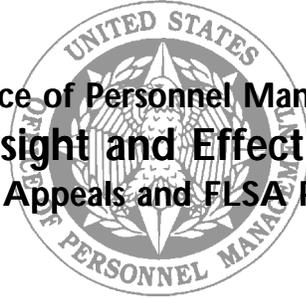


U.S. Office of Personnel Management  
Office of Merit Systems Oversight and Effectiveness  
Classification Appeals and FLSA Programs



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:** Visual Information Specialist  
GS-1084-12

**Organization:** Visual Information Branch  
Technical Media Services Division  
Information Services Department  
[installation]  
[city and State]

**OPM decision:** Visual Information Specialist  
GS-1084-11

**OPM decision number:** **C-1084-11-01**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Linda Kazinetz  
Classification Appeals Officer

June 1, 2000  
\_\_\_\_\_  
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).

Since this decision changes the grade of the appealed position, it is to be effective no later than the beginning of the sixth pay period after the date of this decision, as permitted by 5 CFR 511.702. The servicing personnel office must submit a compliance report containing the corrected position description and a Standard Form 50 showing the personnel action taken. The report must be submitted within 30 days from the effective date of the personnel action.

The personnel office must also determine if the appellant is entitled to grade or pay retention, or both, under 5 U.S.C. 5362 and 5363 and 5 CFR 536. If the appellant is entitled to grade retention, the two-year retention period begins on the date this decision is implemented.

### **Decision sent to:**

[appellant]

[servicing personnel officer]

Ms. Janice W. Cooper  
Chief, Classification Branch  
Field Advisory Services Division  
Department of Defense  
Civilian Personnel Management Service  
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Arlington, Virginia 22209-5144

Mr. R.M. James, Jr.  
Director, Civilian Personnel Programs Division  
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800 North Quincy Street  
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## **Introduction**

On March 31, 2000, 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 Visual Information Specialist, GS-1084-12, in the Visual Information Branch of the Technical Media Services Division, Information Services Department, at [installation] in [city and State]. [Appellant] requested that her position be classified as Publishing Consultant, GS-301-13/14, or Arts and Information Specialist, GS-1001-13/14. 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 May 16, 2000, including an interview with the appellant's first-line supervisor, [name]. 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 4C00052001, most recently classified by the servicing personnel office as Visual Information Specialist, GS-1084-12, on January 18, 2000.

## **Position Information**

The appellant reported that she spends approximately 50 percent of her time designing the visual aspects of brochures and other similar materials, principally within the subject-matter area of explosives safety. This may include selecting photographs and other visual elements, producing illustrations and other graphics, drafting written passages, determining the style and format of the product, and otherwise planning its overall layout and appearance.

The appellant also reported that she spends the other 50 percent of her time processing site approvals for explosives storage, production, and handling facilities. This involves reviewing approvals received from the Department of Defense Explosives Safety Board and comparing them to the original submittals to ensure that locations and data coincide, and preparing transmittal letters to the submitting activities. The appellant estimated that she processes approximately 100 of these approvals each year.

The appellant is currently researching and writing an article on shipboard explosives inspections for the Explosives Safety Newsletter. However, she reported that she writes no more than two such articles each year. Only duties that are regular and recurring, and that occupy at least 25 percent of an employee's time, can affect the grade of a position. Therefore, these duties are not evaluated in this decision.

## **Series Determination**

The appellant's work involving the design of visual materials is covered under the Visual Information Series, GS-1084. This series includes positions involved in communicating information through visual means, including 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 description

represents the primary purpose and knowledge requirements of the appellant's position and the highest grade level of work performed by the appellant.

The appellant's work involving the processing of explosives site approvals is not covered under any specific occupational or subject-matter series. However, this work is one-grade interval clerical or technical work rather than two-grade interval professional or administrative work. Employees who perform one-grade interval work follow established methods and procedures. They perform their work based on a practical knowledge of the purpose, operation, procedures, and guidelines of the specific program area or functional assignment. They learn to do the work through on-the-job training, or they may attend specific training courses related to the work. Employees who perform two-grade interval work, on the other hand, must apply a high order of analytical ability and comprehensive knowledge of the program or functional field. Their work requires considerable judgment in determining the correct course of action to take in specific assignments.

