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:	[Appellant]
Agency classification:	Engineering Technician (Materials) GS-802-9
Organization:	Department of the Navy
OPM decision:	Materials Engineering Technician GS-802-9
OPM decision number:	C-0802-09-38

Kathy W. Day
Classification Appeals Officer

1/14/00
Date

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

Decision sent to:

[Appellant]

[Human Resources Service Center]

Mr. Benjamin James
Director, Civilian Personnel Programs Division
Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Navy, Civilian Personnel
Department of the Navy
3801 Nebraska Avenue, NW, Building 5, Room 117
Washington, DC 20393-5451

Ms. Janice W. Cooper
Chief, Classification Branch
Field Advisory Services Division
Defense Civilian Personnel Management Service
1400 Key Boulevard, Suite B-200
Arlington, VA 22209-5144

Introduction

On October 1, 1999, the Atlanta Oversight Division, U. S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM), accepted a classification appeal for the position of Engineering Technician (Materials), GS-802-9, [organization], [geographic location]. The appellant believes that his position should be classified as Engineering Technician, GS-802-11 or 12.

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

The appellant believes that he is performing materials engineering and chemical analysis work having the same degree of complexity and level of independence and responsibility as that of higher graded coworkers (one GS-806-12, Materials Engineer, and two GS-1230-12, Chemists) also assigned to the [branch] where he works. He also contends that, as the reports that he prepares have the same authority and are subjected to the same verification process as those of his coworkers, his position is undergraded at GS-9 and warrants classification at the GS-11 level and possibly at GS-12.

By law, OPM must make classification determinations solely by comparing the current duties and responsibilities of the position to OPM standards and guidelines (5 U.S.C. 5106, 5107, 5112). Since comparison to standards, not other positions, is the intended and exclusive method for classifying positions, we may not consider the classification of other positions as a basis for deciding an appeal.

Position information

The appellant is assigned to position description number [#]. The appellant, his second level supervisor and the agency have certified the accuracy of the position description.

The appellant functions as an Engineering Technician with responsibility for conducting standardized and complex metallurgical tests, analyses, and evaluations of materials used in the repair and refitting of submarines. The appellant performs tests and analyses of a variety of physical properties (e.g., spring tension, hardness, tensile properties, microhardness, adhesion strength, etc.) to determine if a material meets military specifications and/or requirements and is suitable for use in repair and refitting operations. Data derived from these tests is consolidated, analyzed, and evaluated by the appellant and is used to prepare technical reports, make recommendations, and develop testing and analytical standards and procedures. He operates and adapts analytical and testing equipment/instrumentation used in the performance of a variety of analyses; modifies existing equipment to perform needed analyses/tests when standard equipment

is unavailable; develops new procedures and techniques for using existing equipment through evaluation of trade and technical publications, manuals, and application of relevant published criteria. The appellant also participates in the planning, initiation, accomplishment of complex, mission related long-range projects undertaken by the organization; makes adjustments to routine operating procedures; evaluates and recommends new analytical/testing methods to superiors; develops new internal procedures and prepares documentation for their use by other branch personnel; and provides training and technical direction on laboratory procedures to the personnel of his branch, ships, and other facilities.

The appellant receives assignments from the Materials Engineer whom he assists and/or the Supervisory Chemist who supervises the analytical and testing operations and personnel assigned to the [branch]. Assignments are in terms of overall project objectives with the Materials Engineer or Supervisory Chemist setting overall priorities and outlining overall goals. The appellant independently carries out the steps (e.g., identifies the correct analytical method, prepares and tests samples, troubleshoots equipment problems, prepares reports of results, etc.) required to accomplish normal work assignments with minimal supervisory direction or guidance. Supervisors are kept abreast of the status of assignments and made aware of controversial or unusual findings and issues. Completed work is assessed through supervisory review of the appellant's reports on the results of the analyses or tests performed.

Series determination

The agency placed the position in the Engineering Technician Series, GS-802. The appellant does not contest the placement of his position in this series, and we agree.

The Engineering Technician Series, GS-802, includes technical positions that require primarily application of a practical knowledge of (a) the methods and techniques of engineering or architecture; and (b) the construction, application, properties, operation, and limitations of engineering systems, processes, structures, machinery, devices, and materials. The positions do not require professional knowledges and abilities for full performance, and therefore, do not require training equivalent in type and scope to that represented by the completion of a professional curriculum leading to a bachelor's degree in engineering or architecture.

The appellant's position is properly placed in the Engineering Technician Series, GS-802.

Title determination

The appellant does not contest the title of his position, and we agree. The GS-802 series authorizes the title *Materials Engineering Technician* for engineering technician positions concerned with the properties, characteristics, and use of engineering materials.

Standard determination

Engineering Technician Series, GS-802, June 1969.

