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

Appellant: [appellant]

Agency classification: Secretary (Stenography/OA)
GS-318-7

Organization: Commander’s Office
[organization]
Air Combat Command
Department of the Air Force
[location]

OPM decision: Secretary (OA)
GS-318-7

OPM decision number: C-0318-07-06

/s/ Judith L. Frenzel
Judith L. Frenzel
Classification Appeals Officer

October 15, 2003
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).

Since this decision changes the classification of the appealed position, it is to be effective no later than the beginning of the fourth pay period after the date of the decision (5CFR 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.

**Decision sent to:**

[appellant’s name and address]

Civilian Personnel Officer
[servicing personnel office address]

Director, Civilian Personnel Operations
HQ AFPC/DPC
U.S. Department of the Air Force
550 C Street West, Suite 57
Randolph Air Force Base, Texas 78150-4759

Chief, Civilian Policy
HQ USAF/DPFC
Department of the Air Force
1040 Air Force Pentagon
Washington, DC 20330-1040

Chief, Classification Appeals Adjudication Section
Civilian Personnel Management Service
Department of Defense
1400 Key Boulevard, Suite B-200
Arlington, Virginia 22209-5144
Introduction

On July 2, 2003, the Dallas Field Services Group of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted a classification appeal from [appellant]. The agency’s complete administrative report was received on July 21, 2003. The appellant’s position is currently classified as Secretary (Stenography/OA), GS-318-7. She believes the position should be classified as Secretary (OA), GS-318-8. The appellant’s position is assigned to the Office of the Wing Commander, [organization], Air Combat Command, Department of the Air Force, [location]. We have accepted and decided this appeal under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code.

Background information

The appellant is assigned to Core Personnel Document (CPD) [number], dated December 1997. This document indicates it was a replication of AF [number], dated May 1, 1985. The previous supervisor submitted a request to upgrade the position and revise the position description to the Civilian Personnel Office (CPO) on April 1, 2002. The CPO replied on June 13, 2003, indicating that personnel staff had completed an audit and found the position properly graded at the GS-7 level. The appellant initiated a grievance and stated she met with a union official on October 31, 2002. She was advised her issue was not grievable but was a classification appeal issue. The appellant was told by the union her case had been sent to OPM. She stated that after several follow-ups with the union, she contacted our office and filed an appeal directly with this office. There was no record of a previous request from or on behalf of the appellant within OPM.

The appellant states that her current position warrants an upgrade to GS-318-8 because her duties, workload, and the number of personnel within the organization] have increased dramatically since her current PD was written. The appellant also compares her position to the positions of other secretaries located at [location]. Two of these positions are assigned to other tenant agencies. In determining the appropriate classification of the appellant’s position, we cannot consider either the volume of work (The Classifier’s Handbook, chapter 5) or comparison of the appellant’s position to other positions as a basis for deciding her appeal.

Like OPM, the appellant’s agency must classify positions solely by comparing their current duties and responsibilities to OPM standards and guidelines (5 U.S.C. 5106, 5107, and 5112). Section 511.612 of 5 CFR requires that agencies review their own classification decisions for identical, similar, or related positions to insure consistency with OPM certificates. Thus, the agency has the primary responsibility for insuring that its positions are classified consistently with OPM appeal decisions. The appellant believes that her position is classified inconsistently with others. Because these positions involve multiple agencies within Department of Defense, she may pursue this matter by writing to the Department of Defense’s Civilian Personnel Management Service. In so doing, she should specify the precise organizational location, series, title, grade, duties, and responsibilities of the positions in question. The agency should explain to her the differences between her position and the others, or grade those positions in accordance with this appeal decision.
To help decide this appeal, we conducted a telephone audit of the appellant’s position on August 18, 2003. Follow-up discussions with her were held on August 28 and September 2, 2003. We also conducted telephone interviews with the appellant’s acting supervisor on August 20 and with her supervisor on September 9, 2003. In reaching our decision, we have reviewed the audit and interview findings as well as all the information contained in the written record provided by the appellant and her agency.

**Position information**

The acting supervisor, the Director of Staff, certified the current CPD as *basically* correct in the general duties, however, it does not reflect the expanded roles and duties of the Wing and the appellant’s duties. The appellant states that CPD [number] was written based on a PD written in 1985 and does not reflect the current mission of the Wing. A position description is the official record of the major duties and responsibilities assigned to a position by a responsible management official; i.e., a person with authority to assign work to a position. A position is the duties and responsibilities that make up the work performed by an employee. Classification appeal regulations permit OPM to investigate or audit a position and decide an appeal on the basis of the duties assigned by management and performed by the employee. We classify a real operating position, not simply the PD.

