

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 1018
Atlanta, GA 30303-3109

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

Appellant: [Appellant]

Agency classification: Electronics Technician
GS-856-11

Organization: National Oceanic and Atmospheric
Administration
U.S. Department of Commerce

OPM decision: Electronics Technician
GS-856-11

OPM decision number: C-0856-11-02

/s/

Virginia L. Magnuson
Classification Appeals Officer

3/27/02

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]

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Introduction

On November 27, 2001, the Atlanta Oversight Division of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted an appeal for the position of Electronics Technician, GS-856-11, [organization], National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce, [geographic location]. The appellant is requesting that his position be classified as Computer Specialist, GS-334-12, or as Electronics Technician, GS-856-12. We received a complete administrative report from the agency on December 31, 2001.

We have accepted and decided this appeal under section 5112(b) of title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.).

General issues

The appellant makes various statements regarding his position description and the agency's actions during his attempts to have his position description updated. In adjudicating this appeal, our only concern is to make our own independent decision on the proper classification of his position. By law, we must make that decision solely by comparing his current duties and responsibilities to OPM standards and guidelines (5 U.S.C. 5106, 5107, and 5112). Therefore, we have considered the appellant's statements only insofar as they are relevant to making that comparison.

The appellant discusses the variety of work he performs as a factor in the classification of his position. Variety of work is only considered in determining the grade of a position to the extent that it impacts the skills, knowledge and qualifications required to perform the assignment.

In reaching our classification decision, we have carefully reviewed all information furnished by the appellant, his supervisor and his agency, including the official position description. An OPM representative conducted telephone interviews with the appellant and the appellant's immediate supervisor. This appeal was decided by considering the audit findings and all information of record.

Position information

The appellant is assigned to position description number [number]. The Chief, [organization], who retains certification authority for the division, certified the accuracy of the position description.

The appellant disagrees with the accuracy of his position description. He believes that his position description does not fully reflect the major computer specialist and systems management duties he performs on a regular and recurring basis. He believes that these duties and responsibilities are a major component of his day-to-day work and, if they were included in his position description, would warrant classification of his position at GS-12 in either the Computer Specialist Series, GS-334, or the Electronics Technician Series, GS-856.

After considering all the available information, including the official position description, and information furnished during telephone interviews with the appellant and his supervisor, we have concluded that the duties being performed by the appellant are adequately described for classification purposes in the position description of record.

This position is one of two Electronics Technician, GS-856-11, positions assigned to the [organization]. The primary purpose of the appellant's position is to provide maintenance support for the WSR-88D Next Generation Weather Radar (NEXRAD). He is also responsible for maintaining other electronic equipment/systems located at the [organization] and surrounding installations that support the agency's mission. These include the Advanced Weather Interactive Processing System (AWHIPS), Automated Surface Observing Systems (ASOS), upper air tracing systems, telecommunications systems, and hydrologic observing systems. The appellant participates in the installation, modification and relocation of assigned equipment/systems when necessary. He performs preventive, corrective and emergency equipment/systems maintenance and conducts tests and analyses to ensure equipment performance is within prescribed parameters. The appellant identifies system problems and equipment malfunctions. He recommends modifications or changes to improve system operation and maintenance and implements modifications as directed by the immediate supervisor, an Information Technology (IT) Specialist, GS-2210-13. The supervisor is identified within the organization as the Electronic Systems Analyst (ESA).

The [organization] has more than 100 standard, commercially available desktop computers and associated hardware and software, seven operating systems, six wide area networks (WANs) and three routers that support the organization's IT requirements. The ESA is the sole IT position at the [organization], however, management is currently recruiting for a second IT position. This position will assume some responsibilities involving management, integration, maintenance and support of the [organization]'s computer equipment/systems.

The preponderance of the appellant's work is related to the equipment/systems involved in the [organization]'s climatic and hydrologic activities. The [organization]'s Electronics Technicians, on an "as time permits" basis according to their supervisor, are involved in the maintenance, repair, testing, troubleshooting, installation, configuration, etc., of this IT equipment. The appellant estimates that these duties are performed for 25 percent or more of the time. In a memorandum dated August 7, 2001, the [organization] Meteorologist-in-Charge informed the appellant that this work will be performed on an irregular basis and will comprise less than 25 percent of his total duties.

