

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

Washington Oversight Division
1900 E Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20415

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

Appellant:	[name]
Agency classification:	Secretary (Office Automation) GS-318-8
Organization:	[program office] Office of the Associate Chief Geologist for Science Geologic Division U.S. Geological Survey Department of the Interior Reston, Virginia
OPM decision:	Secretary (Office Automation) GS-318-7
OPM decision no.:	C-0318-07-02

Linda Kazinetz
Classification Appeals Officer

November 15, 1999
Date

As provided in section 511.612 of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations, this decision constitutes a classification 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 the conditions and time limits specified in title 5, Code of Federal Regulations, sections 511.605, 511.613, and 511.614, as cited in the Introduction to the Position Classification Standards, appendix 4, section G (address provided in appendix 4, section H).

Decision sent to:

Mr. Robert Hosenfeld
Personnel Officer
U.S. Geological Survey
John W. Powell Federal Building
12201 Sunrise Valley Drive
Reston, Virginia 20192

[Appellant]

Ms. Carolyn Cohen
Director of Personnel
Department of the Interior
Mail Stop 5221
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Introduction

On August 11, 1999, the Washington Oversight Division of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted a position classification appeal from [appellant], who is employed as a Secretary (Office Automation), GS-318-8, in the [program office] of the Office of the Associate Chief Geologist for Science, Geologic Division, U.S. Geological Survey, Department of the Interior, in Reston, Virginia. [The appellant] requested that her position be classified as Secretary, GS-318-9. This appeal was accepted and decided under the provisions of section 5112 of title 5, United States Code.

An on-site position audit was conducted by a Washington Oversight Division representative on October 12, 1999, and a telephone interview with the appellant's first-line supervisor, [name], on October 19, 1999. This appeal was decided by considering the audit findings and all information of record furnished by the appellant and her agency, including her official position description, number[PD#], most recently certified by the servicing personnel office as Secretary (Office Automation), GS-318-8, on September 1, 1999.

Position Information

The appellant serves as secretary to the Program Coordinator, [program], and provides a wide range of clerical and administrative services in support of office operations. She facilitates the flow of work and information between the office and outside parties, and handles many nontechnical questions and problems that arise on her own initiative. She processes the office's incoming and outgoing correspondence; keeps the supervisor's calendar; makes travel arrangements and develops itineraries; gathers background information for meetings; and develops or consolidates program information for various reports. She organizes program workshops, including coordinating all administrative and logistical details. She organizes and coordinates the office's project proposal review system by gathering supporting documentation for proposals, preparing the review agenda, recording the proceedings, and preparing transmittal correspondence on proposal awards. A major aspect of her position is to ensure the effective continuation of work in the office during the supervisor's frequent travel, to include independently responding to routine information requests, representing the supervisor at staff meetings, and checking his e-mail and contacting him on matters requiring immediate attention or responding personally when appropriate. The appellant's position description provides comprehensive information on the appellant's duties and responsibilities and accurately represents the work she performs.

Series Determination

The position is properly assigned to the Secretary Series, GS-318, which covers positions that serve as the principal clerical or administrative support in the office. Neither the appellant nor the agency disagrees.

Title Determination

The position is correctly titled as Secretary, which is the authorized title for all nonsupervisory positions in this series, with the parenthetical title of Office Automation to reflect the position's requirement for word processing skills. Neither the appellant nor the agency disagrees.

Standard Determination

The position was evaluated by application of the criteria contained in the position classification standard for the Secretary Series, GS-318, dated January 1979. This standard is written in the Factor Evaluation System (FES) format, under which factor levels and accompanying point values are to be assigned for each of the following nine factors, with the total then being converted to a grade level by use of the grade conversion table provided in the standard. The factor point values mark the lower end of the ranges for the indicated factor levels. For a position to warrant a given point value, it must be fully equivalent to the overall intent of the selected factor level description. If the position fails in any significant aspect to meet a particular factor level description, the point value for the next lower factor level must be assigned, unless the deficiency is balanced by an equally important aspect that meets a higher level.

Grade Determination

Neither the appellant nor her agency disagrees with our evaluation of factors 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, or 9. Those factors are therefore addressed very briefly, whereas factors 1, 2, and 5 are discussed in more detail below.

