

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

Dallas Oversight Division
1100 Commerce Street, Room 441
Dallas, TX 75242

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

Appellant: [appellant's name]

Agency classification: Secretary (Office Automation)
GS-318-6

Organization: Office of the Vice Wing Commander
[a specific] Training Wing
Air Education and Training Command
Department of the Air Force
[location]

OPM decision: Secretary (Office Automation)
GS-318-6

OPM decision number: C-0318-06-06

/s/ Bonnie J. Brandon

Bonnie Brandon
Classification Appeals Officer

May 10, 2002

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]

[appellant's civilian personnel office]

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Introduction

On February 13, 2002, the Dallas Oversight Division of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted a classification appeal from [the appellant]. The appellant submitted the appeal through her civilian personnel office. The agency's complete administrative report was enclosed with the appeal. The appellant's position is currently classified as Secretary (Office Automation), GS-318-6. She believes the position should be classified as Secretary (Office Automation), GS-318-7. The appellant's position is in the Office of the Vice Wing Commander, [a specific] Training Wing, Air Education and Training Command, Department of the Air Force, [location]. We have accepted and decided this appeal under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code.

To help decide this appeal, a representative of the Dallas Oversight Division conducted a telephone audit of the appellant's position. We also conducted telephone interviews with the appellant's immediate supervisor and the Command Chief Master Sergeant (Command Chief). In reaching our decision, we have reviewed the audit and interview findings and the information of record provided by the appellant and her agency, including her official position description, [number].

General issues

In her appeal, the appellant states that her duties have increased approximately 40 percent during the past year as the result of the Vice Wing Commander being delegated the supervisory responsibility for 11 subordinate Wing staff offices and because she performs administrative assistant duties for the Command Chief. The appellant also states that, in addition to continuing to perform her normal duties and responsibilities, she performs the same duties as the Wing Commander's secretary when the Vice Commander assumes command in the absence of the Wing Commander. In determining the appropriate classification of the appellant's, we cannot consider either the volume of work (*The Classifier's Handbook*, chapter 5) or temporary duties (section III.F. of the *Introduction to the Position Classification Standards*).

Position information

The appellant independently performs a variety of administrative and assistant duties in support of the Vice Commander, the Command Chief, and the 11 subordinate Wing staff chiefs. She provides advice and assistance on correspondence procedures and formatting to subordinate Wing staff and reviews all correspondence requiring the Vice Commander's or Command Chief's signature.

The appellant coordinates the flow of information among the Vice Commander and the Wing staff. This includes controlling suspense dates on correspondence, required forms, and other materials; reviewing documents for grammatical, typographical, and procedural accuracy; and compiling needed information for use by the Vice Commander and Command Chief in a timely manner. She also provides assistance and guidance to other Wing personnel regarding proper format for correspondence and other written material, standard administrative practices, and other clerical procedures.

The appellant maintains and controls the Vice Commander's and the Command Chief's personal calendars, ensuring priority appointments and meetings are kept and that there are no conflicts of interest. She receives, screens, and directs all visitors, calls, and correspondence. The appellant independently responds, both orally and in writing, to requests for interviews, appointments, meetings, and invitations for the Vice Commander and Command Chief based on in-depth knowledge of their schedules and responsibilities. She arranges the Vice Commander's and Command Chief's travel, transportation, and lodging and advises them on administrative procedural matters. The appellant also oversees matters of military protocol affecting the Vice Commander in both his normal function and when acting for the Wing Commander. She performs similar duties for the Command Chief. The appellant plans and coordinates administrative arrangements for conferences, ceremonies, and other meetings. She compiles information for and briefs the Vice Commander and Command Chief on items relevant to their participation at such functions.

The appellant has responsibility for the Wing Commander's complaint hotline, an automated voicemail system that individuals may call with various problems and questions. She transcribes the complaints, responds to them herself as appropriate or directs them to others for response, and maintains a log of the complaints and responses. She also proofreads any base newspaper articles that result from the complaint hotline. The appellant stated that these duties occupy about 10 percent of her time.

