

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



Atlanta Oversight Division  
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**Classification Appeal Decision**  
**Under Section 5112 of Title 5, United States Code**

**Appellants:** [appellants' names]

**Agency classification:** Civil Engineering Technician  
GS-802-9

**Organization:** Production Control Branch  
Production Management Division  
Little Creek Site  
Navy Public Works Center  
[city, state]

**OPM decision:** Civil Engineering Technician  
GS-802-9

**OPM decision number:** C-0802-09-25

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Kathy W. Day  
Classification Appeals Officer

2/13/98

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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:**

[appellants' representative]

[name]

Director, Human Resources Office

Naval Base

[address]

Mr. William Duffy

Chief, Classification Branch

Field Advisory Services Division

Defense Civilian Personnel Management  
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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 Civil Engineering Technician, GS-802-9, Production Control Branch, Production Management Division, Little Creek Site, Navy Public Works Center, [city, state]. The appellants are requesting that their position be changed to Civil Engineering Technician, GS-802-11.

The appeal has been accepted and processed under section 5112(b) of title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.). 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**

These appellants are 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 work or below 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 appellants' position to others as a basis for deciding their appeal.

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

## **Position information**

The appellants are assigned to Position Number 7S182. The appellants, supervisor, and agency have certified to the accuracy of the position description.

The appellants analyze project requests and determine the scope of proposals to ensure the needs of the customer are addressed. Customers serviced are in any of the of the activities located at the

Public Works Center (PWC) Little Creek Site. Based on site visits and discussions with the customer, the appellants assess the project and scope of the work and prepare appropriate design sketches or drawings, detailed job plans, cost estimates, and material requirements involved in the maintenance, repair, new construction and rehabilitation/renovation of real property systems and equipment. The majority of their assignments involve structural work related to real property systems such as housing, messing, recreational, utility, and miscellaneous buildings although they also perform work in other areas as well. Supervision is provided by the Supervisory Production Controller (Construction), GS-802-12, whose primary function is that of head of the Production Management Division. The supervisor assigns work and sets priorities through a Production Controller who screens work requests to determine if they should be retained for handling by the engineering technicians or routed to the Engineering Division. Requests designated for handling by the technicians are distributed on a first come first served basis according to the technician's specialization. Unusual problems involving the project are discussed with the supervisor when there are disagreements between the technician, production controller and engineering staff on some facets of a project. The appellants determine the technical requirements of the job plans, construction plans, methods, components and/or materials, and cost estimates. The supervisor provides minimal procedural or technical assistance and completed work is reviewed in terms of 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 appellants do not contest the occupational series nor the title of their positions.

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 positions are properly placed in the GS-802 series.

### **Title determination**

The title Civil Engineering Technician applies to positions that involve work concerned with buildings, structures, dams, soil mechanics, tunnels, highways, water resources, bridges, airports, railways, and other phases of civil engineering. Since the work primarily involves development and preparation of project specifications and plans for work related to the structural maintenance, repair,

new construction and rehabilitation/renovation of buildings all of which are covered by the civil engineering specialization, the positions are properly titled Civil Engineering Technician.

### **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 the 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.

Discussions with the employees and the supervisor indicate that the assignment of jobs is based upon the discipline involved, the skills of the employee, and the workload priorities of the unit. The supervisor stated that he is basically an administrative supervisor for reporting purposes and is normally only involved with the "exceptions" the appellants may encounter during a project. Once assigned a project, the appellants meet onsite with customers to analyze the project request and assess the circumstances of the particular project. These meetings are essential as the customers generally know the desired outcome but lack the specific knowledge of the trades and of the codes, specifications, requirements, and standards that must be adhered to in accomplishing the work. The appellants are also provided an opportunity to determine the existence of conditions or situations which may negatively affect the costs, timeliness, construction methods, etc.; complicate the assignment; or require significant changes to the proposal submitted. They prepare preliminary field studies and concept drawings or sketches; recommend systems, materials and the most cost effective

construction methods (contractor, PWC shop personnel, etc.); prepare cost estimates; and resolve technical problems regarding what the customer wants and what is possible in terms of codes, requirements, materials, design, equipment, etc. They may also identify special conditions required by the existence of contaminants, such as asbestos and/or lead based paint, and identify unexpected problems involving original construction methods and materials. Once customer approval of the project is given, the appellants develop job plans to include a complete description of work, specifications, and milestones; requisition materials; sequence the phases of the project; coordinate the involvement of technicians from other specializations; and plan quality assurance inspections, site cleanup and debris removal. The project is then given to the PWC shops personnel or contractors who perform the actual work. The appellants are responsible for overall coordination and resolving any problems that may arise. They work with PWC shops personnel, contractors, vendors and suppliers, customers, and when necessary, engineer staff to ensure that the project is properly completed. The appellants have been assigned a variety of projects such as:

