



United States  
**Office of  
Personnel Management**

Washington, DC 20415

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

**Appellant:** [appellant et al.]

**Agency classification:** Audiovisual Assistant  
GS-1001-6

**Organization:** Multimedia Branch  
[Squadron]  
[Headquarters]  
[Air Force Base]  
Department of the Air Force  
[city and state]

**OPM decision:** GS-1001-6  
Title to be determined by agency

**OPM decision number:** C-1001-06-01

/s/ Robert D. Hendler

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Robert D. Hendler  
Classification and Pay Claims  
Program Manager  
Center for Merit System Accountability  
Human Capital Leadership  
and Merit System Accountability

May 31, 2006

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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*, appendix 4, section G (address provided in appendix 4, section H).

**Decision sent to:**

[12 appellants]  
Multimedia Branch  
[Squadron]  
[division]  
[Air Force Base, city and state]

[classification officer]  
Classification Officer  
[address, division]  
[address]  
[Air Force Base, city and state]

[personnel officer]  
[Personnel Officer]  
[section, division]  
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## **Introduction**

On May 18, 2005, the Chicago Field Services Group of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted a group classification appeal for [12 appellants]. They occupy identical additional positions (hereinafter referred to as position), currently classified as Audiovisual Assistant, GS-1001-6, in the [Branch], [Squadron], [Air Force Base], United States Air Force, [city and state]. The appellants believe their position should be reclassified as Visual Information Specialist, GS-1001-9. [appellant] was the initial lead appellant. [appellant] was subsequently designated as the lead appellant replacing [appellant] who no longer is assigned to the position. We received a partial agency administrative report (AAR) on June 21, 2005, and the complete AAR on December 12, 2005. We accepted and decided this appeal under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.).

To help decide the appeal, we conducted a telephone audit with the new lead appellant on January 10, 2006, and interviewed the immediate supervisor by telephone on January 11, 2006. In reaching our decision, we carefully considered the audit and interview findings and all other information of record furnished by the appellants and the agency.

## **Background**

The position is located in a Most Efficient Organization formed in April 2003 as the result of an A-76 study to consolidate all visual information (VI) work into a central work center providing support for all base organizations.

## **General issues**

The appellants occupy a standard position description [(SPD #####)] which was revised on February 22, 2005, based on the findings of an agency desk audit which was requested by the supervisor. The supervisor certifies that the new SPD is an accurate description of the work performed. The appellants agree that it is accurate, but disagree with the title and grade.

Implicit in the appellants' rationale is a concern that their position is classified inconsistently with other positions that perform similar work. By law, we must classify positions solely by comparing current duties and responsibilities to OPM standards and guidelines (5 U.S.C. 5106, 5107, and 5112). Since the comparison to standards is the exclusive method for classifying positions, we cannot compare the appellants' position to others, which may or may not be classified correctly, as a basis for deciding the appeal.

Like OPM, the appellants' agency must classify positions based on comparison to OPM standards and guidelines. However, the agency also has primary responsibility for ensuring that its positions are classified consistently with OPM appeal decisions. If the appellants consider their position so similar to others that they all warrant the same classification, they may pursue the matter by writing to their human resources office. In doing so, they 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 theirs, the agency must correct

their classification to be consistent with this appeal decision. Otherwise, the agency should explain to them the differences between their position and the others.

The appellants also request backpay for work they claim has been performed at a higher level. However, the U.S. Comptroller General states that an “. . . employee is entitled only to the salary of the position to which he is actually appointed, regardless of the duties performed. When an employee performs the duties of a higher grade level, no entitlement to the salary of the higher grade exists until such time as the individual is actually promoted. This rule was reaffirmed by the United States Supreme Court in *United States v. Testan*, 424 U.S. 392, at 406 (1976), where the Court stated that ‘. . . the federal employee is entitled to receive only the salary of the position to which he was appointed, even though he may have performed the duties of another position or claim that he should have been placed in a higher grade.’ Consequently, backpay is not available as a remedy for misassignments to higher level duties or improper classifications.” (CG decision B-232695, December 15, 1989).

The appellants make various statements about their agency and its evaluation of their position. In adjudicating this appeal, our only concern is to make our own independent decision on the proper classification of their position. By law, we must make that decision solely by comparing their current duties and responsibilities to OPM position classification standards (PCSs) 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. Because our decision sets aside all previous agency decisions, the appellants’ concerns regarding their agency’s classification review process are not germane to this decision.

### **Position information**

The appellants work under the general supervision of the Base [section] Branch (Center) Manager, a Supervisory Visual Information Specialist, GS-1084-11, who oversees 19 employees. This includes two Audiovisual Production Specialists, GS-1071-9, three Audiovisual Production Assistants, GS-1071-6, one Lead Audiovisual Assistant, GS-1001-7, and thirteen Audiovisual Assistants, GS-1001-6 (12 of whom are the appellants). The Center provides VI work products and services that support and affect the adequacy of such activities as public information, training, developing technical publications, or conducting business with professional communities associated with the work of the air base.