The Commander of the [organization] is responsible for the operations, maintenance, logistics, training, and combat support of [number and type] aircraft, worldwide. He is responsible to the commander of the Air Combat Command. The Wing consists of three groups; i.e., Operations, Maintenance, and Computer Systems. These groups are further divided into 13 squadrons with a total of approximately 3,800 enlisted, officers, and civilian personnel, including 48 officers and enlisted personnel from Canada and two other countries. The appellant serves as the principal office assistant, providing secretarial support to the Wing Commander, the Vice Commander, and the Director of Staff of the [organization]. She also performs duties in support of the Executive Officer to the Wing Commander.

The appellant ensures the General, the Vice Commander, and the Director of Staff are current in their required flight and training hours. She maintains and controls their personal calendars and schedules, ensuring priority appointments and meetings are kept and that there are no conflicts. The appellant receives, screens, and directs all calls and visitors, ascertaining the nature of the request, responding to routine or non-technical inquiries personally, and referring technical or non-routine inquiries to the appropriate staff. She meets, greets, and prepares for distinguished visitor’s on an average of one to two per week this past year.

The appellant responds to requests for appointments, meetings, interviews, and invitations for the Wing Commander, Vice Commander, and the Director of Staff based on her knowledge of their schedules and responsibilities. She arranges their travel, transportation, and lodging (if necessary) and advises them on administrative and procedural matters. The appellant also coordinates planning with the Wing’s protocol and public affairs offices for all official business meetings. The appellant plans and coordinates administrative arrangements for conferences, ceremonies, and other meetings. She compiles information for and briefs the Wing Commander and the Vice Commander on items relevant to their participation at such functions.
The appellant reviews incoming correspondence and identifies needed action, prepares replies to routine and non-technical matters and refers technical or other matters to the appropriate staff specialists. Outgoing correspondence and reports are reviewed for conformance with regulation, policy, format, spelling, etc. She reviews all officer and senior enlisted service members’ performance reviews, requiring the Wing Commander or Vice Commander’s signature, for accuracy in format and required data. She provides advice and assistance on correspondence procedures and formatting to subordinate Wing support staff that includes 10 GS-5 and 4 GS-6 secretaries. She conducts monthly administrative meetings with all 14 secretaries to provide guidance and advise them of administrative policy and personnel changes. To accomplish her work, the appellant uses various computer software programs including Microsoft Word, Excel, and Access.

Series, title, and standard determination

We find the appellant’s position is properly classified in the Secretary Series, GS-318. Neither the appellant nor the agency questions the series of the position. Consistent with our series determination, the proper title for the appellant’s position is Secretary. As the position requires a qualified typist and proficiency in the use of office automation software, the title should include “Office Automation” as a parenthetical title. Interviews with the appellant and her supervisor established that her position does not require the use of stenography. Accordingly, this designation should be eliminated from her position’s title. The full title of the appellant’s position is Secretary (Office Automation).

When evaluating the appellant’s position, we applied the Office Automation Grade Evaluation Guide to ensure that her use of office automation systems was not classifiable at a higher grade than her secretarial work. We determined that these responsibilities are at a lower grade level than the secretarial work performed. As a result, the appellant’s position is properly graded using the Position Classification Standard for the Secretary Series, GS-318.

Grade determination

The GS-318 standard is written in the Factor Evaluation System (FES) format, which uses nine factors. Each factor is evaluated separately and is assigned a point value consistent with the factor level definitions described in the standard. The total number of points for all nine factors is converted to a grade by use of the standard’s grade conversion table. Under the FES, each factor level description describes the minimum characteristics needed to receive credit for the described level. Therefore, if a position fails to meet the criteria in a factor level description in any significant aspect, it must be credited at the next lower level. Conversely, the position may exceed those criteria in some aspects and still not be credited at a higher level.

Factor 1, Knowledge required by the position

This factor measures the nature and extent of information or facts which the secretary must understand to do acceptable work (e.g., procedures, practices, rules, policies, principles, and concepts) and the nature and extent of the skills needed to apply that knowledge. The GS-318
standard measures this factor by (1) the type of knowledge required and (2) the work situation of the position.

_Knowledge type_

The knowledge required by the appellant’s position matches Knowledge Type III. Positions at this level require, in addition to Type II knowledge, knowledge of the duties, priorities, commitments, policies, and program goals of the staff sufficient to perform non-routine assignments such as: independently noting and following-up on commitments made at meetings and conferences by staff members, shifting clerical staff in subordinate offices, or locating and summarizing information from files when this requires recognizing which information is or is not relevant to the problem at hand. At this level, the secretary is fully responsible for coordinating the work of the office with the work of other offices, and for recognizing the need for such coordination in various circumstances. This may include advising secretaries in subordinate organizations concerning such matters as the information to be provided by the subordinate organizations for use in conferences or reports.