- ▶ A major project involving the concrete pads, roadwork, gravel, grading, etc., for the renovation of a training facility used by the Army Reserve at Fort Story. The building dated to approximately World War II and the grounds area covered several acres. There were significant problems with flooding that had caused massive deterioration over the years. The project entailed tearing out and replacing all old concrete pads on which vehicles/heavy equipment were parked; regrading the area to improve drainage (the biggest cause of the flooding); resurfacing all roads, etc. This project took five or six months from start to finish at a cost of approximately \$200,000.
- ▶ A project involving the demolition of an old commissary building at the installation at Little Creek. The building was 50-60 years old and had originally been used as a theater and was later converted into a commissary. It contained the commissary offices and warehouse. This project was one of the first major demolition projects at the installation. Due to its age, there were problems with asbestos. The appellant also stated that several high capacity air conditioning units had to be salvaged for use by other organizations at the installation prior to demolishing the building. After the building was demolished, the concrete slab left behind, as well as 7,000 - 8,000 square feet of asphalt parking lot, had to be removed. The area was seeded with grass and currently remains vacant.
- ▶ A project, currently in progress, involving the installation of energy efficient doors and storm doors in 589 housing units, most of which are occupied. The casings of the new doors, which are made of fiberglass, did not slide correctly. The appellant had to decide the cause of the problem and consult with the door manufacturer to determine what alterations could be made to the fiberglass casing that would resolve the problem.

The appellants have many years of experience in the building construction field and a wide range of trade knowledge related to building codes, fire codes, engineering standards, construction requirements and techniques, safety requirements, and environmental requirements related to the proper handling of asbestos and lead based paints. This experience allows them to apply sound

engineering practices in carrying out assignments and accomplishing the work. The supervisor stated that the technicians he supervises are expected to stay with assigned projects “from cradle to grave” to include outsourcing where necessary. If it is determined that a project should be totally outsourced, the appellants’ involvement ends. The work frequently requires that plans be modified based on circumstances encountered during site visits, discussions with customers as to their expectations or wishes, and equipment and structural peculiarities of the buildings involved. However, these modifications do not normally require a radical departure from established procedures or the development of a wide range of new or extremely complex procedures. Reference materials are available in the form of Navy/PWC directives, manufacturers’ specifications and recommendations, national and local codes and standards for different disciplines, engineering drawings, and sketches and files of similar projects. Where modifications or changes must be made, existing precedents are usually available and applicable, allowing the appellants to choose an appropriate means of accomplishing the work from these existing bodies of knowledge and their own experience.

The appellants are given their assignments along with major objectives, time frames, background information and guidance by the supervisor. After being assigned a project, the appellants are responsible for determining the technical requirements of the job. They do not receive technical assistance from the supervisor in completing the assignment or assistance in meetings or discussions with customers, contractors, vendors, suppliers, shop personnel or other technicians involved in the project. In those instances where technical assistance is required, they consult with engineers or architects as required.

Following approval by the customers, the work is assigned to the appropriate work center and the appellants are responsible for coordinating the work of other personnel involved in the project and assuring that the final product conforms with all applicable standards. They are also responsible for meeting with customers during the execution of the projects to resolve any job-related problems or concerns. The supervisor is apprised of unusual problems or delays that may affect project costs and timeliness. Guidelines generally available to the appellants include PWC and NAVFAC instructions and directives, design manuals, Engineering Performance Standards, technical directives, procedures, engineering drawings, sketches, specifications, manufacturers’ specifications and recommendations, and precedents and files of previous projects. Also included are appropriate national, state or local building codes, standards and practices for the different trades, requirements regarding environmental issues such as asbestos and lead paint removal and disposal, fire protection, etc. All projects require the use and application of established engineering principles, methods, and techniques and must conform to any applicable codes. These assignments are comparable to the GS-9 level.

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 coordination 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 appellants do not meet the GS-11 level. Larger and more complex projects are generally assigned to the Engineering Division. The appellants' assignments deal primarily with the civil aspects of conventional structural construction projects, design features, drawings and contract specifications for portions or complete buildings or other facilities. Although the buildings on which the appellants work tend to be older and may contain hazardous materials such as asbestos and lead paint, there are established national, local, industrial, and manufacturer codes, specifications, and engineering principles which the appellants can apply. In addition, in some cases, there are files of previous work available which can be referenced in order to help them accomplish their portions of the projects. The appellants do not generally deal with a variety of multiple-use construction projects and do not develop new procedures/systems as is envisioned at this level.

GS-10 level assignments are not specifically described in the standard. The appellants' assignments do not in any way regularly exceed those described at the GS-9 level. Therefore, their 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. 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.

Comparable to the GS-9 level, the appellants operate in an independent manner with very little technical supervision. However, technical advice and guidance is readily available. 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 appellants have regular contact with other engineering technicians, engineers, requesting officials, and contractors. These contacts are to gather information, to define the scope of the requested work, to clarify policy issues, etc.

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 appellants work independently under general supervision, the intent of the GS-11 level is not met. They may recommend a course of action, but the appellants seek technical advice on unusual problems and policy issues. 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 appellants are responsible for applying conventional engineering practices, techniques, and knowledge of the codes, specifications, and regulations to their projects. They exercise some judgment in determining the applicability of the specifications, codes, and engineering principles to the specific project, but consult with their 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 appellants' position does not regularly require them 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 Civil Engineering Technician, GS-802-9.