Series, title, and standard determination

The appellant does not dispute the agency's determination of series and title of her position. We agree that the position is properly classified in the Secretary Series, GS-318. Consistent with the series determination, the proper title for the appellant's position is *Secretary*. The appellant's position also requires proficiency in the use of computer software, automated word processing office equipment, and the skills of a qualified typist to perform word processing duties. As prescribed by the titling instructions of the Office Automation Grade Evaluation Guide (Guide), the full title of the appellant's position is *Secretary (Office Automation)*.

We applied the Guide to the appellant's office automation work and determined that those duties and responsibilities are lower graded than her secretarial work. Since the office automation duties are not grade-controlling, we will not discuss them further. We also will not evaluate the appellant's complaint hotline duties since they do not occupy at least 25 percent of her time (as explained in section III.J. of the *Introduction to the Position Classification Standards*, only duties that occupy at least 25 percent of an employee's time can affect the grade of a position). Therefore, the appellant's position is properly graded using the Position Classification Standard for the Secretary Series, GS-318.

Grade determination

The GS-318 standard is written in the Factor Evaluation System (FES) format, which uses nine factors. Each factor is evaluated separately and is assigned a point value consistent with the factor level definitions described in the standard. The total number of points for all nine factors

is converted to a grade by use of the standard's grade conversion table. Under the FES, each factor level description 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 the next lower level. Conversely, the position may exceed those criteria in some aspects and still not be credited at a higher level.

Factor 1, Knowledge required by the position

This factor measures the nature and extent of information or facts which the secretary must understand to do acceptable work (e.g., procedures, practices, rules, policies, principles, and concepts) and the nature and extent of the skills needed to apply that knowledge. The GS-318 standard measures this factor by (1) the type of knowledge required and (2) the work situation of the position.

Knowledge type

The appellant's position meets Knowledge Type III in that the position requires a good working knowledge of program goals and policies of the organization, the priorities and commitments of the Vice Commander and the Command Chief, and the duties of the Wing staff. The appellant must understand the functions of the Wing Commander and the subordinate groups and squadrons throughout the [specific] Training Wing. She must have a thorough knowledge of established policies and procedures in various administrative areas, including officer and enlisted performance reports, travel, military protocol, and internal and external communications. The appellant uses this knowledge to review internal and external correspondence, to direct information and inquiries to appropriate personnel, and to prepare correspondence for signature of the Vice Commander or the Command Chief. She attends weekly staff meetings, noting assignments and suspense dates, and follows up and provides reminders to various staff of impending due dates. The appellant also uses her knowledge of the organization's function to handle the complaint hotline inquiries, providing a response herself or referring the inquiries to the appropriate individuals. The appellant's position is equivalent to Knowledge Type III where positions require knowledge of the organization and functions of the office and knowledge of the duties, priorities, commitments, policies, and program goals of the staff sufficient to perform nonroutine assignments. Positions at this level note and follow up on commitments made at meetings by staff members, coordinate the work of the office with other offices, and research and provide information from files and documents when this requires recognizing which information is relevant to the problem at hand.

In addition to the knowledge and skills required by lower levels, positions at Knowledge Type IV require the secretary to have a basic foundation of administrative concepts, principles, and practices sufficient to perform independently duties such as eliminating conflict and duplication in extensive office procedures, determining when new procedures are needed, systematically studying and evaluating new office machines and recommending acceptance or rejection of their use, and studying the clerical activities of the office and subordinate offices and recommending a specific restructuring of the way activities are carried out. This level also requires a comprehensive knowledge of the supervisor's policies and views on all significant matters affecting the organization so that the secretary is able to perform duties such as

developing material for the supervisor's use in public speaking engagements (develop background information and prepare outline for the speech) and briefing or advising staff members or persons outside of the organization on the supervisor's views on current issues facing the organization.