The appellant reviews completed explosives site approvals prepared by engineers at the DoD Explosives Safety Board. The purpose of her review is to check various data contained in the approval to ensure that there are no discrepancies between the approval and the original submittal, that figures cited are correct, that facilities and locations are properly identified, etc. This is basically proofreading, and if she finds any apparent errors or discrepancies, she either corrects obvious typographical errors or brings them to the attention of the professional staff. She then prepares a transmittal letter to the submitting activity by extracting pertinent information (e.g., on the conditions of the approval) from either the original activity package, the program office's submittal to the Explosives Safety Board, or the approval letter. She has no involvement in identifying sites for the explosives facilities, nor in determining the modifications that must be made to the original plans based on the conditions of the site approvals. She is not technically responsible for ensuring that site plans conform to explosives safety regulations and guidelines, as her work is thoroughly checked by the program office's engineering staff before it is released. Her review is clerical in nature, to verify data and locations cited in the site approvals and to transmit these to the submitting activities. As such, this is one-grade interval work, and since it is not associated with a specific occupational or subject-matter series, it is classifiable to the Miscellaneous Clerk and Assistant Series, GS-303.

Positions that involve work in two or more series are to be assigned to the series that represents the highest grade level of work performed, if that work represents the main work of the position and its paramount knowledge requirements. Therefore, the appellant's position is properly assigned to the Visual Information Series, GS-1084.

The position does not belong in the Miscellaneous Administration and Program Series, GS-301. That series is reserved for administrative positions involved in the performance of specialized, two-grade interval work not otherwise covered by another established occupational series. Since the appellant performs two-grade interval visual information work covered by the GS-1084 series, there is no basis for assigning her position to the GS-301 series.

Likewise, the position does not belong in the General Arts and Information Series, GS-1001. That series covers positions involving work characteristic of two or more series in the overall information and arts occupational group, where (a) no one type of work is series controlling, (b) the paramount qualification requirements are not characteristic of another series in the group, and (c) the combination of work is not specifically provided for in another series. The information and arts group encompasses such work as illustrating, museum curating, public affairs, music and theater arts, photography, audiovisual production, writing and editing, and visual information. The appellant's work is associated primarily with the GS-1084 series, although she may on occasion produce photographs and illustrations or do some writing to clarify the information being presented. However, the GS-1084 series provides for mixed positions combining visual information work with other related work such as illustrating, photography, or exhibits construction, when the work involves broader knowledge of the principles and techniques of visual design than is associated with these more specialized fields. Therefore, the GS-1084 series covers the variety of duties performed by the appellant in connection with her visual information assignments.

### **Title Determination**

The appellant's position is correctly titled as Visual Information Specialist, which is the authorized title for all nonsupervisory positions in the GS-1084 series.

### **Grade Determination**

#### ***Evaluation of Visual Information Work***

The GS-1084 standard does not contain grade-level criteria, and instructs that work covered under this series be evaluated by reference to the Grade Evaluation Guide for Visual Arts Work. This guide 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.

Classification standards and guides provide evaluation criteria for factor levels that are typical of the occupation covered. For example, higher factor levels are omitted if the nature of the work in a particular occupation does not normally permit performance at those levels. Although factor levels above those covered in a standard may be used if warranted by referencing a related occupational standard or the Primary Standard, positions classified like this would be unusual for the particular occupation.

The Primary Standard serves as the framework for the Factor Evaluation System and for classification standards and guides written in FES format. It describes the basic levels of the nine factors in broad conceptual terms. It may be used to point rate an individual position factor when that factor exceeds the highest factor level in the applicable FES occupational standard. If the highest factor level described is fully met but not exceeded, there is no need to reference the next higher level in the Primary Standard or any other standard. In the appellant's position, we did not find that any of the highest factor levels described in the Guide for Visual Arts Work were exceeded. However, we have addressed the Primary Standard in the below evaluation in response to its reference in the agency evaluation and the appellant's appeal.

*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 1-7 (the highest level described under this factor), work requires knowledge of the subject matter area supported that is thorough enough to plan visual products that interpret subject matter content information provided with the assignment. For example, at this level the employee plans original visual treatments for printed publications or exhibits, to include meeting with the client to learn the information objectives of the project and the points to be emphasized, and deciding such design matters as size, layout, materials, medium, color, typography, and special visual elements, reproduction methods, or fabrication techniques.

The knowledge required by the appellant's position matches Level 1-7. This basically represents the level of the fully skilled employee who is well versed in the subject matter or programmatic area and is able to carry out a variety of original projects from inception to completion.

The position does not meet Level 1-8 in the Primary Standard. At that level, work requires mastery of a professional or administrative field to apply experimental theories and new developments to problems not susceptible to treatment by accepted methods, or to make decisions or recommendations significantly changing, interpreting, or developing important public policies or programs.

The nature of the appellant's work does not lend itself to the exercise of this level of knowledge. Her work does not require the application of experimental theories or new developments, nor does she make any programmatic or policy decisions. She develops visual information products using materials and techniques common to the occupational field. Some of these may be somewhat nonstandard, such as combining a brochure within a folder, or binding a booklet with a back spiral so that it will lay flat, but these are not new or experimental developments in the visual information field.