The appellant reports to the ESA who assigns work in very general terms. The appellant is expected to independently plan and carry out the majority of his assignments with minimal supervisory assistance.

Series, title and standard determination

The agency placed the appellant's position in the Electronics Technician Series, GS-856, and titled it Electronics Technician. The appellant believes that the majority of his regular and recurring work is two-grade interval computer specialist work.

In May 2001, OPM issued a new position classification standard for Administrative Work in the IT Group, GS-2200. This standard abolished the Computer Specialist Series, GS-334, standard and instructed agencies to classify work previously covered by that series to the IT Management Series, GS-2210, when knowledge of IT (as defined in the standard) is the paramount requirement necessary to perform the primary duties of the position. Since the appellant believes his position is properly classified as a Computer Specialist, we applied the new standard to respond to his appeal rationale.

The IT standard covers two-grade interval administrative positions that manage, supervise, lead, administer, develop, deliver, and support IT systems and services. This series covers only those positions for which the paramount requirement is knowledge of IT principles, concepts, and methods to perform functions such as planning, designing, analyzing, developing and implementing systems for the organization. IT refers to systems and services used in the automated acquisition, storage, manipulation, management, movement, control, display, switching, interchange, transmission, assurance, or reception of information. IT includes computers, network components, peripheral equipment, software, firmware, services, and related resources.

The appellant stated that he installs and tests new/upgraded software (e.g., operating systems, applications, software patches, hardware drivers, etc.), sets up user and e-mail accounts, and establishes access rights. He also configures new computers, performs checkout procedures to ensure network compatibility and detect unauthorized software, performs system backups, and installs new machines on the network. The duties identified by the appellant do not involve administering the operation of a computer system, or the planning, design, or development of systems typical of IT Specialists. These types of duties are excluded, on page 19 of the standard, from the GS-2210 series, because they do not require the regular and recurring application of knowledge of IT principles, concepts, and methods.

The Electronics Technician Series includes positions that require (a) the knowledge of the techniques and theories characteristic of electronics such as a knowledge of basic electricity and electronic theory, algebra, and elementary physics, (b) the ability to apply that knowledge to duties involved in engineering functions such as design, development, evaluation, testing, installation and maintenance of electronic equipment, and (c) a knowledge of the capabilities, limitations, operations, design characteristics, and functional use of a variety of types and models of electronic equipment and systems.

The appellant's primary duties and responsibilities are characteristic of the kind of work described in the Electronics Technician Series. His assignments involve maintenance support for a variety of assigned computer controlled electronics equipment/systems. The [organization] uses the equipment/systems to gather, control, process, integrate, display, store and transmit meteorological and hydrological data. The media, public, other governmental agencies, military and private sector use this data to provide weather, hydrologic and climatic observations, forecasts, and warnings of hazardous and/or life-threatening weather conditions.

The appellant performs preventive, corrective and emergency maintenance and repairs to ensure proper functioning of mission critical equipment and systems that are required to be operational

24 hours a day. The majority of his work involves the WSR-88D NEXRAD radar system, its subsystems and components. The appellant's work requires knowledge of the techniques and theories characteristic of electronics, the ability to apply that knowledge to duties involved in evaluating, testing, installing and maintaining electronic equipment, and knowledge of the capabilities, limitations, operations, design characteristics, and functional use of a variety of types of electronic equipment and systems.

The appellant's position is properly placed in the Electronics Technician Series, GS-856, and titled Electronics Technician. We must use the GS-856 position classification standard for grade level determination.

Grade determination

The GS-856 standard uses the following criteria to evaluate the grade-level differences in this occupation: (1) The kind and degree of knowledge about electronics required; (2) the operational setting in which the work is performed; and (3) the kind and degree of technical responsibility exercised.

The grade-level descriptions in the standard provide grade distinctions under the headings of Development Functions and Other Functions. Development Functions (design, construction, packaging, testing, redesign, and documentation) comprise a limited part of the appellant's activities. The installation, maintenance, operation and testing performed by the appellant on electronics equipment and systems used for meteorological forecasts are described under Other Functions. The grade distinguishing criteria under Other Functions does not contain subheadings as does Development Functions.