The appellants’ primary duties, occupying approximately 43 percent of their time, consist of using electronic systems to capture, store, retrieve, manipulate, transfer, compute, produce, and print by providing VI services necessary to support base personnel in their reporting, training, and communications responsibilities. Their work involves producing printed publications or the visual aspects of oral presentations using computer graphics software packages. The purpose of the work is to produce a variety of conventional visual arts products that depict or present subject matter information or ideas.

The appellants work with customers in producing printed material, which requires specific visual materials to communicate information. The customers are base managers and staff who are the authors, editors, or program officials who need the Center’s VI support services. The appellants

receive requests for preparing VI products for exhibits, briefings, presentations, periodicals, pamphlets and other publications, special reports, brochures, and handouts. They review written requests and ideas concerning photographs, charts, and/or diagrams provided by requesting personnel. The appellants assign work orders, and determine processes to be used, administer quality control checks, and notify customers when the work products are completed. After receiving a request, the appellants meet with the customer to record the information objectives of the project, the visual points to be emphasized, relationships to be stressed, and the relative degree of importance of various pieces of the information to be disseminated. They make initial decisions on such design matters as size, layout, kind and quality of materials, media, color schemes, typography, lighting effects, specific visual elements or materials incorporated, and reproduction methods. They advise customers on the technical advantages and disadvantages of various formats, styles, media and methods of reproduction, suggesting those that will best meet the information objectives of each request.

The appellants also provide photographic support to base managers and staff and the organization's public information activities using digital cameras (approximately 20 percent of their time) and related electronic imaging software (approximately 32 percent of their time) to edit and produce photographs. They also photograph equipment components, accident scenes, and other stationary objects for documentation, diagnostic, or training purposes. The Center provides "on call" or "stand-by" photographic support for documenting military accidents and crime scenes.

They spend approximately 5 percent of their time providing audiovisual (AV) and/or multimedia production support to the organization's public information activities and video teleconferencing operational support to the video teleconferencing facilitator.

Based on our review, we find the official PD contains the major duties and responsibilities assigned to and performed by the appellant and we incorporate it by reference into our decision.

### **Title, series, and standard determination**

The agency placed the position in the GS-1000 Information and Arts Group which includes positions involving professional, artistic, technical, or clerical work involving (1) the communication of information and ideas through verbal, visual, or pictorial means; (2) collection, custody, presentation, display, and interpretation of art work, cultural objects, and other artifacts; or (3) a branch of fine or applied arts such as industrial design, interior design, or musical composition. Within that Group, the agency has assigned the position to the General Arts and Information Series, GS-1001, and identified the work as one-grade interval in nature. This series covers positions which administer, supervise, or perform (1) any combination of work characteristic of two or more series in this group where no one type of work is series controlling, the paramount qualification are not characteristic of another series in the group, and the combination of work is not specifically provided for in another series, or (2) other work typical of this group for which no other series has been established.

The appellants agree their work is covered by the GS-1001 series, but state that series does not cover one-grade interval positions as classified by the agency, but only two-grade interval

positions. The appellants say that the agency failed to properly use specific subject-matter PCSs to determine the grade level of their position, such as the PCS for the Visual Information Series, GS-1084, and the related Grade-Evaluation Guide for Visual Arts Work, and the PCSs for the Illustrating Series, GS-1020, the Photography Series, GS-1060, and the Audiovisual Series, GS-1071, all of which cover two-grade interval work.

Work covered by the Visual Information Series, GS-1084, includes the design and display of such visual materials as photographs, illustrations, diagrams, graphs, objects, models, slides, and charts used in books, magazines, pamphlets, exhibits, live or video recorded speeches or lectures, and other means of communicating. This work requires knowledge of and ability to apply the principles of visual design; knowledge of the technical characteristics associated with various methods of visual display; and the ability to present subject matter information in a visual form that will convey the intended message to, or have the desired effect on, the intended audience.

The GS-1084 PCS specifically excludes positions, like the appellants', involving the use of computer graphics software packages to produce illustrations, charts, or graphs, or to lay out printed material, where established formats and ready-made images in the software offer little opportunity for the exercise of artistic judgment or skill beyond deciding the proportions and placement of ready-made visual elements on the page, poster, or transparency. While visual products include books, magazines, pamphlets, exhibits, or series of visual images similar to those produced by the appellants, the primary purpose of the GS-1084 work is to design and select the various elements involved in producing the visual products. In contrast, the appellants insert images, charts, and text into documents generated by computer graphic and word processing software to produce conventional visual products. They do not create the sketches, drawings, or models typically provided by VI specialists in order to communicate their design ideas to others. Therefore, the Grade-Evaluation Guide for Visual Arts Work may not be used to evaluate their work. The appellants also do not produce the type of illustrations using the range of artistic techniques required for coverage by the GS-1020 Illustrating Series.