Level 1-7 is credited.

1250 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.

At Level 2-4 (the highest level described under this factor), the employee is given only the broad objectives and resource limitations of the project, and consults with the supervisor or client to develop specific ideas on the appearance and content of the product. The employee independently plans and carries out the work, coordinating and resolving most differences with clients. Completed work is reviewed only in terms of customer satisfaction.

The level of responsibility under which the appellant works is comparable to Level 2-4. This level describes operating with a great deal of technical independence in carrying out the work, where the employee deals directly with the client in determining requirements, presenting options, and making requested changes. At this level, there is no actual supervisory review of the completed products. This describes the manner in which the appellant operates. Her assignments may be made through the supervisor or they may be presented directly to her by her customers. She works directly with the customers in identifying the objectives to be met by the products, suggesting alternative visual treatments, and presenting work in progress for acceptance. Her supervisor does not review or approve completed products, but does keep apprised of her progress and of customer satisfaction with her work.

The position does not meet Level 2-5 in the Primary Standard. At that level, the supervisor provides administrative direction with assignments in terms of broadly defined missions or functions. The employee has responsibility for independently planning, designing, and carrying out programs, projects, studies, or other work. Results of the work are considered technically authoritative and are normally accepted without significant change. If the work should be reviewed, the review concerns such matters as fulfillment of program objectives, effect of advice and influence on the overall program, or the contribution to the advancement of technology. Recommendations for new projects and alteration of objectives usually are evaluated for such considerations as availability of funds and other resources, broad program goals, or national priorities.

This level describes a degree of program management authority that is not present in the appellant's position. It represents the level at which the employee is responsible for an overall program or functional area, and works under administrative direction in ensuring that the mission and objectives of the assigned program are accomplished. Its focus is on broad program authority rather than on technical independence in discrete assignments. The appellant provides visual information support to an assigned program area, in which she is given specific assignments with instructions as to objectives and cost considerations. She is not responsible for an overall visual information program, to include determining the work to be accomplished under that program. Her role in the organization as a journey-level worker precludes crediting of this level.

Level 2-4 is credited.

450 points

### *Factor 3, Guidelines*

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

At Level 3-4 (the highest level described under this factor), the subject matter to be depicted is either novel or vague, and the form and content of the visual product are left to the employee's discretion. The projects are unique and guidelines are scarce or of limited use. The employee must research the subject matter, search for appropriate visual elements, or test new materials and methods.

The guidelines used by the appellant match Level 3-4. The appellant is given assignments with only general instructions as to the objectives to be achieved by the visual product. She is expected to identify the aspects of the subject to be depicted, and to determine the most appropriate format and approach. As an example, she is currently working on a display case for a support office depicting the organizational mission and activities. Since there is no existing display, the appellant has to research the program files to find representative samples of their work and to search for visual elements such as photographs to illustrate the work.

The position does not meet Level 3-5 in the Primary Standard. At that level, guidelines are broadly stated and nonspecific, e.g., broad policy statements and basic legislation that require extensive interpretation. The employee must use judgment and ingenuity in interpreting the intent of the guidelines that do exist and in developing applications to specific areas of work. The employee is frequently recognized as a technical authority in the development and interpretation of guidelines. The appellant's functional responsibilities do not lend themselves to the use of these kinds of guidelines. Her job is to design specific visual materials. The customer gives her guidance on the objectives to be achieved or on the general types of information to be conveyed, and advises her while the work is in progress on any material that may be inappropriate for presentation. She does not work within the broad parameters of only basic legislation and policy, but rather within the more defined requirements related to the objectives of the visual material to be produced. Although she argues that she is recognized as a technical authority, she is not a technical authority in the development of guidelines for her occupational field, which is the intent of this level. She does not, for example, develop guidelines for use by other visual information specialists on the conduct of visual information activities, or instructing them on how to use certain materials, or setting forth requirements for the treatment of certain types of projects.

Level 3-4 is credited.

450 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.

At Level 4-4, the work involves various projects requiring the use of a wide range of methods, materials, or art media. The projects are conventional, but no format or visual style has been specified. Visual products have been done before on the same general subject matter and in the same general manner of presentation. The emphasis is on planning, research, and collaboration with persons knowledgeable in the subject matter to be presented. This includes identifying sources of information and material needed and deciding which images and artifacts to present and emphasize.

