situation. The agency has evaluated the appellant's position as requiring Knowledge Type III, and the appellant agrees. We concur with the agency assessment of this element.

The appellant's organization exceeds Work Situation A as described in the GS-318 standard. For instance, in Work Situation A, the employee's supervisor directs the staff primarily through face-to-face meetings. By contrast, the record indicates that the appellant's supervisor directs the staff mainly through subordinate supervisors who head divisions within [the appellant's organization].

The appellant's organization also meets one or more aspects of Work Situation B as described in the standard. For instance, in Work Situation B, direction of the staff is exercised through intermediate supervisors. This criterion is met, as indicated in the preceding paragraph.

However, the appellant's organization does not fully meet Work Situation B, for four reasons:

- In Work Situation B, there is a system of formal internal procedures and administrative controls, and a formal production or progress reporting system. The appellant does maintain various internal procedures and controls. These include an automated tracking system for correspondence and reports, a tracking system to monitor personnel performance evaluations, a report that tracks suspense listings on a weekly basis, an appointment calendar for the Director and Deputy Director, a Master Calendar Report, receipt and recording of Hazardous Material Incident Reports, and time and attendance recording. However, these systems do not fully meet the intent of Work Situation B. In our judgment, internal procedures and controls meeting Work Situation B must be significantly more complex than those typically used in organizations described in Work Situation A. By contrast, the appellant's internal procedures are similar to those that would normally be used in any organization, including those described in Work Situation A. For instance, even very small organizations with no subordinate supervisors would typically need a tracking system for correspondence and reports, a report to track suspense listings, an appointment calendar for the supervisor, and time and attendance recording.
- In Work Situation B, coordination among subordinate units is sufficiently complex to require continuous attention. The appellant does coordinate among subordinate units that have various different functions. However, we judge that this coordination is not complex enough to require continuous attention, for two reasons. First, such coordination might be complex enough if the subordinate units themselves were complex, each having many employees, their own secretaries and clerks, and maybe formal internal subdivisions. The appellant might then need to continuously coordinate among the subordinate units, for instance, by shifting clerical staff among the units to take care of fluctuating workloads. However, the appellant's five subordinate units are not this complex. The record indicates that each unit contains only about four to seven or eight employees aside from the unit chief, no secretaries, few or no

clerks, and no formal internal subdivisions. Second, the appellant's January 26 letter to us indicates that she spends most of her time managing the procedures, controls, and systems listed in the preceding paragraph. Some of this time may involve coordinating among subordinate units. However, we judge that much of it does not. For instance, we consider that much of the appellant's time maintaining her superiors' appointment calendar does not involve coordinating among subordinate units. Again, this indicates that such coordination does not require her continuous attention, as intended in Situation B.

- The appellant notes that according to the Secretary Series Explanatory Memorandum, many small organizations of limited staff are responsible for programs or functions that place upon the secretary far more substantive and complex demands and responsibilities than is typical of Work Situation A. We agree. For this reason, the GS-318 standard indicates that even if organizations meet Work Situation A in terms of internal coordination, they still may be credited with Work Situation B if they have extensive responsibility for coordinating work outside the organization. This outside coordination must require procedures and administrative controls equivalent to those described earlier for this level. The appellant does have many contacts outside her organization. For instance, she notes that she receives calls and requests from environmental citizens' groups, professional societies, the media, and officials of State and local governments. She also arranges various meetings, including a monthly Keystone Conference which has attendees from Air Force; from county, State, and Federal agencies; and from various public interest groups. However, she does not have extensive responsibility for coordinating work outside her organization, where this requires formal, written procedures and controls fully equivalent to the internal procedures and controls required for Work Situation B.
- The appellant believes that GS-6 benchmarks 1 and 2 in the standard reflect her duties very closely except for stenography. However, those and other benchmarks indicate that organizations under Work Situation B are typically much larger and more complex than the appellants'. The simplest organization described in the benchmarks under Work Situation B is a research and development division with 95 positions and three branches. Each branch is further subdivided. The division has a formalized system of internal procedures including extensive reporting requirements, and coordination of subordinate units and projects is hard to maintain. The most complex organization described under Work Situation B is a research and development laboratory with 450 employees in four offices and five divisions. The divisions are subdivided into two to four branches that are further subdivided. There are about 50 subordinate supervisors, and formal policies, procedures, and reporting requirements are needed.