The Photography Series, GS-1060, covers positions that involve supervising or performing work in operating still, television (video), or motion picture cameras, and in processing photographic film and negatives, including requiring the knowledge of the equipment, techniques, and processes of photography. However, because of the limited planning and artistic demands, the appellants' work does not meet the basic knowledge requirements for coverage by the GS-1060 PCS. The appellants use a simple point and shoot digital camera to take photos, and all photography is digital. The images are downloaded into a PC and manipulated by standard electronic imaging software (Adobe Photoshop) and printed or occasionally merged into other graphics software for production of final visual products. The appellants point to Level 1-5, the lowest level for Factor 1, Knowledge Required by the Position, described in the PCS, which covers providing photographic support to an organization's public information activities by photographing or videotaping award presentations, official portraits, buildings and grounds, and staged or candid shots of equipment and work operations. However, the appellant's photographic functions do not require a level of knowledge necessary to perform duties of conventional photography to support coverage by or use of the 1060 PCS for grade evaluation purposes because the work does not require either (1) working knowledge of the subject matter to be photographed, and/or (2) artistic ability in selecting, arranging, and lighting subjects or in

processing work. In performing their photography duties, the appellants use a digital camera (three similar models are available) which does not require them to possess and apply basic knowledge of the type intended by application of the 1060 PCS, i.e., special knowledge of lights, film type, lenses, diffusers, and range of complicated techniques to photograph different types of subjects under varying environmental conditions such as exposures needed to photograph indoors and outdoors, in confined and spacious areas, in natural and fluorescent lighting, and at night is required. Their work in editing and modifying images using electronic imaging software does not meet the analytical and artistic demands of processing work covered by the GS-1060 PCS; i.e., assessing the condition of source materials, and making adjustments in processing methods based on a knowledge of the working characteristics of photographic chemical and solutions, and how they must be manipulated to achieve proper contrast, density, and color.

The appellants point to the Audio-Visual Production Series, GS-1071, which involves the production of videotape, radio, motion picture, or other AV presentations. Covered positions involve planning, organizing, and directing the work of writers, actors, narrators, set designers, camera operators, sound technicians, and other AV production personnel. Such functions are vested in the Centers' AV production specialist positions which the appellants, in turn, support. Furthermore, the limited amount of time the appellants spend on such work cannot impact the grade-level worth of the position since it does not occupy 25 percent or more of the appellants' work time.

Contrary to the appellants' assertion, the GS-1001 series is one of a number of series on the list of two-grade interval series in Appendix 1 to the *Introduction to the Position Classification Standards* that covers both one and two-level interval positions. We find the appellants perform one-grade interval work typical of the GS-1000 Group for which no other series has been established. The appellants apply extensive practical knowledge gained through experience and specific training as described for one-grade interval technical work in the *Introduction*. Their work involves using electronic systems to capture, store, retrieve, manipulate, transfer, compute, produce, and print photographs and visual art products.

Some of the work performed by the appellants may involve substantial elements of work found in an administrative field. Unlike administrative work, the appellants' work does not involve the exercise of analytical ability, judgment, discretion, and personal responsibility, and the application of a substantial body of knowledge of principles, concepts, and practices applicable to one or more fields of administration or management as found in the two-grade interval occupations cited by the appellants. While administrative positions do not *require* specialized education, they do involve the type of skills (analytical, research, writing, judgment) typically gained through a college level education, or through progressively responsible experience. In contrast, the appellants exercise technical analytical ability, judgment, discretion, and personal responsibility and apply knowledge of the technical principles, concepts, and practices applicable to using graphics and imaging software to manipulate data to produce products in a more limited capacity than that found in two-grade interval positions.

The appellants' position requires applying a practical knowledge of the purpose, operation, procedures, techniques, and guidelines set forth by the Base Multimedia program. They provide services that are of a continuing, repetitive nature, and performed on the basis of acquiring a

familiarity with the visual information process gained through on the job experience. The work does not involve making the sort of judgmental decisions characteristic of two-grade interval positions. The appellants exercise some judgment in taking and processing photographs, but the record shows that they normally deal with recurring types of projects typical of one-grade interval work. After a careful review of the record, we found the appellants' duties do not require them to analyze or use evaluative methods and techniques, and therefore, their position must be classified under the one-grade interval structure. Accordingly, the appellants' position is allocated as a one-grade interval position in the GS-1001 series. Since there are no prescribed titles for use in the GS-1001 series, the title is not appealable (see 5 CFR 511.607(a)(4)), and the agency may construct a title as provided in the Introduction, section III.H.2.

