

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

Philadelphia Oversight Division
600 Arch Street, Room 3400
Philadelphia, PA 19106-1596

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

Appellant: [appellant's name]

Agency classification: Computer Assistant
GS-335-7

Organization: [name] Center
Veterans Affairs [name]
Department of Veterans Affairs
[location]

OPM decision: Computer Assistant
GS-335-7

OPM decision number: C-0335-07-02

/s/ Robert D. Hendler

Robert D. Hendler
Classification Appeals Officer

12/18/01

Date

As provided in section 511.612 of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), 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* (PCS's), appendix 4, section G (address provided in appendix 4, section H).

Decision sent to:

[appellant's name]
[appellant's address]

[name]
[organizational name] Leader
Department of Veterans Affairs
[organizational name]
[address]
[location]

Ms. Ventris C. Gibson
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Introduction

On August 6, 2001, the Philadelphia Oversight Division of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted a classification appeal from [appellant's name]. Her position is currently classified as a Computer Assistant, GS-335-7. She believes the position should be upgraded. The appellant works in the Information Resource Management (IRM) component of the [organizational name] Center, Veterans Affairs [organizational name] ([acronym]), Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), [location]. We have accepted and decided this appeal under section 5112(b) of title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.). We received the complete appeal administrative report on September 21, 2001.

General issues

In her appeal letter of July 11, 2001, the appellant states that she has been working without a correct position description (PD) since 1996 when she was assigned to perform computer work. She provided a copy of a revised PD, certified as current and accurate by her first and second level supervisors in August 1999, with a requested classification as "Computer Assistant, GS-334-7." The PD (#[number]) was certified as current and accurate by the first level supervisor on July 23, 2001, by the second level supervisor on July 25 and was classified as Computer Assistant, GS-335-7 on July 26. The appellant notified us on August 1 that although the PD was essentially correct, she believed that it should be a higher grade. The appellant and her first level supervisor certified the accuracy of the PD of record, with agreed upon changes, on September 12.

We conducted an on-site audit with the appellant and interviewed her immediate supervisor, Mr. [supervisor's name], [organizational name] Leader, on November 30, 2001. We interviewed her technical leader, [name], the System Manager, by telephone on November 31. We find that the PD of record, as revised, contains the major duties and responsibilities assigned to and performed by the appellant and we incorporate it by reference into this decision.

During the audit, the appellant said that she believed her position should be evaluated at Levels 1-6 and 2-4 by using the Computer Specialist, GS-334 PCS. She questioned her activity's analysis of Factor 8, but agreed with the analysis of the remaining factors. The appellant said that she is performing work similar to that performed by a higher graded co-worker. Because of the small size of the staff, she must be cross-trained to fill in for her higher graded co-workers when they are absent.

OPM is required by law to classify positions on the basis of their duties, responsibilities, and qualification requirements by comparison to the criteria specified in the appropriate PCS or guide (5 U.S.C. 5106, 5107, and 5112). The law does not authorize use of other methods or factors of evaluation, such as comparison to other positions that may or may not have been classified correctly. In addition, work performed in the absence of another employee, or that is not a significant and substantial part of the overall position occupying at least 25 percent of the employee's time, cannot control the classification of a position.

Like OPM, the appellant's agency must classify positions based on comparison to OPM's PCS's and guidelines. Agencies are obligated to review their own classification decisions for identical,

similar or related positions to insure consistency with OPM appeal certificates (5 CFR 511.612). If the appellant considers the appealed position so similar to others that they warrant the same classification, she may pursue this matter by writing to her agency's human resources management headquarters. She should specify the precise organizational location, classification, duties and responsibilities of the positions in question. If the positions are found to be basically the same as the appealed position, or warrant similar application of the controlling PCS's, the agency must correct their classification to be consistent with this appeal decision. Otherwise, the agency should explain to her the differences between the appealed position and the others.

The Computer Specialist Series, GS-334, has been superseded by the Information Technology (IT) Management Series, GS-2210. Therefore, we must use this PCS in conjunction with the Job Family Standard (JFS) PCS for Administrative Work in the IT Group, GS-2200 to respond to the appellant's classification issues. Our decision sets aside all previous agency decisions regarding the classification of the position in question.

Position Information

The appellant provides hardware support to a team of IT specialists, who handle the more complex technical issues. The activity uses a variety of commercially available personal computers (PC's) and equipment in work areas of varying speeds including Gateway, Dell, Compac, AT&T, and ACER for approximately 400 non-clinical workstations that use commercial off-the-shelf software (COTS). Her typical tasks involve configuring and placing PC's. This includes installing the operating system, peripheral devices with their respective software drivers, ergonomic adaptive equipment, printers, terminals, and cables. In responding to user requests for additional memory, the appellant determines how to meet user needs, e.g., freeing up disc space by deleting software, and adding memory based on specific PC model requirements.

