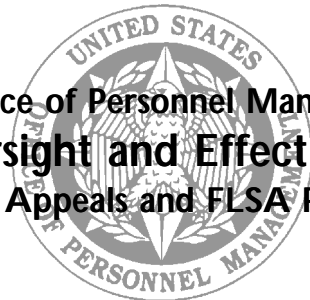


U.S. Office of Personnel Management  
Office of Merit Systems Oversight and Effectiveness  
Classification Appeals and FLSA Programs



Atlanta Oversight Division  
75 Spring Street, SW., Room 972  
Atlanta, GA 30303

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

**Appellant:** [Appellants]

**Agency classification:** Purchasing Agent  
GS-1105-6

**Organization:** Department of the Navy

**OPM decision:** Purchasing Agent  
GS-1105-6

**OPM decision number:** C-1105-06-02

\_\_\_\_\_  
/s/  
Kathy W. Day  
Classification Appeals Officer

\_\_\_\_\_  
10/20/99  
\_Date

As provided in section 511.612 of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations, this decision constitutes a certificate that is mandatory and binding on all administrative, certifying, payroll, disbursing, and accounting officials of the government. The agency is responsible for reviewing its classification decisions for identical, similar, or related positions to ensure consistency with this decision. There is no right of further appeal. This decision is subject to discretionary review only under conditions and time limits specified in the Introduction to the Position Classification Standards, appendix 4, section G (address provided in appendix 4, section H).

**Decision sent to:**

[Appellants]

[Direct, Human Resources  
Office]

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## **Introduction**

On July 30, 1999, the Atlanta Oversight Division, U. S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM), accepted a group classification appeal for the position of Purchasing Agent, GS-1105-6, [organization], Department of the Navy, [geographic location]. The appellants believe their position should be classified as Purchasing Agent, GS-1105-7 or 9.

The appeal has been accepted and processed under section 5112(b) of title 5, United States Code. This is the final administrative decision on the classification of the position subject to discretionary review only under the limited conditions and time outlined in part 511, subpart F, of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations.

## **General issues**

A desk audit was requested by the appellants in June 1999. At that time, the agency was undergoing a Reduction-in-Force and the request for the desk audit was denied. Further efforts by the appellants to have their position reviewed in July 1999 were unsuccessful. The appellants then filed a classification appeal with OPM. The appellants contend that the knowledge of specialized services required for their work and the uniqueness of the items purchased increases the complexity of their work and warrants their position being graded at the GS-7 or GS-9 level.

## **Position information**

The appellants are assigned to position description number[#]. The appellants, their supervisor and the agency have certified the accuracy of the position description.

The appellants are assigned to the [organization]. They primarily function as Purchasing Agents and are responsible for processing acquisitions, administering contracts, and purchasing activities associated with obtaining commercial and technical items and services required for the renovation of shipboard crew areas. These areas include wardrooms, galleys and mess decks, sleeping compartments, bathrooms, and office spaces. The work involves repetitive purchases of commercially produced items specifically designed or easily adapted to meet military requirements and specifications from required and open-market sources. Purchases are accomplished through methods such as purchase order invoices, delivery orders against established General Services Administration (GSA) contracts, calls against blanket purchase agreements, and government purchase card. The appellants maintain awareness of work progress on urgent requirements; instruct customers on the technical procedures involved in preparing procurement packets; assist customers in conducting market research and identifying methods to expedite the ordering of required services or supplies; locate sources for specialized, unique, or obsolete items; and survey customers and evaluate responses to develop recommendations to improve the organization's services. They also receive and resolve customer complaints related to the purchasing process, and resolve vendor problems related to payments, contracts, and incomplete contractual agreements.

The appellants work under the supervision of the Supervisory Procurement Analyst who establishes general priorities and deadlines for processing purchasing actions and provides instructions in situations involving changes in policies, procedures, and regulatory controls. The appellants are responsible for independently selecting the proper methods and procedures to be used in the purchasing of a variety of technical goods and services. Completed work is evaluated in terms of technical soundness, appropriateness, and conformance with policy and requirements. The actual methods employed to accomplish purchasing actions are seldom scrutinized.

### **Series determination**

The agency placed the position in the Purchasing Series, GS-1105. The appellants do not contest the placement of their position in this series, and we agree.

The Purchasing Series, GS-1105, includes positions that involve supervising or performing work to acquire supplies, services, and construction by purchase, rental, or lease through (a) delivery orders and/or (b) small purchase procedures. The work requires knowledge of policies and procedures for small delivery orders and small purchases. This work also requires knowledge of commercial supply sources and common business practices related to sales, prices, discounts, units of measurement, deliveries, stocks, and shipments.