The GS-1001 series does not include grade level criteria. The *Introduction* states that if there are no specific published grade-level criteria, then the standard selected as the basis for comparison should be for a kind of work as similar as possible to the work evaluated with respect to (1) the kind of work processes, functions, or subject-matter of work performed; (2) the qualifications required to do the work; (3) the level of difficulty and responsibility; and (4) the combination of classification factors which have the greatest influence on grade level.

The agency evaluated the appellants' position by applying the Office Automation Grade Evaluation Guide (OAGEG) which evaluates the use of office automation (OA) technology. When OA duties are assigned to positions involving other subject matter work, OPM guidance states that the OAGEG is to be used in combination with other PCSs or guides to evaluate positions classified in other series. An example provided by the OAGEG describes a situation where a VI assistant may use a graphics package to produce charts or other visual products, in addition to word processing work. The appellants' position involves the use of computer graphics software packages to produce illustrations, charts, or graphs, or to lay out printed material, where established formats and ready-made images in the software offer little opportunity for the exercise of artistic judgment or skill beyond deciding the proportions and placement of ready-made visual elements on the page, poster, or transparency.

The Grade Level Guide for Clerical and Assistance Work (the Guide) provides general criteria for use in determining the grade level of non-supervisory clerical and assistance work. Assistance work is defined as technical work performed to support the administration or operation of the programs of an organizational unit. This work requires a working knowledge of the work processes and procedures of an administrative field and the mission and operational requirements of the unit. The appellant's work in using electronic systems to capture, store, retrieve, manipulate, transfer, compute, produce, and print by providing VI services necessary to support base personnel in their reporting, training, and communications responsibilities. They work with a multiplicity of customers in producing printed material, which requires specific visual materials to communicate information which, as discussed previously, is one-grade interval technical work.

Therefore, we will use the OAGEG to focus on and evaluate the appellants' technical work using graphics software programs to produce photographs and VI work products and the Guide to evaluate the visual art assistance work. The grade level for such positions is established by the



guide that results in the highest grade level for the duties assigned and performed for 25 percent or more of the work time.

### **Grade determination**

#### *Evaluation using the OAGEG.*

The OAGEG is written in Factor Evaluation System (FES) format. Positions are placed in grades on the basis of their duties, responsibilities, and the qualifications required as evaluated in terms of the nine FES factors common to non-supervisory General Schedule (GS) positions. Point values are assigned for each factor, with the total numerical score being converted to a grade level using the grade conversion chart provided in the guide. Under the FES, the factor point values mark the lower end of the ranges for each factor level. For a position to warrant a given point value, it must be fully equivalent to the overall intent of the description. If the position fails in any significant aspect to meet a particular factor level description, the point value for the next lower factor must be assigned, unless the deficiency is balanced by an equally important aspect that meets a higher level.

The agency the position at Levels 1-4, 2-3, 3-2, 4-3, 5-2, 6-2, 7-2, 8-2, and 9-2. The appellants disagree with the assignments of levels for Factors 1, 2, 3, and 5. However, after a careful review of the entire record, we have decided to review all nine factors to insure proper factor level relationships.

#### *Factor 1, Knowledge Required by the Position*

This factor measures the nature and extent of information an employee must understand in order to do the work and the skills needed to apply that knowledge.

At Level 1-4, the work requires knowledge of the capabilities, operating characteristics, and advanced functions of a variety of types of office automation software; and knowledge of the similarities, differences, and integration of the different software types. This level of knowledge is applied to select the most appropriate software type for a specific office need, to integrate different software types into a single document, or to complete other nonstandard assignments using varied office automation technologies. Illustrative of such work is an employee who uses desk-top publishing software to prepare varied news releases, brochures, reports, and publications by applying knowledge of the types of information maintained and the procedures for accessing and importing the information to be included in publications. The employee applies knowledge of desk-top publishing capabilities to enhance the presentation of the data, e.g., electronically changing tables to graphs, superimposing one graph over another, adding boxed explanatory text to graphics, highlighting significant material with shadowing, importing graphics into narrative text, varying style and pitch of type within the text, and adjusting size and shape of pages to fit the publication involved.

Level 1-4 is met. The appellants' work requires knowledge of multimedia methods, techniques, and materials used in the design, production, and reproduction of visual products to produce aesthetically composed visual products in a timely manner; of professional layout, drawing and

painting software; of spatial relationships, form, typography, color and design; of standard off-the-shelf graphics, word processing, spreadsheet, and/or database management software applications to integrate information for inclusion in visual presentations; and of digital photographic equipment and image enabling software for editing and retouching photographic images.