The appellant's position does not meet the knowledge of administrative concepts, principles, and practices required for Knowledge Type IV. Further, the position does not require a comprehensive knowledge of the supervisor's policies and views on all significant matters affecting the organization as described at this level. The appellant does not study subordinate offices' clerical activities in order to improve processes/activities, and she does not review and revise extensive office procedures for her organization. Rather, the review the appellant conducts on internal correspondence is for correct formatting, grammatical and typographical errors, and adherence to administrative policy and procedures. Although the appellant assists in collecting background information for the Vice Commander's public speaking engagements, the Vice Commander develops his own outline and speech. At the Vice Commander's request, the appellant may review the speech for flow and understanding. There is no evidence that the appellant must use knowledge to adapt policies and procedures to emergency situations or to establish practices or procedures to meet new situations. Instead, well-established policies and procedures are available and can be applied to many emergency and/or new situations.

The appellant's position is appropriately credited with Knowledge Type III.

Work Situation

The appellant's position matches Work Situation B. Consistent with the standard's description, the [specific] Training Wing is organized into a Wing staff who report directly to the Vice Commander and three subordinate groups that report to the Wing Commander. The groups are further divided into squadrons. The three subordinate groups (medical, training, and support) vary from each other in terms of subject matter, functions, and relationships to other organizations. All correspondence from the subordinate groups is routed through the Vice Commander. The appellant's organization has a system of formal internal procedures and administrative controls and a formal progress reporting system comparable to Work Situation B.

The appellant's position does not meet Work Situation C which is characterized by significantly greater organizational complexity, such as three or more subordinate levels with several organizations at each level and with specialists in fields such as personnel, finance, and management analysis. Such organizations typically have an organizational program that is interlocked on a direct and continuing basis with the programs of other departments, agencies, or organizations, requiring constant attention to extensive formal clearances and procedural controls; is directly affected by conditions outside the organization which vary widely in nature and intensity, and which frequently require organizational, procedural, or program adjustments in the supervisor's organization; or requires the supervisor to devote a substantial portion of the time in personal contacts, such as those with citizen groups, professional societies, and the media, because of active and extensive public interest or participation in the program. The appellant's organization does not have the complexity, controls, or extent of personal contacts described for Work Situation C. The majority of the personal contacts for the appellant and her

supervisor occur at the local level as a result of the Vice Commander's community relations activities. However, there is limited public interest or interaction with the media outside the local community.

We credit Knowledge Type III and Work Situation B which equates to Level 1-4 (550 points).

Factor 2, Supervisory controls

This factor covers the nature and extent of direct or indirect controls exercised by the supervisor, the secretary's responsibility, and the review of completed work. Supervisory controls are measured by the way assignments are made, instructions are given, priorities and deadlines are set, objectives and boundaries are defined, and the way work is reviewed.

At Level 2-3, the supervisor defines the overall objectives and priorities of the work in the office and assists the secretary with some special assignments. The secretary plans and carries out the work of the office and handles problems and deviations in accordance with established instructions, priorities, policies, commitments and program goals of the supervisor, and accepted practices in the occupation. Completed work is evaluated by adequacy, appropriateness, and conformance to established policy. The methods used by the employee are almost never reviewed in detail.

The appellant's position meets Level 2-3. The Vice Commander defines the overall objectives and priorities for the office and assists the appellant with unusual or complex assignments. The appellant plans and carries out the day-to-day work of reviewing and routing correspondence to appropriate individuals; scheduling meetings and conferences based on her knowledge of the Vice Commander's priorities, commitments, objectives, and preferences and ensuring that there are no conflicts; setting and following up on correspondence suspense dates; collecting information for the Vice Commander prior to scheduled meetings and conferences; screening visitors; and handling problems and deviations in accordance with regulations, instructions, policies, and the Vice Commander's preferences. As described at Level 2-3, the appellant's work is reviewed for adequacy, appropriateness, and conformance to established policy.

At Level 2-4, the supervisor sets the overall objectives and priorities of the work and the supervisor and employee, in consultation, develop the deadlines and the work to be done. At this level, the secretary handles a wide variety of situations and conflicts requiring the use of initiative to determine the approach to be taken or methods to use, and the discovery of previously unknown sources of information. For example, the secretary performs duties independently, referring only the most complex problems to the supervisor. Unlike Level 2-4 where many situations and conflicts arise which require the secretary to determine the approach to resolve them, the appellant resolves routine conflicts and situations based on established procedure and addresses unusual conflicts and situations to the Vice Commander. For example, if there is a scheduling conflict, the appellant cannot choose a suitable replacement for the Vice Commander to attend lower priority functions. The appellant's position does not meet the intent of Level 2-4 for how the work is assigned, the level of independence for carrying out the work, and how the work is reviewed.