The appellants' position is properly placed in the Purchasing Series, GS-1105.

### **Title determination**

The appellants do not contest the title of their position, and we agree. The title *Purchasing Agent* is authorized by the GS-1105 standard for nonsupervisory positions.

### **Standard determination**

Purchasing Series, GS-1105, March 1993.

### **Grade determination**

The GS-1105 standard is written in the Factor Evaluation System (FES) format. Under the FES, positions are evaluated on the basis of their duties, responsibilities, and the qualifications required as evaluated in terms of nine factors common to nonsupervisory General Schedule positions.

A point value is assigned to each factor based on a comparison of the position's duties with the factor-level descriptions in the standard. The factor point values mark the lower end of the ranges for the indicated factor level. For a position factor 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 in the standard, the point value for the next lower factor level must be assigned, unless the deficiency is balanced by an equally important aspect which meets a higher level. The total points assigned are converted to a grade by use of the grade conversion table in the standard.

*Factor 1 - Knowledge Required by the Position:*

This factor measures the nature and extent of information or facts that a worker must understand to do acceptable work, such as the steps, procedures, practices, rules, policies, theories, principles, and concepts; and the nature and extent of the skills needed to apply this knowledge. The agency evaluated this factor at Level 1-4.

At Level 1-4, the work requires an in-depth or broad knowledge of a body of purchasing regulations, methods, procedures and business practices to make purchases involving (1) specialized requirements and/or (2) commercial requirements that have unstable price or product characteristics, hard-to-locate sources, many critical characteristics or similar complicating factors. This includes for example:

- knowledge of solicitation or purchasing methods, such as would be acquired through extended training or experience, to make competitive or sole source small purchases that involve, for example, collecting data to determine price reasonableness for new items, preparing detailed written solicitations, tailoring special terms and conditions, or matters of similar complexity;
- skill in analyzing descriptions that have unique aspects and many critical characteristics to identify problem areas in specifications or work statements, determine if quotations are responsive, or decide if substitutions are acceptable or should be referred to other personnel for further review;
- knowledge of price analysis techniques to evaluate prices or costs for requirements with inadequate price history or evaluate allowable charges for requirements involving special cost features;
- knowledge of various acquisition clauses, such as those pertaining to inspection, acceptance, packaging, or testing to select or tailor clauses for purchases that involve special handling; and

- knowledge of post-award procedures to discuss equitable price adjustments for modifications to a purchase order, determine whether to recommend termination of an accepted purchase order for convenience, or perform similar actions.

At Level 1-5, the work requires knowledge of specialized technical purchasing methods and procedures to perform complex purchasing work including substantive involvement in at least one of the following:

- negotiating and awarding bilateral purchase orders for professional studies (e.g., research studies), or for the exclusive manufacture of unique equipment, instruments, dies, etc.;
- developing and selecting criteria/technical ranking factors for purchases of a variety of detailed commercial service or construction projects;
- administering small purchases that require extensive monitoring and oversight to resolve complex problems (e.g., protests, claims, terminations, or substantial modifications), and coordinating/discussing these or similar problems with small purchase contractors and various agency or activity personnel;
- negotiating, awarding, and administering small purchases that involve clauses normally not applicable to small purchases (e.g., purchase orders that contain provisions related to default termination, liability, and Government furnished property); or
- negotiating, awarding and administering small purchase orders that involve the use of instruments that are not firm fixed price (e.g., time and materials, labor hour, or other unpriced small purchase orders).

Level 1-4 is met. The appellants possess and use an in-depth knowledge of a variety of purchasing regulations and methods and procedures to acquire items related to the maintenance and renovation of ships. Their purchasing work primarily involves competitive, noncompetitive, or sole source small purchases of items and services. They are also required to be knowledgeable of the appropriate policies, procedures, and regulatory requirements that apply to the purchases they must make and knowledgeable of common business practices and sales to determine if supplier or vendor prices and discounts are reasonable, if proposed delivery dates are acceptable, and what methods of shipment are available for specialized items.