As at Level 1-4, the highest level described for this factor, the appellants are required to demonstrate a working knowledge and clear understanding of the capabilities of several software types and the ability to integrate information from two or more software programs into a single product on most individual assignments. For example, to complete assignments involving the production of VI products, the appellants utilize Corel Draw, Version 11, and Adobe Illustrator. Both of these software applications are vector enhancing programs. In addition, the appellants have access to the software applications contained in Microsoft Office Suite, such as Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel, Microsoft PowerPoint, Microsoft Access, and Microsoft Publisher. The appellants draw on their knowledge of how these software applications function in order to produce VI products for exhibits, briefings, presentations, periodicals, pamphlets, event programs, reports, brochures, posters, and handouts.

Also comparable to Level 1-4, the appellants use standard off-the-shelf software to capture, store, retrieve, manipulate, transfer, compute, produce, and print to support base personnel by providing VI services. They also use a variety of standard photographic and layout and design software applications to produce a variety of visual presentations, such as slides, photos, illustrations, charts, graphs, brochures, exhibits, layout material, and other visual factors where practical skill and judgment are required to decide proportion and placement of the visual elements. This is assisted by the capture of VI data using digital cameras and manipulating it with electronic imaging software programs. The primary camera used is the Nikon Model D100 digital single lens reflex 35 mm camera. Other models of the same brand name camera available for use include D1X and D1H. Adobe Photoshop is the application software used exclusively for processing photographs. The appellants can use Adobe Photoshop to make any needed adjustments to photos such as cropping, brushing (retouching), adjusting color, correcting common lens distortions, and sharpening the image.

In addition to the office automation software mentioned thus far, the appellants must also demonstrate working knowledge and understanding of the features and functions of several types of hardware, such as personal computers, printers, and scanners. Their work requires a demonstrated knowledge of the capabilities, operating characteristics, and advanced functions of a variety of office automation software, the ability to integrate information in many assignments from more than one source, and the attendant use of compatible hardware. That meets, but does not exceed, Level 1-4. Therefore, Level 1-4 (550 points) is credited.

### *Factor 2, Supervisory Controls*

This factor covers the nature and extent of direct or indirect controls exercised by the supervisor, the employee's responsibility, and the review of completed work.

At Level 2-3, the highest level described in the OAGEG, assignments are given with information on general administrative changes, deadlines, and priorities. For work that has not previously been automated, the supervisor defines overall objectives. The employee works independently to plan and carry out steps for completing assignments in accordance with established office instructions and practices for office automation. When current practices or deviations in an assignment cause problems, the incumbent uses own initiative to resolve them and coordinates efforts with other employees involved in or affected by the nonstandard procedures. Completed work is evaluated for technical soundness, usefulness, and conformance with office operating requirements and needs. The methods used to produce work normally are not reviewed.

The appellants' work meets but does not exceed Level 2-3. Illustrative of this level, the supervisor provides information on general administrative changes and deadlines. The appellants obtain new assignments by picking up work orders from a work order in-basket located at the front desk. They "log in" work orders by entering appropriate information in a software application called the Multi-media Information Management System (MIMS). Thereafter, they interact directly and independently with the customer to advise on the best techniques and media to accomplish the customer's needs. They plan and carry out assignments in accordance with established office practices. Workload among the staff is managed through daily meetings to discuss the number of assignments being handled by each member of the staff and their status. Typical of Level 2-3, completed work is evaluated for technical soundness, usefulness, and conformance with the needs of the customer based on the customer's satisfaction with the product. Therefore, this factor is credited with Level 2-3 (275 points).

### *Factor 3, Guidelines*

This factor covers the nature of guidelines and the judgment needed to apply them.

At Level 3-2, guidelines include both detailed step-by-step instructions for specific office automation tasks and more general procedural guidelines in the form of manufacturer's manuals and tutorials for users, agency correspondence procedures, style manuals, technical dictionaries, sample work products, etc. Employees must select and apply detailed instructions for each office automation task or function, when available. For tasks not covered by specific guidelines, they must search more general guidelines to determine the specific steps to apply. Judgment is required because of the number and similarity of guidelines or the availability of alternative procedures for accomplishing a function such as choosing which editing procedure to use, depending on the nature and extent of the changes required.

At Level 3-3, much of the work requires adaptation of available guides, such as user's manuals, to meet requirements for new tasks or to solve processing problems either encountered in the employee's own work or referred by others. Judgment is required to search manuals for methods that can be applied and to adapt those methods to specific requirements. Employees also

exercise initiative and judgment in deviating from existing instructions or practices to resolve operating problems or to develop more efficient processing procedures. Frequently the methods developed become guidelines for other employees in the unit. Problems that cannot be resolved by adapting existing guidelines are referred to automation specialists.