She responds to help desk questions, e.g., PC is slow, printer is not working, user has question on a standard software package function, such as problems using a spreadsheet. Using established troubleshooting techniques, she identifies the likely cause and tests probable solutions, e.g., shutting down a sluggish wireless bar coding unit to allow it to cool down and reset itself. The appellant is responsible for the Xerox print server. This assignment includes networking approximately 50 printers in central locations to replace about 200 dedicated printers.

The appellant assists the specialists by performing routine VistA mainframe system backups, and adding or deleting VistA user accounts. She provides orientation on standard software packages, e.g., logging in. Another VAMROC organization provides basic software package training. The appellant also provides administrative support to the IRM team. This includes placing credit card yearly maintenance contracts, setting up maintenance contracts that require purchase, and ordering supplies such as toner cartridges and printer ribbons.

When the appellant cannot resolve hardware or other issues from manuals and other printed guidance, she seeks guidance from a higher graded co-worker with whom she shares hardware support responsibility. Both will consult with the System Manager on hardware issues that they cannot resolve.

Series, title, and standard determination

The agency placed the appellant's position in the Computer Clerk and Assistant Series, GS-335, for which there is a published PCS, and titled it Computer Assistant. The appellant believes that she is performing two-grade interval IT work.

The IT Management Series, GS-2210, is a two-grade interval series for positions with responsibility to plan, design, develop, acquire, document, test, implement, integrate, maintain, or modify computer systems. GS-2210 equipment work focuses on system architecture, including defining system hardware requirements. This work exceeds the level of work assigned to and performed by the appellant. The GS-2200 JFS discusses how to distinguish between specialist and assistant work. It states that positions responsible for monitoring the operation of small networked systems, adding network users, updating passwords, installing or assisting users in installing COTS, configuring hardware and software according to instructions, troubleshooting minor problems, and responding to less complex user questions are excluded from the GS-2210 series. These and similar functions do not require regular and recurring application of a full range of knowledge of IT principles, concepts and methods. The appellant's position is a direct match to this exclusion. Therefore, the GS-2200 JFS may not be used to evaluate the appellant's position.

The duties and responsibilities of the appellant's position are characteristic of the kind of work described in the Occupational Information section of the Computer Clerk and Assistant Series, GS-335 PCS as Support to Computer Specialists. The PCS states that some computer assistants perform duties much like those assigned to entry and trainee level computer specialists. They assist computer specialists in work that requires knowledge of hardware, peripheral devices, and memory storage. The appellant's position also contains aspects of work described within the PCS under Support to Subject Matter Users, which says that some computer clerks and assistants provide computer support to users through networks. Work varies in difficulty ranging from highly structured and recurring tasks to very specialized tasks. Some employees discuss information requirements with users and give advice on how to access the data.

We find that the position is properly classified to the GS-335 series. Based on the grade level analysis that follows, we find the position is properly allocated as Computer Assistant, GS-335.

The directly applicable GS-335 PCS (dated February 1980), however, must be read along with the more recent information contained in the November 1990 Office Automation Grade Evaluation Guide (OAGEG) that evaluates the use of office automation (OA) technology. The OAGEG is used in combination with other PCS's or guides to evaluate positions when OA duties are assigned to those positions. We have used the OAGEG to help describe the range of hardware and software supported by the appellant, and to clarify and assist in determining the grade of the position that is controlled by applying the GS-335 PCS. Finally, where appropriate we make reference to the Primary Standard (PS). This standard serves as a "standard-for-standards" for the Factor Evaluation System (FES). It serves as a basic tool for maintaining alignment across occupations.

Grade determination

The GS-335 PCS is written in FES format. Positions graded under the FES format are compared to nine factors. Levels are assigned for each factor and the points associated with the assigned levels are totaled and converted to a grade level by application of the Grade Conversion Table contained in the PCS. Under the FES, factor level descriptions mark the floor threshold for the indicated factor level. If a position fails in any significant aspect to meet a particular level in the standard, the next lower level and its lower point value must be assigned, unless an equally important aspect that meets a higher level balances the deficiency.

The agency credited Levels 1-4, 2-3, 3-3, 4-3, 5-3, 6-2, 7-2, 8-1, and 9-1. The appellant disagrees with the agency's evaluation of Factors 1, 2, and 8. After careful review of the record, we concur with the agency's analysis of the uncontested factor levels and have so credited the position. Our analysis will address the remaining factors.

Factor 1: Knowledge Required by the Position

This factor measures the nature and extent of information or facts that employees 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.