We credit Level 2-3 (275 points).

Factor 3, Guidelines

This factor covers the nature of guidelines and the judgment needed to apply them. Guides used in the secretary occupation include, for example, reference materials such as style manuals, dictionaries, agency regulations, policies, and instructions concerning correspondence, and operating procedures of the organization served.

At Level 3-2, guidelines typically include dictionaries, style manuals, agency instructions concerning such matters as correspondence or the handling of classified information, and operating policies of the supervisor or organization served.

The appellant's position meets Level 3-2. Guidelines include the Air Force Tongue and Quill Style Manual, operations instructions, travel manual, regulations, local policy, and the Vice Commander's oral guidance. All of those references provide adequate guidance for the completion of the appellant's duties and do not normally require adaptation for application to her work.

The appellant's position does not meet Level 3-3, the highest level described in the standard. At this level, guidelines include a large body of unwritten policies, precedents, and practices which are not completely applicable to the work or are not specific and which deal with matters relating to judgment, efficiency, and relative priorities rather than with procedural concerns. For example, a secretary at this level interprets and adapts the guidelines to specific situations, analyzes results and, recognizes the need for changes, and recommends necessary changes. In contrast, guidelines for use by the appellant are usually written standardized policies and procedures that are applicable to most situations encountered by the appellant.

We credit Level 3-2 (125 points).

Factor 4, Complexity

Complexity 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 appellant's position meets and does not exceed Level 4-3, the highest level described in the standard. As at Level 4-3, the appellant's work includes various duties involving different and unrelated processes and methods. For example, the appellant performs a number of duties comparable to preparing 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 involved and the relationships between various types of information. When the appellant sets up conferences, she must plan and arrange travel and hotel accommodations for the Vice Commander and the Command Chief based on her knowledge of their schedules and commitments. The complexity of the appellant's assignments and the decisions she makes are characteristic of Level 4-3.

We credit Level 4-3 (150 points).

Factor 5, Scope and effect

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 work products or services both within and outside the organization. In the secretary occupation, effect measures such things as whether the work output facilitates the work of others, provides timely services of a personal nature, or affects the adequacy of systems of clerical and administrative support.

At Level 5-2, the purpose of the work is to carry out specific procedures. The work affects the accuracy and reliability of further processes. Duties frequently appearing at this level include serving as liaison between the supervisor and subordinate units, consolidating reports submitted by subordinates, or arranging meetings involving staff from outside the immediate office.

The appellant's position meets Level 5-2. The appellant serves as the initial point of contact for the Vice Commander and the Command Chief which helps ensure effective use of their time. Her review of correspondence and other activities she performs affect the timely and effective accomplishments of the organization and contribute to the accuracy of work performed by the staff.

The appellant's position does not meet Level 5-3. Positions at Level 5-3 serve offices that clearly and directly affect a wide range of agency activities, operations in other agencies, or a large segment of the public or business community. In contrast, the appellant's organization is limited to providing training in firefighting and intelligence areas and medical and support activities of the installation. Unlike secretaries at Level 5-3 who modify and devise methods and procedures that significantly and consistently affect the accomplishment of the mission of the office, the appellant uses established, formalized methods and procedures with minimal adaptation to assist the Vice Commander in accomplishing the mission of the installation. At Level 5-3, the secretary identifies and resolves various problems and situations that affect the orderly and efficient flow of work in transactions with parties outside the organization. Problems identified and resolved by the appellant normally do not affect activities above the installation level or reach the agency level outside of the [specific] Training Wing.

We credit Level 5-2 (75 points).