Level 3-2 is met. The appellants use knowledge of visual arts methods, techniques, materials, and the subject matter itself to adapt already existing information to specific requirements. Illustrative of Level 3-2, most of the assignments, especially as this applies to the development of VI products, require the selection and adaptation of information already available in software programs or examples of previous similar, but not identical projects, done for the organization, based on sketches, construction drawings, or other input provided by the customer (at times, customer input may be verbal in nature). The appellants format documents automatically by using macros available within the graphic software packages. They exercise independent judgment in formulating initial decisions on such design matters as size, layout, kind and quality of materials, media, color schemes, typography and so forth. However, the sources of information upon which such decisions are made are the existing software programs. The appellants then provide a visual sample to the customer, and this is refined until the customer is satisfied with the result which, in most cases, is the basis for evaluation of the success of the employees' work. Level 3-3 is not met because there is no requirement in the position for "deviating from existing instructions and practices" on a regular and recurring basis within the meaning of the position classification system. Instead, the position relies heavily on work samples provided by customers or on previously completed work products that can be adapted for current assignments. Therefore, this factor is evaluated at Level 3-2 (125 points).

#### *Factor 4, Complexity*

This factor 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 variety of textual documents processed must be evaluated in terms of the intricacy of the formats involved and the extent to which the employee must make adjustments.

At Level 4-3, the highest level described in the OAGEG, work involves using several types of software packages for different office needs. In deciding how to proceed, the employee considers many factors that are varied and that are not always clearly established. These include, for example, the nature and capability of different software types or software packages of the same type; the similarities, differences, and integration compatibilities among software types and software packages; the general operations of the unit such as the source and timing of data for reports; and the current and long term use of the subject document or report and how its use may change. In performing the work, the employee applies judgment in considering and selecting from among many different software types in light of the range and peculiarities of the unit's information processing capabilities and requirements. The employee regularly develops methods and procedures for office automation tasks, and identifies and solves problems in existing methods or procedures.

Level 4-3 is met. The appellants apply knowledge of a variety of art media and visual materials and methods to produce finished VI products. These products typically present factual information or depict specific operations or occurrences, and are based on design concepts and subject matter content provided by customers. The appellants apply knowledge of a variety of art media and visual materials and methods to produce finished visual products. Illustrative of Level 4-3, the appellants produce a variety of conventional visual arts products that depict or present subject matter information or ideas. These products are conventional in that similar products have been produced in the past covering the same general subject matter and using the same general manner of presentation. The variety of visual presentations include slides, photos, illustrations, charts, graphs, brochures, exhibits, layout material, and other VI products. The work is accomplished through the use of a variety of standard off-the-shelf computer graphics software packages to produce products where practical skill and judgment are required to decide proportion and placement of the visual elements. This is assisted by the capture of VI data (photographs) using digital cameras and manipulating it with electronic imaging software programs. Themes or subjects, as well as the general format (media, color scheme, overall dimensions, etc.) to be used, are already specified by customers. The emphasis is on technical proficiency in the development of visual arts products. The appellants make decisions necessary to work out details of the final visual product after the subject, theme, and general format have been agreed upon with the customer in the form of sketches, scale models, plans, or diagrams. This is typically what the appellants are called on to do. The work exceeds Level 4-2 because it requires consideration and use of several different types of software programs to meet customer needs. Consequently, this factor is evaluated at Level 4-3 (150 points).

#### *Factor 5, Scope and Effect*

This factor covers the relationship between the nature of work; i.e., the purpose, breadth, and depth of the assignment, and the effect of the work products or services both within and outside the organization. The concept of scope alone does not provide sufficient information to properly understand and evaluate the impact of the position. The effect of the work completes the picture allowing consistent evaluations.

At Level 5-2, the highest level described in the OAGEG, the purpose of the work is to collect, select, organize, and provide information in oral or written form. This may involve telephone conversations, electronic mail, reports, on-line databases, and e-mails. The work is performed in accordance with established rules, regulations, procedures, and office automation practices. The work affects the way in which the efforts of other employees are supported and increases the availability and usefulness of the information being presented.

The appellants' work meets but does not exceed Level 5-2. The purpose of this position is to plan the details of developing a variety of conventional visual products that depict or present subject matter information or ideas. Typical of that level, the work products support and affect the adequacy of such activities as public information, training, developing technical publications, or conducting relations with professional communities associated with the work of the base organization. This factor is evaluated at Level 5-2 (75 points).

## *Factor 6 and Factor 7, Personal Contacts and Purpose of Contacts*

### *Personal Contacts*

This factor includes face-to-face contacts and telephone and radio dialogue with persons not in the supervisory chain. The purpose of personal contacts ranges from factual exchanges of information to situations involving significant or controversial issues and differing viewpoints, goals, or objectives.

The OAGEG describes two levels of personal contacts as follows:

1. Employees within the immediate work unit or related support units such as points-of-contact and document originators.
2. Employees at various levels throughout the agency who are involved in or affected by integrating or changing automated office procedures.