As at Level 1-4, the appellant performs a wide range of duties including solving commercial hardware and COTS problems requiring knowledge of hardware, software, and program capabilities and limitations. The position requires that the appellant be knowledgeable of PC operating systems and PC-based network operating systems. In addition, she performs scheduled backups, manages and arranges for or deletes system access. The appellant must have knowledge of computer components, applications, and operating systems to install standard software and equipment, recover from routine software malfunctions, and provide basic training for new users. Further, the appellant must provide fundamental technical guidance to users while serving as help desk consultant, e.g., interpret common error messages, resolve routine printing problems, and identify the source of problems where readily identified when computers do not boot or users cannot connect to the network.

Level 1-4, the highest level described in the OAGEG, covers work that requires a knowledge of the capabilities, operating characteristics, and advanced functions of a variety of types of OA software, and knowledge of the similarities, differences, and integration of the different software types. These are typical of the knowledge she applies in helping users by answering individual questions related to the use of different software applications like Microsoft Word, Excel and Exchange.

The appellant's work does not require applying Level 1-5 knowledge, where assignments involve the development, test, implementation and modification of computer programs and operating procedures. Employees prepare programs or write new program documentation and operating procedures. The appellant's regular and recurring work supports users of COTS software programs that are not modified. The appellant does not have responsibility for application program development. The appellant's hardware work similarly is based on applying knowledge of directly applicable manufacturers' installation, maintenance and repair procedures. Any work equivalent to the development and modification of programs and procedures, or analogous

decisions on system hardware, are vested with higher graded employees on the IRM team. Therefore, we evaluate this factor at Level 1-4 (550 points).

Factor 2: Supervisory Controls

This factor covers the nature and extent of direct and indirect controls exercised by the supervisor. Employee responsibilities, as well as the review of completed work, are included. Employee responsibility depends upon the extent to which the employee is expected to develop the sequence and timing of various aspects of the work, to modify or recommend modification of instructions, and to participate in establishing priorities and defining objectives. The degree of review of completed work depends upon the nature and extent of the review.

The appellant's position meets, but does not exceed, Level 2-3 which is the highest level described in the GS-335 PCS and the OAGEG. As at this level, the appellant identifies the work to be done, plans and carries out the steps required and submits completed work to users without supervisory review. The appellant adapts work procedures based on established instructions and experience. At this level in the OAGEG, the employee works independently to plan and carry out steps for completing assignments in accordance with established office instructions and practices for OA. When current practices or deviations in an assignment cause problems, the appellant uses own initiative to resolve them and coordinates efforts with other employees involved or affected by the nonstandard procedures.

The appellant's supervisor provides minimal supervision. Work assignments are derived through problems that arise, through the normal course of planning and carrying out the work to be done, or through inquiries received at the help desk. The employee uses initiative in carrying out recurring assignments independently without specific instructions. Unusual situations are referred to the System Manager. For example, the appellant receives suggestions from the System Manager when confronted with unfamiliar error messages or when solutions to unfamiliar problems are needed while installing hardware. The supervisor is kept informed of progress and completed work is reviewed for conformity to deadlines and accepted practices and as a result of feedback from users about the quality and accuracy of the work.

Level 2-4, described in the PS, is characteristic of that performed by higher level employees, including the appellant's supervisor, who independently plan and carry out projects and analyses of the organization's IT requirements, interpret policy, coordinate the work of others, and resolve most conflicts that arise. As discussed in the *Classifier's Handbook*, this factor considers not just the degree of independence, but also the degree to which the nature of the work allows an employee to make decisions and commitments and to exercise judgment. The appellant's decisions on equipment and COTS problems do not represent judgment on the policies or issues contemplated at Level 2-4. Therefore, we evaluate this factor at Level 2-3 (275 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, as well as the extent of physical exertion involved in the work.

The PD of record states that the appellant's work requires a significant amount of walking, standing and lifting, and requires the frequent movement of equipment occasionally weighing more than 25 pounds. Our review of available equipment literature shows that the appellant routinely lifts printers that weigh more than 35 pounds, e.g., HP Laserjets, and regularly bends, stoops and crawls to perform her equipment duties.

These demands meet Level 8-2, where the work requires extended periods of standing, walking, stretching, bending, stooping or carrying of leads of paper, tapes or cards that may weigh as much as 45 pounds. Her work does not meet Level 8-3 which includes the regular and recurring lifting of objects over 50 pounds and occasional lifting and carrying of heavier materials. Therefore, we evaluate this factor at Level 8-2 (20 points).

Summary

In summary, we have credited the position as follows:

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	6-2	25
7. Purpose of Contacts	7-2	50
8. Physical Demands	8-2	20
9. Work Environment	9-1	<u>5</u>
Total Points		1,500

A total of 1,500 points falls within the GS-7 grade level point range of 1,355-1,600 points on the Grade Conversion Table.

Decision

The position is properly classified as Computer Assistant, GS-335-7.