Level 1-5 is not met. The work performed by the appellants does not routinely involve activities requiring knowledge of specialized purchasing methods and procedures as described at this level. They do not have any involvement in situations requiring negotiating or awarding of purchase orders related to professional studies; developing or selecting criteria for detailed commercial services or construction projects; or administering small purchases involving clauses or provisions such as default termination, liability, Government furnished property, etc. Their primary involvement is with the purchase of firm, fixed-price items where this level of knowledge is not

required. The appellants contend that they must have a knowledge of complex, sophisticated technical services, and military drawings to carry out their assignments. They also contend they are responsible for reviewing and ensuring the accuracy of specifications for renovation work performed. The technical aspects of shipboard renovation work (i.e., technical drawings, required specifications, components and materials used, etc.) are the responsibility of the Naval Architect assigned to their organization. The appellants' responsibility is to locate commercial concerns, generally local or well known to the organization, that provide these particular components and/or can perform the necessary installation work. There is no indication in the appeal file that their primary function requires any significant technical knowledge of these areas to successfully carry out their assignments.

The appellants state that their responsibility for advertising and awarding open market requirements, and processing other requirements under Simplified Acquisition Procedures (SAP) in amounts ranging from \$25,000 up to \$100,00 requires a higher level of knowledge of the Federal Acquisition Regulations (FAR) and the Defense Federal Acquisition Regulations Supplement (DFARS). Dollar value in and of itself is not an indicator of the degree of knowledge required to perform the work of these positions. The dollar value must be considered within the context of the overall work performed as compared to all of the classification criteria.

Level 1-4 is credited for 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 extent of review of completed work. The agency evaluated this factor at Level 2-3.

At Level 2-3, the supervisor or other designated authority assigns work with standing instructions on objectives, priorities, and deadlines, and indicates special considerations or unusual requirements. The employee plans and carries out successive steps necessary to make purchases and uses accepted practices or procedures to resolve problems and deviations (e.g., requirements that have fluctuating price and item characteristics, are sole source, and are urgently required, or items that are new to the market). The employee independently performs tasks, such as negotiating price with a sole source vendor, persuading reluctant vendors to bid, and collecting data to determine price reasonableness for requirements not acquired recently or previously. The employee may have to identify loopholes in specifications or statements of work that are very lengthy, detailed, or difficult to understand. The supervisor reviews recommended awards or completed purchase files for technical soundness, appropriateness, and conformity to policy and requirements but does not review methods in detail.

At Level 2-4, the supervisor defines overall objectives and requirements of the work and provides further guidance at the employee's request. The employee is responsible for resolving most conflicts that arise, coordinating the work with others and interpreting policies to meet established

objectives. The employee is delegated considerable latitude in committing the agency or activity to a course of action and typically has no higher level procurement expertise available. The supervisor evaluates completed work for results achieved and effectiveness in meeting requirements within legal and regulatory constraints.

Level 2-3 is met. The appellants receive work assignments from the supervisor who ensures that the dollar value of purchases and requirements (e.g., items or services) are equally distributed among them. The appellants are responsible for independently selecting the methods and procedures to follow in completing their assignments up to the limit of their warrants. The supervisory review of completed work consists of spot checks to assess technical soundness, appropriateness, and conformance with policy and requirements.

Level 2-4 is not met. The appellants' regular and recurring assignments do not typically require conflict resolution or extensive coordination of work with others, nor do they involve intensive negotiations to resolve protests, claims, or contract terminations. There are two Contract Specialists in the organization who have signature authority and responsibility for providing procurement expertise for warrants exceeding the \$25,000 small purchase and \$100,000 mandatory requirement thresholds held by the appellants. The appellants lack the delegated authority to commit the agency to courses of action and their work receives a closer review than is typical at Level 2-4.

Level 2-3 is credited for 275 points.

*Factor 3 - Guidelines:*

This factor covers the nature of guidelines and the judgment needed to apply them. The agency evaluated this factor at Level 3-2.

At Level 3-2, a number of established procedures and specific guidelines are available and apply to work assignments. These include procurement history files, Federal Supply Schedules or other established contracts, standard operating practices, and regulations governing small purchases and delivery orders. Guidelines cover areas such as required and optional sources of supply, types and use of purchase orders, maximum ordering limitations, and forms to use when making purchases. Guidelines also explain, for example, how to order from schedules when documentation is required (e.g., waivers, sole source justifications, and verifications of price reasonableness), when it is appropriate to establish blanket agreements, and how to account for use of imprest funds. The employee at this level uses judgment in selecting the appropriate reference and procedure to make purchases.

At Level 3-3, guidelines, such as those described at Level 3-2, are available but are not completely applicable to many of the aspects of the work because of the unique or complicating nature of the requirements or circumstances. For example, when ensuring the adequacy of specialized purchase descriptions there are no directly related reference sources, such as



standardized descriptions in catalogs or procurement history files. The employee at this level uses judgment to interpret guidelines, adapt procedures, decide approaches, and resolve specific problems.