The position requires contacts with persons (customers) outside of the immediate work unit. These customers, either requesting the services of the appellants or providing information or services to the appellants, are affected to the extent that warrants the crediting of Level 2.

### *Purpose of Contacts*

The OAGEG further sets forth two scenarios regarding the purpose of contacts:

- a. To exchange information about the assignment or methods to be used to complete the assignment. For example, to clarify terminology, determine priorities of projects, discuss additions or revisions, or discuss equipment capabilities.
- b. To plan, coordinate, and integrate work processes or work methods for office automation between and among related work units.

Level “b” is not met because the appellants are not required to coordinate or integrate office automation methods between and among related work units. All such coordination/integration regarding the processes used to accomplish assignments takes place within the work unit. On the other hand, the position does require the exchange of information about the assignment or methods to be used to complete the assignment. The information exchanged may range from easily understood to highly technical. Level “a” is appropriate.

The combination of Level 2a results in the assignment of 45 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 and the physical exertion involved in the work.

The OAGEG describes physical demands at one level, i.e., work that is sedentary and requires no special physical demands. The vast majority of tasks performed in this position are carried out in an office setting while working at a computer and keyboard. A small percentage of the photographic assignments require the appellants to work outside the office setting in situations that may require walking over rough terrain; recurring bending, crouching, or stretching. However, these demands are not sufficiently regular and recurring to warrant crediting of Level 8-2 as determined by the agency. Therefore, this factor is evaluated at 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.

At Level 9-1, the only level described in the OAGEG, work that involves minimal risks and observance of safety precautions typical of office settings. The work of this position is typically performed in an adequately lighted and climate controlled office that requires no special safety precautions. The position occasionally involves moderate risks or discomforts such as working near or on moving machinery (i.e., jet aircraft) with attendant special safety precautions and the use of protective clothing or gear, e.g., hearing protection and/or a safety vest. However, these demands are not sufficiently regular and recurring to warrant crediting of Level 9-2 as determined by the agency. Therefore, Level 9-1 (5 points) is assigned.

The appellants' position is assigned the following factor levels:

<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. & 7. Personal Contacts and Purpose of Contacts	2a	45
8. Physical Demands	8-1	5
9. Work Environment	9-1	5
<i>Total</i>		1230

According to the grade conversion table in the OAGEG, a total of 1230 points falls within the GS-6 grade level point range of 1105 – 1350 points.

### *Evaluation using the Guide*

The Guide provides general criteria for use in determining the grade level of nonsupervisory clerical and assistance work. Administrative support work of the kind described in the Guide is performed in offices, hospitals, and numerous other settings in all Federal agencies. The Guide describes the general characteristics of each grade level from GS-1 through GS-7 with narrative descriptions of grade level criteria pertaining to clerical and assistance work and uses two criteria for grading purposes: *Nature of assignment* (which includes knowledge required and complexity of the work) and *Level of responsibility* (which includes supervisory controls, guidelines, and contacts). The appropriate grade is determined by applying the criteria and assigning the highest grade level that matches the work being evaluated that is performed 25 percent or more of the work time. Weaknesses as well as strengths are considered in matching work to the grade level criteria. Following is our evaluation of the appellants' position using the Guide.

#### *Nature of Assignment*

At the GS-6 grade level, the work requires considerable evaluative judgment within well-defined, commonly occurring aspects of an administrative program or function. The work involves continuing processes based on direct application of established policies, practices, and criteria. Assignments consist of a relatively narrow range of case situations that remain stable and resemble past problems or situations. The work requires practical knowledge of guidelines and skill to recognize the dimensions of a problem and express ideas in writing.

At the GS-7 grade level, work consists of specialized duties with continuing responsibility for projects, questions, or problems that arise within an area of a program or functional specialty as defined by management. Work assignments involve a wide variety of problems or situations common to the segment of the program or function for which the employee is responsible. Each assignment typically consists of a series of related actions or decisions prior to final completion. Decisions or recommendations are based on the development and evaluation of information that comes from various sources. The work involves identifying and studying factors or conditions and determining their interrelationships as appropriate to the defined areas of work. The employee must be concerned about taking or recommending actions that are consistent with the objectives and requirements of the program or functions. The work requires knowledge and skill to recognize the dimensions of the problems involved, collect the necessary information, establish the facts, and take or recommend action based upon application or interpretation of established guidelines. The work also requires practical knowledge, developed through increasingly difficult, on-the-job training or experience dealing with the operations, regulations, principles, and peculiarities of the assigned program, function, or activity.