Grade determination

The GS-802 standard defines grade levels using two broad classification criteria: *Nature of Assignment* and *Level of Responsibility*. The agency evaluated both factors at GS-9. The appellant believes that his position should be evaluated at GS-11 or 12.

Nature of Assignment

This includes the scope and difficulty of the work and the skills and knowledge required to complete the assignment.

At the GS-9 level, engineering technicians typically perform a variety of work relating to the area of specialization that requires the application of a considerable number of different basic but established methods, procedures, and techniques. The employee usually has independent responsibility for planning and conducting a block of work which may be a complete conventional project or a portion of a larger more diverse project. When phases or details are preformed by other groups or personnel outside the organizational unit, the technician reviews, analyzes, and integrates their work. Additionally, assignments at this level require a good understanding of the effect that recommendations made or other results of the assignments may have on an item, system, or process and its end-use application. Also at this level, the employee is often required to deviate from original plans to incorporate additional factors encountered or requested after the beginning of the assignment.

At the GS-11 level, the technician performs work of broad scope and complexity which requires interpreting, adapting, and applying numerous guidelines, engineering principles and practices which relate to the area of specialization. At this level, the technician is typically confronted with a variety of complex problems which require considerable judgment to make sound engineering compromises and decisions. Ingenuity and creative thinking are required in devising new ways of accomplishing objectives, and in adapting existing equipment or current techniques to new uses.

The appellant's typical work is comparable to the GS-9 level. He performs standard engineering tests using established methods and techniques to accomplish the work. He selects the approach and plans and executes the assignments within available guidelines including Federal and military specifications, Navy and installation laboratory procedures, and a variety of technical standards, methods, manuals, and handbooks. He is responsible for conducting a variety of tests and analyses of materials and the preparation of reports of findings. The appellant must be able to prepare engineering and technical drawings of specifications to have test samples fabricated by shop personnel. The appellant's assignments do not meet the GS-11 level since he is not required

to interpret and adapt engineering standards, make engineering compromises, or devise new ways of accomplishing objectives.

Nature of Assignment is credited at GS-9.

Level of Responsibility

This considers the nature and purpose of person-to-person work relationships and supervision received in terms of intensity of review, as well as guidance received during the course of the work cycle.

At the GS-9 level, the supervisor outlines requirements and furnishes general instructions as to the scope of objectives, time limitations, and priorities. The supervisor is consulted in situations requiring significant deviation from standard engineering practices. The supervisor observes the work of a GS-9 technician for progress and coordination with work performed by other employees and for adherence to completion and cost schedules. Standard methods employed by the technician are not typically subject to review but review is made for adequacy and conformance with established policies, precedents and sound engineering concepts and usage. Personal work contacts are primarily to resolve mutual problems and coordinate work with that of personnel in related activities. The GS-9 technician has person-to-person contacts with clients for whom work is done, contractors and architect-engineering firms to promote adherence to agency standards and advise of discrepancies.

At the GS-11 level, the technician has considerable freedom to plan and carry out assignments. The supervisor makes assignments in terms of major objectives and provides advice on specific unusual problems which are anticipated. There is little review of the technician's work during the progress of typical assignments. Technical assistance is infrequently sought or required, but the supervisor may be consulted when unusual or controversial problems or policy questions arise. Person-to-person contacts are more extensive in scope and involve complex engineering problems and are carried out without close supervision.

The appellant meets the GS-9 level. He receives direction and general instructions on projects from the Materials Engineer and the Supervisory Chemist and the work is reviewed for technical accuracy. The appellant's contacts include technical personnel from other shops, submarine crew members, customers bringing in work, other engineers, and specialists in his field. Contacts are for the purpose of discussing potential approaches and solutions to problems, coordinating work efforts, obtaining and providing additional information and other matters related to materials testing. The appellant's level of responsibility does not meet the GS-11 level. His work assignments represent a relatively structured environment involving standard testing methods and procedures and do not typically involve the level of complexity found in GS-11 assignments. Technical assistance, if needed, is available from the Materials Engineer or the Supervisory Chemist. The GS-11 level of responsibility assumes that the employee is performing assignments equivalent to the GS-11 level and would, therefore, have responsibility for adapting a general font

of knowledge and interpreting precedents to handle complex assignments requiring the exercise of considerable judgment. In this instance, the appellant applies conventional engineering practices and a knowledge of the codes, specifications, and regulations to his projects. He exercises some degree of judgment in determining the applicability of the specifications, codes, and engineering principles to the specific assignment. However, the supervisor is made aware of controversial, non-routine work, findings, or test results. This level of responsibility does not meet the full intent of the GS-11 level.

Level of Responsibility is credited at GS-9.

Summary

Both *Nature of Assignment* and *Level of Responsibility* equate to the GS-9 level.

Decision

The appellant's position is correctly classified as Material Engineering Technician, GS-802-9.