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. For the secretarial occupation, the extent of knowledge required is related, in part, to the work situation in which the position is located.

Work Situation

Work situation refers to the complexity of the organization served (i.e., the immediate office in which the secretary works, and any subordinate offices) which affects the extent of office rules, procedures, operations, and priorities the secretary must apply to maintain a proper and smooth flow of work within the organization and between organizations.

The appellant's immediate organization matches Work Situation B, where the office either has subordinate organizations or equivalent responsibility for coordinating work outside the organization. The [program office] has only six professional employees with no subordinate organizations or line management authority over the field organization. It does, however, have extensive interaction with

outside parties, including other Federal and State agencies, universities, and professional societies, that requires continuous coordination by the appellant.

The appellant's organization does not match Work Situation C. In addition to the conditions described in Work Situation B, staffs of these organizations are augmented by various staff specialists in such fields as personnel, management analysis, and administration. The organization is typically divided into three or more subordinate levels, with several organizations at each level. The standard notes that the number of organizational echelons is not necessarily the controlling element in determining that Work Situation C is met. Rather, the presence of conditions such as the augmenting staff specialists, or the degree of managerial autonomy, may be more significant criteria in certain situations. (This would apply to small independent agencies or other organizational entities that operate outside a Departmental framework.) Regardless, the clear intent of the standard in regard to Work Situation C is that it apply to only the highest levels within the organizational hierarchy, generally to the level represented by the head of the overall organization, who would thus have direct authority over the organization's administrative functions. None of these conditions are present in the appellant's work situation. Her immediate organization is a small program office three levels below the agency head, with no subordinate elements or independent administrative staff (i.e., personnel, management analysis, etc.) External coordination requirements, such as the program's interaction with other Federal and State agencies, is explicitly recognized and credited under Work Situation B, and is not in itself sufficient to warrant crediting of Work Situation C.

Knowledge Type

The position meets Knowledge Type III, where work requires knowledge of the duties, priorities, commitments, policies, and program goals of the staff sufficient to perform nonroutine assignments such as: independently noting and following-up on commitments made at meetings and conferences by staff members; shifting clerical staff in subordinate offices to take care of fluctuating workloads; or locating and summarizing information from files and documents when this requires recognizing which information is or is not relevant to the problem at hand. The appellant has demonstrated application of this level of knowledge through the performance of such comparable duties as: attending internal staff meetings in the supervisor's absence, conveying information on the supervisor's behalf, noting any required actions, and referring these to the supervisor or handling non-technical matters herself; reviewing all incoming correspondence and e-mail directed to the supervisor in his absence, determining which requires immediate attention, and handling many questions personally or contacting the supervisor for instructions; and gathering information on current program activities and recent accomplishments from a variety of sources for preparation of the "Green Book" to Congress.

The position does not meet Knowledge Type IV, where work requires a basic foundation of administrative concepts, principles, and practices sufficient to perform independently such duties as: eliminating conflict and duplication in extensive office procedures; determining when new procedures are needed; systematically studying and evaluating new office machines and recommending acceptance or rejection of their use; and studying the clerical activities of the office and subordinate

offices and recommending a specific restructuring of the way activities are carried out. These knowledges are manifested in the application of such skills as: adapting policies or procedures to emergency situations and establishing practices or procedures to meet new situations; and recognizing how and when certain policies, procedures, or guidelines will be confusing to others.

The standard notes that Work Situation A does not permit application of Knowledge Type IV, and that Work Situation B rarely involves application of Knowledge Type IV. This is because that level of knowledge is predicated on working in a sizeable organization where many different clerical and administrative activities are carried out, and there is consequently a continuing requirement for the secretary to develop and modify procedures for application by other clerical and administrative staff to accommodate changes in operations. It is focused less on personal performance of work than on continuously monitoring the effective accomplishment of the clerical activities and processes of the organization. In contrast, the appellant is responsible only for the work she personally performs (with the assistance of a lower-graded clerical support employee.) The small size of her immediate office does not afford her the opportunity to develop and modify procedures and guidelines for extensive clerical activities carried out throughout the organization by other clerical and administrative staff, or thus to apply the skills described under Knowledge Type IV.