Type III Knowledge characterizes the nature of the appellant’s work and her role in the office. The appellant must know the policies and priorities of the supervisor and his staff in order to handle the administrative matters that arise and to coordinate with the work of other offices, e.g., in obtaining administrative services, arranging meetings, and conveying information. She must understand established policies and practices in a variety of administrative areas, e.g., travel, military protocol, and internal and external communication. She must possess considerable knowledge of her organization’s program goals and priorities, understand the functions of the Command, and of the subordinate units within the Wing. She uses this knowledge in her day-to-day work to review letters, responses to Congressional inquiries, and military progress and performance reports for format, completeness, and accuracy of spelling and grammar. The appellant directs technical or nonroutine correspondence to the appropriate staff. She prepares correspondence such as letters of appreciation or recognition on the General’s letterhead for signature by the Commanding General and the Vice Commander. In her daily duties, the appellant must also be able to recognize problems with incomplete or missing information on administrative paperwork submitted to the Command Section by other groups in the Wing and in responses to requests for information by the General and his staff.

Although the appellant routinely develops simple material for the General’s use in public speaking engagements, e.g., commendations, achievements, personnel changes, the work does not meet the criteria for Knowledge Type IV. Positions at Knowledge Type IV require the secretary to regularly use organizational and administrative knowledge to eliminate conflict in office procedures, to systematically evaluate administrative processes used by subordinate offices, and to recommend restructuring of activities. At this level, the secretary routinely uses knowledge of policies and procedures to adapt them to emergency situations and to recognize how and when policies, procedures, and guidelines would be confusing to others. This level of knowledge is not required of the appellant’s position. The appellant indicated that she does not develop or change procedures, study and evaluate new equipment, or regularly brief staff or persons outside the organization on the supervisor’s views on current issues facing the
organization. Because the position does not meet the criteria for Knowledge Type IV, it is appropriately credited with Knowledge Type III.

**Work Situation**

The work situation refers to the complexity of the organization served by the secretary, such as the immediate office in which the secretary works and any subordinate offices which affect the extent of office rules, procedures, operations, and priorities the secretary must apply to maintain the flow of work within and between organizations.

In Work Situation B, the staff is divided into subordinate segments which may be further subdivided, work direction is through intermediate supervisors, and the subordinate groups differ in function and administrative requirements in such a way that demands are placed on the secretary that are significantly greater than those described in Work Situation A. In this situation, there is a system of formal internal procedures and administrative controls and a formal production or progress reporting system.

In Work Situation C, in addition to the conditions described at Work Situation B, staffs of 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 found at each level. In addition, such organizations typically have one of the following, or equivalent, conditions which increase the knowledge required by the work: the program is interlocked on a direct and continuing basis with the program of other departments, agencies, or organizations, requiring constant attention to extensive formal clearances and procedural controls; the program is directly affected by conditions outside the organization which vary widely in nature and intensity, and which frequently require organizational, procedural, or program adjustments in the supervisor’s organization; or there is active and extensive public interest or participation in the program which results in the supervisor spending a substantial portion of the time in personal contacts such as those with citizens group, professional societies, the media, educational groups, officials of State or local governments, or community leaders.

The appellant’s position matches Work Situation B. Comparable to the standard’s description, the [organization] is organized into subordinate groups, all of which are further divided, with intermediate supervisors. The three groups are operations, maintenance, and computer systems, each involving different aspects of the Wing’s mission. The operations group is the largest having 7 squadrons, maintenance has 4, and computer systems has 2. The appellant works with the Command Section staff that also includes 4 senior enlisted staff members, as well as the 3 Group Commanders and 10 program chiefs and their secretarial staff. As typical of Situation B, the appellant maintains frequent and substantive contacts outside the organization, coordinates numerous administrative details in support of the mission, and must be familiar with the internal operations of the Wing and its relationships with outside organization.

The position does not meet Work Situation C. While the Wing is comparatively large and subdivided into subordinate levels, size is not the controlling factor. Organizations at the Situation C level are frequently large enough to require support from internal administrative
functional entities. The General has a subordinate staff officer responsible for military personnel and another for financial management for the Wing. However, the program is not interlocked with other departments or agencies, is not directly affected by outside conditions, nor is there the active and extensive public interest as typical at Situation C that significantly impacts the appellant’s work by requiring additional knowledge requirements or requiring that she establish formal administrative controls between her organization and outside organizations.