The appellant makes many points in support of her belief that her position should be evaluated at Work Situation B. For instance, she indicates it takes several months to become familiar enough with the language used in [her organization] to use it effectively in performing one's work. However, we have found that her position exceeds Work Situation A, meets one or more aspects of Work Situation B, but does not fully meet the latter work situation. As indicated earlier, if a position fails to meet

the criteria at a given level of the standard in even one significant aspect, it must be credited at a lower level. Therefore, the appellant's position must be evaluated at Work Situation A.

We have evaluated the appellant's position at Knowledge Type III and Work Situation A. Therefore, the position must be credited with Level 1-3 and 350 points (page 12 of the standard).

Factor 2, Supervisory controls

The supervisory controls over the appellant's position are best described at Level 2-3. Similar to controls described at Level 2-3, the appellant performs her work following the established office procedures. Her supervisor almost never reviews her work in detail.

Factor 3, Guidelines

Guidelines are best described at Level 3-2. The appellant's guidelines typically include a variety of agency instructions, style manuals, and user manuals. The appellant finds and applies the appropriate guideline.

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 has credited Factor Level 4-2. The appellant makes various statements in support of her belief that Level 4-3 is correct. However, we agree with the agency and find that the appellant's position does not fully meet Level 4-3 criteria for the following reasons. Although she must have knowledge of the duties, policies, and program goals of the supervisor and staff, the standard says that work at Level 4-3 involves different and unrelated processes and methods and provides examples of the types of assignments typically found at that level.

In the first example at Level 4-3, the secretary regularly prepares one-of-a-kind reports from information in various documents when this requires reading correspondence and reports to identify relevant items, and when decisions are based on a familiarity with the issues and the relationships between various types of information. The appellant provided four examples of reports she believes meet the criteria. We cannot agree that they do. The examples are routine and recurring (SF-52 preparation, projected leave schedules) or not sufficiently complex (total hours worked by an intern). The Consolidated Stakeholders Report is apparently a recurring report (monthly) that the appellant was asked to complete on a one-time basis. All this indicates that the appellant does not regularly prepare different one-of-a-kind reports to the extent intended at Level 4-3.

The second Level 4-3 example depicts a secretary who regularly sets up conferences that require planning and arranging travel and hotel accommodations for conference participants when this is

based on a knowledge of the schedules and commitments of those participating. The appellant does set up conferences and meetings at her installation. She discusses one meeting where she made hotel reservations for 40 people. However, the record indicates that she does not regularly set up conferences and meetings that require arranging for both the travel and hotel accommodations of all participants.

Though the appellant's work falls short of Level 4-3, we find that it is fully equivalent to Level 4-2 as described in the GS-318 standard. At that level, actions to be taken or responses to be made differ in such things as the sources of information, the kinds of transactions or entries, or readily verifiable differences. Decisions at this level are based on a knowledge of the procedural requirements of the work coupled with an awareness of the specific function and staff assignments of the office.

This factor is evaluated at Level 4-2 and assigned 75 points. We note that even if Level 4-3 had been credited, this would not have affected the overall grade of the appellant's position.

Factor 5, Scope and effect

Scope and effect are best described at Level 5-2. As expected at Level 5-2, the appellant's work frees the staff from administrative burdens, and assures that work conforms to appropriate policies and procedures.

Factor 6, Personal contacts

Personal contacts are best described at Level 6-2. The appellant's contacts include employees both within and outside her organization, members of the public, and representatives of other government offices. The contacts are in a moderately unstructured setting.

Factor 7, Purpose of contacts

The purpose of contacts is best described at Level 7-2. At Level 7-2 the purpose of contacts is to plan, coordinate, and advise on work.

Factor 8, Physical demands

The work is sedentary. Level 8-1 is correct.

Factor 9, Work environment

The appellant performs the work in an office. Level 9-1 is correct.

Summary

In sum, we have evaluated the appellant's position as follows:

Factor	Level	Points
1. Knowledge required by the position	1-3	350
2. Supervisory controls	2-3	275
3. Guidelines	3-2	125
4. Complexity	4-2	75
5. Scope and effect	5-2	75
6. Personal contacts	6-2	25
7. Purpose of contacts	7-2	50
8. Physical demands	8-1	5
9. Work environment	9-1	<u>5</u>
Total points:		985

The appellant's position warrants 985 total points. Therefore, in accordance with the grade conversion table on page 9 of the standard for the GS-318 series, her position is properly graded at GS-5.

Decision

The appellant's position is properly classified as Secretary (OA), GS-318-5.