Factor 6, Personal contacts

This factor measures the types of personal contacts that occur in the work, including face-to-face telephone contacts with persons not in the supervisory chain. Levels described under this factor are based on what is required to make the initial contact, the difficulty of communicating with those contacted, and the setting in which the contact takes place.

Personal contacts at Level 6-3 are with individuals or groups from outside the employing agency in a moderately unstructured setting, e.g., the contacts are not established on a routine basis,

requiring the secretary to identify and locate the appropriate person to contact or to apply significant skill and knowledge in determining to whom a telephone call or visitor should be directed. At this level, the purpose and extent of each contact is different, and the role and authority of each party is identified and developed during the course of contact. Typical contacts at this level include attorneys, representatives of professional organizations, the news media, or public action groups.

The appellant's position meets Level 6-3. She serves as the point of contact for many administrative and clerical issues and for general inquiries from both within the organization and from the general public. Contacts also include military officers, distinguished Department of Defense and Air Force visitors, Members of Congress and/or their representatives, State and local government officials, and foreign nationals. Many of the contacts occur in a moderately unstructured environment, for example, callers requesting specific information that requires the appellant to determine and locate the appropriate individual to handle the request. The appellant receives and screens telephone calls and visitors, handling personally those that are within her scope and referring others to the appropriate staff. She identifies and develops the role and authority of each caller and visitor. In making contacts, the appellant must use her knowledge of the [specific] Training Wing's function, organization, policies, and procedures to provide information, direct inquiries, and resolve clerical and administrative issues.

The appellant's position does not meet Level 6-4 where contacts are with high-ranking officials from outside the employing agency at national or international levels in highly unstructured settings. Typical contacts might include Members of Congress, leading representatives of foreign governments, presidents of large national or international firms, or nationally recognized representatives of the news media. Contacts at this level are characterized by situations where each party may be very unclear as to the role and authority of the other or each contact may be conducted under different ground rules. The appellant's personal contacts are normally limited to Department of Defense personnel, the general public, and representatives of local government and are usually only moderately unstructured, e.g., the caller is unsure who to contact for information and the appellant must determine the appropriate point of contact for the caller.

We credit Level 6-3 (60 points).

Factor 7, Purpose of contacts

In this occupation, purpose of contacts may range from factual exchanges of information to resolving problems affecting the efficient operation of the office. The personal contacts which serve as the basis for the level selected for this factor must be the same as the contacts which are the basis for the level selected for Factor 6.

The appellant's position exceeds Level 7-1 where the primary purpose of contacts is to obtain, clarify, or give facts or information directly related to the work, for example, exchanging information when providing telephone and receptionist service. The appellant's position meets and does not exceed Level 7-2 in that her duties typically include ensuring that reports and responses to correspondence are submitted by the staff by the suspense dates, in proper format, and in accordance with policy and procedure; making lodging and travel arrangements for the

Vice Commander and the Command Chief; scheduling meetings and conferences; providing administrative and procedural guidance on correspondence to Wing staff.

We credit Level 7-2 (50 points).

Factor 8, Physical demands

This factor covers the requirements and physical demands placed on the employee by the work assignment. This includes physical exertion involved in the work. As at Level 8-1, the appellant's work is sedentary and there are no special physical requirements to perform the work.

We credit Level 8-1 (5 points).

Factor 9, Work environment

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. As illustrated at Level 9-1, the appellant's work occurs in a standard office setting with good lighting and ventilation, and there are no hazards posing greater than normal everyday risks to her personal safety.

We credit Level 9-1 (5 points).

Summary

We have evaluated the appellant's position as follows:

<i>Factor</i>	<i>Level</i>	<i>Points</i>
1. Knowledge required by the position	1-4	550
2. Supervisory controls	2-3	275
3. Guidelines	3-2	125
4. Complexity	4-3	150
5. Scope and effect	5-2	75
6. Personal contacts	6-3	60
7. Purpose of contacts	7-2	50
8. Physical demands	8-1	5
9. Work environment	9-1	5
<i>Total</i>		1,295

The point total falls within the point range (1,105-1,350) for the GS-6 grade level.

Decision

The appellant's position is properly classified as Secretary (Office Automation), GS-318-6.