Knowledge Type III in combination with Work Situation B equates to Level 1-4.

Level 1-4 is credited.

550 points

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.

The level of responsibility under which the appellant works is comparable to Level 2-3. At that level, the supervisor defines the overall objectives and priorities of the work. Within these parameters, the secretary plans and carries out the work of the office and handles problems and deviations in accordance with established instructions, priorities, policies, commitments, and program goals of the supervisor. The standard describes a number of work assignments typical of this level, all of which accurately portray corresponding duties performed by the appellant. These include: receiving telephone calls and visitors, personally taking care of many matters including answering substantive questions; keeping the supervisor's calendar, scheduling appointments without prior approval, and briefing the supervisor on matters to be considered before the scheduled meeting; receiving requests for program information and personally preparing the material; making arrangements for conferences, including space, time, contacting people, assembling background material, attending the meetings, and reporting on proceedings; receiving and reading incoming correspondence, drafting replies to non-technical inquiries, and acting on requests concerning procedural or administrative requirements; reading outgoing correspondence for procedural and grammatical accuracy, conformance with general policy, factual correctness, and adequacy of treatment; and signing routine, non-technical

correspondence in the supervisor's name. This description of duties basically represents the major office services provided by the appellant.

The position does not meet Level 2-4. At this level, the supervisor sets the overall objectives of the work. The secretary and supervisor, in consultation, develop the deadlines and the work to be done, and the secretary handles a wide variety of situations and conflicts independently. The standard specifically notes that this level is most likely to be found in organizations of such size and scope that many complex office problems arise that cannot be brought to the attention of the supervisor. These include such duties as: noting commitments made by the supervisor at meetings, informing the staff of those commitments, and arranging for staff to implement them; reviewing outgoing correspondence for conflicts or departure from policies and attempting to resolve the problems before presentation to the supervisor; in addition to arranging conferences at Level 2-3, making such decisions as arranging for a subordinate of the supervisor to represent the organization at conferences; drafting letters of acknowledgment, commendation, notification, etc., when the need arises; insuring that official social obligations are met, including arranging luncheons, issuing invitations, insuring proper seating arrangements, and providing for protocol requirements; obtaining specialized program information when it is scattered in numerous documents or must be obtained orally from a variety of sources; and preparing administrative or procedural notices to the staff and devising and installing office procedures.

The performance of these types of duties presumes an office situation with a sizeable subordinate organizational structure. They are predicated on the existence of a large staff, with an ongoing multitude of program activities and demands on the supervisor's time. Within this setting, the secretary serves as liaison between the supervisor and his subordinates, to a certain degree controlling access to the supervisor, and screening out many matters that can be handled either personally or delegated to other staff members. The secretary has a great deal of authority to determine the administrative operation of the office, establishing procedures that directly affect how other support staff perform their work. Office situations at this level are located at the highest organizational levels of the agency, and are headed by the agency's top managers or executives who would have the types of official social and representational commitments described.

The appellant's office situation does not permit her to function in the manner described at Level 2-4. Although she works with a great deal of independence due to her supervisor's frequent travel, and is consequently relied upon to take care of many matters on her own initiative in his absence, the small immediate staff coupled with the lack of a subordinate organizational structure limits the types of duties that she may perform. She cannot serve as liaison between the supervisor and staff, delegate work to other staff members in the supervisor's place, or devise office procedures for other support staff. The parameters of her job are constrained less by the degree of latitude and authority she is given, and the degree of her participation in the work of the office, than by the limitations inherent in the organizational arrangement in which she works and her office's placement in the agency hierarchy.

Level 2-3 is credited.

275 points

Factor 3, Guidelines

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

The guidelines used by the appellant match Level 3-3 (the highest level described under this factor), where guidelines deal more with matters relating to judgment, efficiency, and relative priorities rather than with procedural concerns. This is evidenced in her performance of such duties as making all of the administrative and logistical arrangements for workshops and conferences hosted by the office. Neither the appellant nor the agency disagrees.

Level 3-3 is credited.

275 points

Factor 4, Complexity

This factor covers the nature, number, variety, and intricacy of the tasks or processes in the work performed, the difficulty in identifying what needs to be done, and the difficulty and originality involved in performing the work.