At the GS-9 level, technicians who perform installation, maintenance, operation, and testing duties work with electronic equipment that typically is specially designed, constructed, or modified to fill a specific function peculiar to the organization using it. In many cases modifications are initiated by the agency headquarters to meet agency program or operating requirements, or by the local installation in order to meet local requirements caused by geographical, program, or other requirements. The factory documentation, therefore, may have been modified to reflect changes made subsequent to manufacture. Electronics technicians at this level must recognize and know how to deal with such modifications and incomplete documentation and to reflect changes in the documentation.

GS-9 electronics technicians typically are concerned with complex electronic systems that are made up of combinations of components assembled into a configuration designed to accomplish specific objectives (for example, a radio communications system, a weather radar system, a telemetry system). Some GS-9 technicians are responsible for the performance of maintenance work on complete electronic systems of considerable complexity, or on subsystems of the most complex electronic systems used in air navigation control. They plan and carry out their assignments and have authority to remove the system from operation after weighing impact to overall flight operations.

GS-9 electronics technicians may work primarily with subsystems that are notably complex by reason of miniature size, density of circuitry, lack of available documentation, etc. In some cases inaccessibility of equipment, either in remote spots, in high towers, or in cramped quarters, increases the difficulty of the work since it must be performed without the aid of bulky test equipment, without time for trial-and-error approaches, and in such a way as to assure trouble-free operation with infrequent attendance by the technician.

GS-9 electronics technicians typically carry out all phases of maintenance, troubleshooting, installation, operation, and testing of electronic systems. They are expected to be thoroughly familiar with the theory, design characteristics, operation, and functions of the equipment they work on, as well as the individual requirements and modifications deriving from site and program characteristics. They work with a high degree of independence and are technically responsible for the quality and accuracy of their work which is typically reviewed on a spot-inspection basis only.

At GS-11, the highest level identified in the standard, technicians perform installation, maintenance, operation, and testing duties similar to those described at GS-9. However, they are responsible for the work on one or more complete electronic systems that are classed as among the most complex by virtue of such characteristics as: (1) the great extent to which numerous subsystems are interrelated, (2) the geographical dispersion of many subsystems of the total system, (3) the degree to which malfunctioning or incorrect values anywhere in the system will adversely affect its total operation, (4) incomplete standardization of the system, and (5) the failure of the system in any aspect will be directly responsible for the failure of the mission of which it is a part. In these situations, scientific research involving extensive investments of skilled scientists, time, and money; effective law enforcement; or the protection of life and property hinge upon the accuracy and reliability of the electronic components of a project.

Employees assigned to positions at the GS-11 level typically also establish the sequence and timing of complex projects; work out arrangements with suppliers, contractors, and other governmental or private organizations who either participate in or whose operations are drastically affected by the progress of the project; and solve problems arising from the conflicting requirements of these different organizations. GS-11 electronics technicians report to engineers, technicians of higher grade, or program officials and are responsible to them for technical results and for conformity to agency requirements and regulations.

The appellant's work meets, but does not exceed, the GS-11 level. As at the GS-11 level, the appellant is responsible for performing the full range of activities necessary to maintain and repair electronic equipment and systems used to collect and process a variety of data. The appellant's regular and recurring work involves the WSR-88D NEXRAD weather radar and other complex, complete systems (e.g., ASOS, AWHIPS, telecommunications, NOAA weather radio, wind profilers, sensors, etc.) assigned to the [organization]. The equipment/systems for which the appellant is responsible can present unique problems resulting from requirements for connecting to and communicating with other equipment/systems. Diagnosing problems may be complicated by the requirement to perform analyses to determine the specific piece of equipment or part of the system, which may be in another location geographically, causing the malfunction. The appellant recommends modifications or changes to improve system operation. The

functions performed by the equipment/systems represent the agency's primary mission, and failures or malfunctions impact the organization's ability to issue weather warnings in time to prevent major losses of property or life. This work assignment exceeds the GS-9 level and meets the GS-11 level since the systems for which the appellant is routinely responsible are characterized by numerous, interrelated subsystems, geographical dispersion, and seriousness of malfunctions.

Decision

The appellant's position is correctly classified as Electronics Technician, GS-856-11.