

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 972
Atlanta, GA 30303-3109

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

Appellant: [appellant's name]

Agency classification: Engineering Technician
GS-802-9

Organization: Waterfront Division
Maintenance Department
Navy Public Works Center
[city, state]

OPM decision: Engineering Technician
GS-802-9

OPM decision number: C-0802-09-29

Kathy W. Day
Classification Appeals Officer

2/13/98

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 representative]

[name]

Director, Human Resources Office

Naval Base

[address]

Mr. William Duffy

Chief, Classification Branch

Field Advisory Services Division

Defense Civilian Personnel Management

Service

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Introduction

On July 8, 1997, the Atlanta Oversight Division, Office of Personnel Management (OPM), accepted an appeal for the position of Engineering Technician, GS-802-9, Waterfront Division, Maintenance Department, Navy Public Works Center, [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.

General Issues

The appellant is part of a group appeal from engineering technicians at the Navy Public Works Center who perform work in various specializations. Information furnished with the group appeal compares their GS-9 positions with other engineering technician positions at the same location whom they believe are performing the equivalent or lower level work but are classified at a higher grade. Copies of position descriptions were provided for two Mechanical Engineering Technician, GS-802-11, positions; one Electrical Engineering Technician, GS-802-11, position; and one Electronics Engineering Technician, GS-856-11, position. Although the GS-11 position descriptions are certified by a management official, none have a classification certification or a position description number on the Optional Form 8. A certification by a management official certifies the accuracy of the position description which represents the official record of the duties and responsibilities assigned to a position. However, a classification certification indicates the position description has been placed in its proper class, title and grade in accordance with the OPM classification standards and guidelines by a person delegated classification authority. Since the GS-11 position descriptions lack a classification certification, the duties and responsibilities are not an official record of duties and responsibilities, have not been properly classified, and are neither reviewable nor appealable under the classification appeal process. Additionally, 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 his appeal.

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

Position Information

The appellant is assigned to Position Number 7J173. The appellant, supervisor, and agency have certified to the accuracy of the position description.

The appellant's work involves preparing cost estimates, job plans, construction plans, and minor works with specific breakdown of equipment, material, and personnel in connection with

maintenance, repair, alteration, or conversion of facilities. He is responsible for analyzing work requests, sketches, blueprints, and other specifications for alterations, conversions, installation, replacement, preventive maintenance, and repair of various types of equipment, systems, and vessels.

The appellant receives direction from the Maintenance General Foreman who assigns work identifying major objectives and providing background information and guidance. Unusual problems are discussed by the appellant and the supervisor. The incumbent determines the technical requirements of the job plans, construction plans, methods, components/materials, and cost estimates. The supervisor provides minimal technical assistance and completed work is reviewed for quality, timeliness, and adherence with instructions, guidelines, and policy.

Standards Determination

Engineering Technician Series, GS-802, June 1969.

Series Determination

The agency placed the position in the Engineering Technician Series, GS-802. The appellant does not contest the occupational series nor the title of his position.

The GS-802 series 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 limitations of engineering systems, processes, structures, machinery, devices, and materials. The positions do not require professional knowledges 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. The work is properly placed in the GS-802 series.

Title Determination

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 according to the position description, the appellant must have knowledge of civil, electrical, and mechanical engineering concepts; therefore, his work involves two or more specializations, and the position is properly titled 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.

The appellant is involved primarily in researching, preparing cost estimates, planning and coordinating overhaul, maintenance and repair projects for U.S. Navy facilities such as ships, barges, piers, and dry docks. His projects include such work as overhauling or replacing ship engines or replacing or upgrading electrical components; installation of sea cushions; maintenance and repair of piers and steel structures; installation of fire and flood alarm systems on fuel barges; and demolition. There are also times when structural changes may need to be made to piers or dry docks. As necessary, the incumbent will request that the Engineering Department draw up the changes since he is not a certified engineer. The incumbent must have technical knowledge of various civil, electrical, and mechanical engineering concepts. In addition, the incumbent must be knowledgeable of various environmental safety regulations.

The incumbent has numerous guidelines to follow which include Engineering Performance Standards (EPS), Navy Facilities Instructions, Engineering Handbook, national and local codes and standards, and files of previous projects. There are no occasions when the appellant is required to significantly deviate from these guidelines. All projects require the use and application of established engineering principles, methods, and techniques and must conform to any applicable codes. The nature of the appellant's assignments fully meets the GS-9 level described in the standard.

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.

The GS-11 level is not met by this position. The appellant is not creating new systems or establishing new procedures for the work. The available guidelines are generally (but not completely) applicable to the appellant's work which allows him to exercise judgement to adapt techniques and methods to complete the job where established guidelines are incomplete or impractical. In addition, where guidelines are inappropriate, impractical, or incomplete, the appellant has access to the Engineering Division for assistance. The appellant is able to choose an appropriate means of accomplishing the work from procedures/systems that already have been developed and for which information is available. Accordingly, the appellant is responsible for selecting the appropriate solutions from the body of knowledge already in place. The estimates prepared by the appellant are based on historical data from other jobs, when available, and on EPS and the Estimator system. The EPS is used to assist in estimating jobs by identifying tasks and man-hours to accomplish the work, and the automated Estimator system is used to determine labor hours, materials, and other cost factors. The work requires the use and application of established engineering principles, methods, and techniques.

GS-10 level assignments are not specifically described in the standard. The appellant's assignments do not in any way regularly exceed those described at the GS-9 level. Therefore, his assignments cannot properly be classified at the GS-10 level.

GS-9 is assigned for Nature of Assignment.

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.

The GS-9 level is met. The appellant's work is assigned by the supervisor and time frames are discussed, if necessary. From this point, the appellant is expected to carry out the project with minimal supervisory involvement. The appellant sets up appointments; reviews the job; determines the requirements for sketches or drawings; prepares the job plan; determines and requisitions material needed for the job/project; tracks material receipt; meets with shop supervisors to review the job; provides technical assistance; writes change orders as needed; provides quality assurance; coordinates with contractors, vendors, shops, and Engineering Division as needed; and meets with the customer to discuss any problems. Contacts are with the customers, facility managers, project managers, shop supervisors and tradesmen/mechanics, engineers, and vendors. Meetings are conducted with the contacts as needed, generally, without supervisory involvement.

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 the 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.

Although the appellant works independently under general supervision, the intent of the GS-11 level is not met. He may recommend a course of action, but the appellant seeks technical advice when unusual problems surface outside his area of expertise. For example, the appellant may consult with a diesel mechanic, pipefitter, electrician, or another engineering technician (with specialized experience) when unusual problems occur to determine what procedures will be necessary to complete the project or resolve the problem. The GS-11 level of responsibility assumes that the employee is performing assignments equivalent to the GS-11 level and would, therefore, have responsibility for adapting a general font of knowledge and interpreting precedents to handle complex assignments requiring the exercise of considerable judgment. In comparison, the appellant applies conventional engineering practices and a knowledge of the codes, specifications, and regulations to his projects. He exercises some judgment in determining the applicability of the specifications, codes, and engineering principles to the specific project, but consults with trade employees or his supervisor on difficult problems or situations. This level of responsibility does not meet the intent of the GS-11 level.

The GS-10 level is not specifically described in the standard. To be appropriately classified at the GS-10 level, the technician's Level of Responsibility would have to regularly and clearly exceed the level described at grade GS-9. The appellant's position does not regularly require him to perform at a level that exceeds the GS-9 level.

GS-9 is assigned for Level of Responsibility.

Summary

Both factors are evaluated at the GS-9 level.

Decision

This position is properly classified as Engineering Technician, GS-802-9 .