The complexity of the appellant's work is comparable to Level 4-3 (the highest level described under this factor), where work includes various duties involving different and unrelated processes and methods, such as preparing one-of-a-kind reports from information in various documents and setting up conferences requiring planning and arranging travel and hotel accommodations based on knowledge of the schedules and commitments of participants. The appellant prepares a variety of program material, such as the "Green Book," which requires gathering information from disparate sources such as project files, program brochures, and budget documents. She also plans and schedules conference agendas based on knowledge of the topics to be covered and the availability of the speakers. Neither the appellant nor the agency disagrees.

Level 4-3 is credited.

150 points

Factor 5, Scope and Effect

This factor covers the relationship between the nature of the work, and the effect of the work products or services both within and outside the organization.

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

The scope and effect of the appellant's work match Level 5-2. The purpose of her work is to personally carry out specified tasks and assignments. Her work affects the timely and effective

accomplishment of internal office activities and contributes to the efficient coordination of work between the office and outside parties.

The position does not meet Level 5-3. Positions at this level serve offices that clearly and directly affect a wide range of agency activities, operations in other agencies, or a large segment of the public or business community. The secretary at this level modifies and devises methods and procedures that significantly and consistently affect the accomplishment of the mission of the office. The secretary identifies and resolves various problems and situations that affect the orderly and efficient flow of work in transactions with parties outside the organization.

The appellant supports a small program office responsible for planning, coordination, and review of program activities carried out by three geographically dispersed teams engaged in [description of program activities], with a total of approximately 250 employees. This does not constitute “a wide range of agency activities” but rather one specific program area, and because the program office does not have direct line authority over these field organizations, it does not “clearly and directly” impact their operations in the sense intended at this level. Further, although the program’s activities are of interest to other scientists in the Federal sector and university community who are involved in related fields of endeavor, they likewise do not “clearly and directly” affect operations in other agencies or a large segment of the public. This level includes the additional element of developing and modifying methods and procedures that significantly affect accomplishment of the office’s mission. The purpose of the appellant’s work is the personal completion of specific tasks rather than the development of methods and procedures to be applied by others. Because she directly supports only the immediate program office, she is precluded from performing the types of work that would have this level of effect on the overall program.

Level 5-2 is credited.

75 points

Factor 6, Personal Contacts

This factor includes face-to-face and telephone contacts with persons not in the supervisory chain. The relationship between Factors 6 and 7 presumes that the same contacts will be evaluated under both factors.

The appellant’s personal contacts match Level 6-3, where contacts are with individuals or groups from outside the employing agency in a moderately unstructured setting. The position does not meet Level 6-4, where contacts are with high-ranking officials at national or international levels, such as Members of Congress, leading representatives of foreign governments, State governors, or nationally recognized representatives of the news media, in highly unstructured settings. The appellant has no contacts of this nature. Neither the appellant nor the agency disagrees.

Level 6-3 is credited.

60 points

Factor 7, Purpose of Contacts

This factor covers the purpose of personal contacts, ranging from factual exchange of information to situations involving significant or controversial issues and differing viewpoints and objectives.

The purpose of the appellant's contacts is consistent with Level 7-2 (the highest level described under this factor), where the purpose of contacts is to plan and coordinate work efforts or to resolve operating problems. Neither the appellant nor the agency disagrees.

Level 7-2 is credited. 50 points

Factor 8, Physical Demands

This factor covers the requirements and physical demands placed on the employee by the work situation.

The position matches Level 8-1, which covers sedentary work.

Level 8-1 is credited. 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.

The position matches Level 9-1, which describes a typical office environment.

Level 9-1 is credited. 5 points

Summary

<u>Factors</u>	<u>Level</u>	<u>Points</u>
Knowledge Required	1-4	550
Supervisory Controls	2-3	275
Guidelines	3-3	275
Complexity	4-3	150
Scope and Effect	5-2	75
Personal Contacts	6-3	60
Purpose of Contacts	7-2	50
Physical Demands	8-1	5
Work Environment	9-1	<u>5</u>
Total		1445

The total of 1445 points falls within the GS-7 range (1355-1600) on the grade conversion table provided in the standard.

Decision

The appealed position is properly classified as Secretary (Office Automation), GS-318-7.