The nature of the appellants' assignments fully meets the GS-6 grade level in that the work involves continuing processes based on direct application of established policies, practices, and criteria described at this level. Graphic work performed by the appellants falls within five categories, specifically nameplates/door signs, certificates, posters, two-dimensional/three-dimensional art, and publications. Graphic work assignments are narrowly focused, addressing a single product or action in one of these categories, and are relatively clear cut, once input from customers is obtained. In completing graphics assignments, the appellants usually deal with



problems or situations that remain stable over time and resemble past problems or situations. They assist customers by advising them on matters such as size, layout, kind and quality of materials, media, color schemes, typography, formats, methods of reproduction, etc., demonstrating ability to recognize the dimensions of a problem or task and express ideas in writing.

The GS-7 grade level is not met. The primary purpose of this position is using an assortment of standard layout and design software applications to produce a variety of visual presentations where limited artistic skill and judgment are required to decide proportion and placement of the visual elements. For individual graphics assignments, the appellants identify and study the factors or conditions provided by customers to determine interrelationships, if any. The completion of each graphics assignment is a straightforward task and, as such, assignments do not typically consist of a series of related actions or decisions leading to final completion. Additionally, for each assignment, the appellants develop and evaluate information from a single source, a customer, rather than from a variety of sources. Once they accept a graphics work assignment, they have continuing responsibility for it, answering questions from customers, and solving problems that arise in connection with completing the assignment. However, the appellants' work assignments typically resemble past completed projects in one of only five categories, not the wide variety of problems or assignments within a broader program area described at the GS-7 grade level. Therefore, this factor is evaluated at the GS-6 grade level.

#### *Level of Responsibility*

At the GS-6 grade level, the supervisor assists with precedent assignments by providing an interpretation of policy. Completed work is evaluated for appropriateness and effectiveness in meeting goals. Guidelines are available but often are not completely applicable to the assignment or have gaps in specificity. The employee uses judgment in interpreting and adapting guidelines and bases decisions and recommendations on facts and conventional interpretations of guidelines rather than on theory or opinion. Personal contacts are with employees in the agency or in other agencies, with management, or with those using the services. The contacts are for the purpose of providing, receiving, or developing information in order to identify problems needs, or issues or coordinate work efforts and resolve problems.

At the GS-7 grade level, the supervisor makes assignments in terms of objectives, priorities, and deadlines. The employee independently completes assignments in accordance with accepted practices, resolving most conflicts that arise. Completed work is evaluated for appropriateness and conformance to policy. Guidelines for the work are more complex than at the GS-6 grade level because the employee encounters a wider variety of problems and situations which require choosing alternative responses. Guides, such as regulations, policy statements, and precedent cases, tend to be general and descriptive of intent, but they do not specifically cover all aspects of the assignments. Employees must use significant judgment and interpretation to apply the guides to specific cases and adapt or improvise procedures to accommodate unusual or one-of-a-kind situations. The contacts and purpose of contacts are usually the same as at the GS-6 grade level. However, to a greater degree, the employee serves as a central point of contact to provide authoritative explanations of requirements, regulations, and procedures and to resolve operational problems or disagreements affecting assigned areas.

The appellants' work situation compares closely to the GS-6 grade level illustration in which the supervisor makes assignments by defining objectives, priorities, and deadlines. Based on overall program objectives, the appellants interact directly and independently with customers to advise them on the best techniques and media to accomplish their needs. The appellants plan and carry out graphics work in accordance with accepted practices and administrative procedures. Technical guidelines consist primarily of previous projects done for the organization which were similar but not identical to new assignments, and include sketches or construction drawings provided by the customer. If available guidelines have gaps in specificity, the appellants use judgment in interpreting and adapting these guidelines for application to specific, current assignments. In so doing, they base any decisions and recommendations on the facts at hand and conventional interpretations of these guidelines rather than on theory or opinion. The appellants contact customers, management, and others within the organization, as appropriate, to provide, receive, or develop information in order to identify and resolve problems or needs, with the overall goal of producing graphics work products.

The appellants' level of responsibility does not meet the GS-7 grade level because they do not encounter a wide variety of problems and situations requiring a choice of alternative responses as described at that level. The graphics work is of limited scope; i.e., work assignments fall into only five categories. Work assignments are completed following precedents and guidelines established by previously completed projects. Such guidelines apply to the specific tasks at hand and not to the operational characteristics and procedural requirements of the function of the Multimedia Branch, as would be typical of work performed at the GS-7 level. Rather, the appellants use significant judgment and interpretation to apply guidance to specific cases or work assignments consistent with that depicted at the GS-6 grade level. Therefore, this factor is evaluated at the GS-6 grade level.

Since both factors fully meet the GS-6 grade level, the appellants' work is evaluated at GS-6.

### *Summary*

By comparison with both the OAGEG and the Guide, the proper grade of the appellants' position is determined to be GS-6.

### **Decision**

The position is properly classified as GS-1001-6, with the title at the discretion of the agency.