



United States Office of Personnel Management

Office of Merit Systems Oversight and Effectiveness
Digest of Significant Classification Decisions and Opinions
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Standard: [The Classifier's Handbook](#) (August 1991)
Factor: N/A
Issue: Assigning factor levels using factor level descriptions and benchmarks

Identification of the Classification Issue

In deciding classification appeals, the Office of Personnel Management occasionally receives agency position evaluations which deny factor levels by comparing positions to Benchmarks or illustrations, rather than to factor level descriptions. In some cases, an agency may deny a grade to a position by pointing out that the position does not match the overall intent of a benchmark job description at that grade. The issue is whether this practice is consistent with Office of Personnel Management classification guidance.

Resolution

The Classifier's Handbook (chapter 2) contains the following guidance on the Factor Evaluation System:

Each factor level description represents the minimum or "threshold" for that factor. If the position factor exceeds one factor level but fails to meet fully the intent of the next higher factor level, then the lower point value must be credited. A position factor must meet the full intent of a factor level to be credited with that level.

NOTE: *Benchmark factor levels and illustrations* used in factor level descriptions may not always represent the threshold creditable for that factor. They may reflect conditions that fall anywhere in the range for that factor level. If a position factor appears to fall short of the benchmark factor level or illustration being used for

evaluation, then the basic factor level description should be referenced to be sure that the correct point value is credited.

This distinction between factor level descriptions, which represent thresholds, and benchmark factor levels, which do not necessarily represent thresholds, is important in applying Factor Evaluation System standards which contain benchmarks. A factor level may be credited by reference to either benchmark factor levels or factor level descriptions, but credit for a factor level may be denied only by reference to factor level descriptions. In addition, *illustrations, whether in benchmarks or factor level descriptions*, should not be used alone to deny credit for a factor level because illustrations do not necessarily represent factor level thresholds. Illustrations should be used only in combination with the factor level descriptions.