Level 3-2 is met. The appellants perform their work in accordance with established practices and procedures and specific guidelines related to the acquisition and contract administration processes. Virtually all of their work is covered by SAP, FAR, DFARS, and agency instructions, guidance and policies specifically related to the acquisition of goods and services. They exercise judgment in determining and selecting the appropriate guidelines and/or alternatives to use in completing assignments. Unusual situations in which the available guidelines cannot be readily applied are referred to the supervisor for resolution.

Level 3-3 is not met. The purchasing activities in which the appellants are engaged do not involve unique or complicating requirements or circumstances. Their work is generally limited to areas where materials such as standardized descriptions or procurement related history files are available and are directly related. The appellants also do not have the flexibility to interpret guidelines, adapt procedures, or decide approaches for the resolution of problems as is typical of this level.

Level 3-2 is credited for 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 agency credited Level 4-3, the highest level described in the standard for this factor.

At Level 4-3, the work involves using different processes and methods to make a variety of sole source small purchases and/or make a variety of purchases against various established contracts and agreements (e.g., multiple award schedules, blanket purchase agreements, requirements contracts). The employee uses different solicitation methods, ordering or reporting procedures, purchasing methods, or clauses and provisions depending on the type, quantity, dollar value, or urgency of the requirement.

Level 4-3 is met. The appellants' assignments involve a variety of different and unrelated processes and methods to acquire the items and services required by their organization. Among the alternatives that must be considered are whether or not purchases can be most efficiently accomplished through methods such as purchase order invoices, delivery orders against established GSA contracts, calls against blanket purchase agreements, or government purchase card. The appellants must also identify and consider factors such as the availability of funds, discount rates, time available for delivery, an item's uniqueness or obsolescence, availability in local or non-local markets, or the use of specialized firms in determining the most feasible course of action to take. There is no evidence in the record to support work above this level.

Level 4-3 is credited for 150 points.

*Factor 5 - Scope and Effect:*

This factor covers the relationship between the nature of the work (i.e., the purpose, breadth, and depth of the assignment) and the effect of work products or services both within and outside the organization. The agency evaluated this factor at Level 5-3, the highest level described in the standard.

At Level 5-2, the work involves providing purchasing services that are covered by well-defined and precise procedures and regulations (e.g., repeat orders for commercial requirements). The employee clarifies what is needed and when, and selects purchasing methods and sources from a range of available options. The employee's work products, such as recommendations for awards, affects the smooth flow of everyday operations.

At Level 5-3, the purpose of the work is to purchase various commercial and/or specialized requirements. The work involves applying conventional practices to resolve a variety of purchasing problems (e.g., inadequate or restrictive specifications, lack of multiple suppliers, urgent need, and insufficient price history). Purchasing advice and decisions directly affect the ability of serviced programs to conduct business adequately.

Level 5-2 is met. The appellants' regular and recurring work involves the repetitive purchasing of items and services that are covered by specific regulations and procedures (SAP/FAR, Naval Acquisition Procedures, guidance, instructions, policies, etc.). Their responsibility is to clarify what is needed and when and to select purchasing methods and sources from a range of available options from a limited number of commercial vendors and suppliers. The work performed by the appellants affects the quality and timeliness of the items and services obtained and the efficiency with which renovations are completed.

Level 5-3 is not met. Although the agency credited Level 5-3, the appellants' work does not meet the full intent of this level. The items and services purchased, although specialized in the sense that they are generally specific to shipboard installations, are routinely acquired from commercial sources who specialize in products and services for this purpose or whose products or services are for other purposes, but meet the requirements and specifications to permit use in this manner. These commercial sources are limited in number and are well known within the appellants' organization as primary sources for the specific items and services.

Level 5-2 is credited for 75 points.

*Factor 6, Personal contacts, and Factor 7, Purpose of Contacts:*

Factor 6 includes face-to-face contacts and telephone and radio dialogue with persons not in the supervisory chain. Levels described under this factor are based on what is required to make the initial contact, the difficulty of communicating with those contacted, and the setting in which the contact takes place (e.g., the degree to which the employee and those contacted recognize their relative roles and authorities).

Factor 7 addresses the purpose of personal contacts, which may range from factual exchange of information to situations involving significant or controversial issues and differing viewpoints or objectives. The agency credited these factors at Level 2-a.

At Level 2, contacts include employees in the same agency or activity but outside the immediate organization. For example, contacts may be with personnel in supply, contracting, finance, requirements initiating offices, or at warehouse/delivery receipt sites. Contacts outside the agency include commercial suppliers, contractors, and personnel at other agencies, such as the Department of Labor or GSA.