The complexity of the appellant's work is comparable to Level 4-4. The appellant has designed various brochures, booklets, folders, and displays using a variety of materials and formats. The projects are conventional in the sense that they are rather standard programmatic materials that either describe work being performed by an organization or that serve as basic technical references. As at this level, the format and visual style are generally not specified and the appellant has free rein to suggest alternatives within cost and time constraints. The appellant's work exceeds this level in the respect that there generally have not been earlier visual products on the specific subject matter. However, her projects do not involve particularly technical or complex material but rather consist more of organizational information.

The position does not meet Level 4-5. At that level, the work involves projects that require extensive research into, and decision-making on, the subject matter to be presented due to such conditions as the novelty of the subject matter (e.g., newly found zoological species, newly conceived technology, newly observed natural phenomena, unique historic structures); abstract nature of the subject matter to be presented (e.g., broad concepts or ideas as opposed to specific events or processes); or multiplicity of themes in the subject matter and diversity in the levels of knowledge and interest among audience members. The work requires translating subject matter ideas and information into unprecedented visual products.

The subject matter depicted by the appellant is not this technically complex or conceptually abstract. Most of her projects consist of brochures or displays that tell about the work of the organization or give basic procedural guidance. If any technical information is included, its presentation is brief and superficial. These are not in-depth technical publications that would require the appellant to extensively research the subject matter. Rather, most of the information can be readily obtained from program files.

Level 4-4 is credited.

225 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 5-3, the purpose of the work is to develop a variety of conventional visual products. The work products support and affect the adequacy of such activities as public information, training, or developing technical publications.

The scope and effect of the appellant's work match Level 5-3. The purpose of her work is primarily to design and develop such products as brochures, booklets, folders, and organizational displays. These products are conventional in that there is nothing particularly unusual about them. The work products represent either technical bulletins or public information materials designed to present the work of the organization.

The position does not meet Level 5-4. At that level, the purpose of the work is to design novel or unusual visual products involving a multiplicity of media or individual visual components. The products typically require specifying, accepting, or rejecting custom-produced photographs, illustrations, murals, maps, video or animated sequences, models, sculptures, exhibit display cases, or unique support or suspension systems for artifacts of unusual size, weight, or fragility. The designs affect a wide range of activities both within and outside the agency, such as in-house production operations, procurement actions, and finance office transactions; the activities of private sector visual arts production contractors; and the activities of other local, State, and Federal agencies involved in related work.

The appellant's products are not novel or unique, nor do they incorporate a multiplicity of media or visual components. They are relatively simple, self-contained items, such as a technical bulletin, folder, or a basic organizational display. These products are not of the magnitude or complexity expected at this level, which might include, for example, designing a visual display for the visitor center of a park, historic site, or agency headquarters that involves such elements as maps, illustrations, display cases for historic artifacts or natural specimens, and video sequences. Also, because her products are of a much smaller scale than expected at this level, she completes them herself and thus does not have to coordinate and review the work of contractors or other in-house visual arts production personnel.

Level 5-3 is credited.

150 points

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

Under Persons Contacted, Level 2 is assigned, where contacts are with employees in the same agency but outside the visual arts organization. Level 3 is not met, in that the appellant does not have contacts with the head of the agency or command.

Under Purpose of Contacts, Level b is assigned (the highest level described under this factor), where contacts are to plan, coordinate, or advise on work efforts or to resolve technical problems.

Level 2b is credited.

75 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. Although the appellant initially reported that she has been exposed to explosives in her work, she acknowledged that this occurs only about once every couple of years.

Level 9-1 is credited.

5 points

*Summary*

<u>Factors</u>	<u>Level</u>	<u>Points</u>
Knowledge Required	1-7	1250
Supervisory Controls	2-4	450
Guidelines	3-4	450
Complexity	4-4	225
Scope and Effect	5-3	150
Personal Contacts/ Purpose of Contacts	2b	75
Physical Demands	8-1	5
Work Environment	9-1	<u>5</u>
Total		2610

The total of 2610 points falls within the GS-11 range (2355-2750) on the grade conversion table provided in the standard.

***Evaluation of Site Approval Work***

The GS-303 standard does not contain grade-level criteria. It instructs that work classifiable to this series be evaluated by reference to the General Grade-Evaluation Guide for Nonsupervisory Clerical Positions, or by reference to other one-grade interval standards such as the Management Clerical and Assistance Series, GS-344. These standards provide grade-level criteria to the GS-7 level only, as one-grade interval work would rarely exceed that level.

The visual information work performed by the appellant and evaluated above at the GS-11 level is the grade-controlling work of her position. For this reason, the lower-graded site approval work is not evaluated in this decision since it has no effect on the grade level of the position.

**Decision**

The appealed position is properly classified as Visual Information Specialist, GS-1084-11.