At Level 3, in addition to contacts at lower levels, contacts include technical and legal representatives of firms who are negotiating substantial purchase order changes or terminations for default or convenience, or who are protesting the basis for nonselection for award.

Similar to Level 2, the appellants' regular and recurring contacts include requisitioning, technical, and management personnel within their organization. There are also routine contacts outside the organization with GSA personnel, vendors, salesmen, distributors, and representatives of commercial concerns who either routinely provide or are seeking to provide items and services to the Government. These contacts normally occur at the appellants' place of work or are made telephonically or in writing.

The appellants do not have contacts with the technical or legal representatives of firms involving negotiations related to major changes in purchase orders or contract terminations described at Level 3. Issues such as negotiation of major changes to purchase orders, contract terminations, protests regarding awards, etc., described at this level are handled by higher graded personnel within the organization.

At Level a, the purpose of contacts is to clarify or exchange information related to purchasing routine requirements. Contacts with customers are to obtain missing information, advise on the status of work, and get approval for substitutes or changes in delivery dates, prices, quantities, etc. Contacts with vendors are to obtain information on items, prices, discounts, and delivery dates.

At Level b, the purpose of contacts is to plan and coordinate actions to prevent, correct, or resolve delays or misunderstandings in the purchasing process. This includes contacts with customers to discuss specifications that may be inadequate or too restrictive, and those with vendors to clarify requirements and negotiate issues such as establishing price reductions for deviations in product delivery.

As at Level a, the purpose of contacts established by the appellants is to clarify and exchange information regarding the items and services being purchased. Contacts with customers are to obtain information that may have been missing from the requisition received, inform them of the technical aspects of procurement document preparation, provide market research assistance, and to identify available contract methods which will expedite the ordering of supplies and services. Their contacts with contractors and vendors are to typically obtain information on the availability of items and services, prices, discounts, ability to meet delivery dates, or to clarify technical information related to the purchases.

Level b is not met. The regular and recurring contacts established by the appellants do not involve the kinds of issues described at this level. Their customer contacts do not involve issues related to specification adequacy or alternatives to purchasing (e.g., renting). Matters such as these are the responsibility of other staff personnel (e.g., the Naval Architect, Contract Specialist, supervisor). Their dealings with contractors and vendors do not involve negotiations of prices or modification of terms of contracts, etc., as the items for which they are responsible for purchasing are usually covered in fixed-price contracts with commercial sources with which the organization has done business over a period of time.

Level 2-a is credited for 45 points.

*Factor 8 - Physical Demands:*

This factor covers the requirements and physical demands placed upon the employee by the work assignment. This includes physical characteristics and abilities and the physical exertion involved in the work. The agency evaluated this factor at Level 8-1.

Level 8-1 requires some physical effort, such as standing, walking, bending, or sitting. There are no special physical demands.

Level 8-2 requires above average physical ability to walk around or over building materials, excavation sites, and heavy equipment found at construction sites or similar areas. The employee visits such sites on a regular and recurring basis.

Level 8-1 is met. The work performed by the appellants is primarily sedentary and presents the normal physical effort involved in walking, standing, bending, and the carrying of light items. The appeal record does not contain any information reflecting that the work performed by the appellants on a regular and recurring basis involves the physical effort described at Level 8-2.

Level 8-1 is credited for 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 agency evaluated this factor at Level 9-1.

At Level 9-1, the employee performs work in an office setting involving everyday risks or discomforts which require normal safety precautions.

At Level 9-2, the work involves a moderate level of discomfort during visits to sites away from the office. The employee may be required to wear protective clothing (e.g., hardhat, goggles, gowns, or boots) when visiting construction sites, laboratories, or other areas.

Level 9-1 is met. The majority of the appellants' work is performed in an office setting requiring the observance of normal safety precautions for such areas.

Level 9-1 is credited for 5 points.

<b>SUMMARY</b>		
<b>FACTOR</b>	<b>LEVEL</b>	<b>POINTS</b>
1-Knowledge Required by the Position	1-4	550
2-Supervisory Control	2-3	275
3-Guidelines	3-2	125
4-Complexity	4-3	150
5-Scope and Effect	5-2	75
6-Personal Contacts and 7-Purpose of Contacts	2-a	45
8-Physical Demands	8-1	5
9-Work Environment	9-1	5
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1230</b>

A total of 1230 points falls within the GS-6 range, 1105 to 1350 points, according to the Grade Conversion Table in the GS-1105 standard.

**Decision**

The appellants' position is correctly classified as Purchasing Agent, GS-1105-6.