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

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 secretary’s responsibility, and the review of completed work. Controls are exercised by the supervisor in the way assignments are made, instructions are given, priorities and deadlines are set, and how objectives and boundaries are defined. The responsibility of the secretary depends upon the extent to which the supervisor expects the secretary to develop the sequence and timing of various aspects of the work, to modify or recommend modifications of instructions, and to participate in establishing priorities.

At Level 2-3, the supervisor defines the overall objectives and priorities of the work and assists the secretary with some special assignments. 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, and accepted practices in the occupation.

At Level 2-4, the supervisor sets the overall objectives and the supervisor and secretary, in consultation, develop the deadlines and the work to be done. The secretary handles a wide variety of situations and conflicts using initiative to determine the approach to be taken or the methods to be used.

The appellant’s position meets Level 2-3 but does not fully meet Level 2-4. At both of these levels, the secretary works independently, using personal initiative to complete many assignments; plans and carries out the clerical work of the office; and handles problems or deviations in accordance with the program goals of the organization. At Level 2-3 and Level 2-4, the work of the secretary is reviewed primarily for effectiveness. At Level 2-4, however, the secretary must use personal initiative to handle a wider variety of situations and conflicts. Secretarial positions at Level 2-4 are most likely to be found in organizations of such size and scope that many complex office problems arise which cannot be brought to the attention of the supervisor. While the General may travel extensively, the Vice Commander, Director of Staff, and/or the Executive Officer are able to provide coverage and guidance, as needed.

Work examples given in the standard at the 2-3 level are comparable to those performed by the appellant. These include: screening calls and visitors, handling many items personally; keeping the supervisors’ calendars, scheduling appointments without prior approval, and briefing the
supervisors prior to the meeting; making arrangements for meetings and conferences based on information concerning purpose and people to attend; screening incoming correspondence, responding personally or referring to appropriate staff; reading outgoing correspondence for procedural and grammatical accuracy, etc.

The appellant performs her work with a great deal of independence, however, the supervisor establishes the overall objectives and priorities of that work. She relies on established policies, commitments, and the program goals to plan and prioritize her work, within those set by the supervisor. This is comparable to Level 2-3. While the appellant drafts letters of commendation, these primarily relate to performance issues and do not require the research described in Level 2-4. She maintains the supervisors’ calendars, including official required social events, however her role is more concerned with coordination of schedules rather than exercising full responsibility for planning, arranging, issuing invitations, etc., typical of the Level 2-4.

Level 2-3 is credited for 275 points.

Factor 3, Guidelines

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

At Level 3-3, the highest level described in the standard, the guidelines include a large body of unwritten policies, precedents, and practices which are not completely applicable to the work or are not specific and deal with matters relating to judgment, efficiency, and relative priorities rather than with procedural concerns. The employee may apply and adapt guidelines, such as regulations or the supervisor’s policies, to specific problems for which the guidelines are not clearly applicable.

The appellant uses the typical guidelines including dictionaries, style manuals, and Air Force regulations and operating instructions, as described in Level 3-2. In addition, many situations occur where guidance has to be adapted to meet specific problems. As at Level 3-3, a significant portion of the appellant’s work is guided by unwritten policies, based on her understanding of the General’s position on a variety of issues. She will use initiative in applying written guidelines based on his position and preferences in a given situation and will establish her priorities based on this knowledge.

Level 3-3 is credited for 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.

At Level 4-3, the highest level described in the standard, the work includes various duties involving different and unrelated processes and methods, such as preparing one-of-a-kind reports or setting up conferences. Decisions at this level regarding what needs to be done and how to
accomplish them are based on the secretary’s knowledge of the duties, priorities, commitments, policies, and program goals of the supervisor and staff and involve analysis of the subject, phase, or issues involved in each assignment to select a course of action from many alternatives.

The complexity of the appellant’s work is comparable to Level 4-3. The appellant performs a variety of different and unrelated duties in support of the office. She makes decisions on what needs to be done and how it should be done based on the program goals, priorities, and commitments of the supervisor and her knowledge of the subject matter. Comparable to Level 4-3, the appellant is responsible for making arrangements for conferences, award ceremonies, receptions, and other meetings, including travel, transportation, hotel reservations, and seating arrangements. Examples of other assignments which may require analysis of the particular issues or needs involved include coordinating VIP visits and tours with the military protocol and public affairs offices. She considers the purpose and level of the visit in determining what to include on the agenda and what additional material to provide (e.g., program summaries). Although the general processes may be similar, considerable judgment must be exercised to accommodate the unique requirements of each situation.

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. In this occupation, effect measures such things as whether the work output facilitates the work of others, provides timely services of a personal nature, or affects the adequacy of systems of clerical and administrative support.

At Level 5-2, the purpose of the work is to carry out specific procedures. 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.

As at Level 5-2, the primary purpose of the appellant’s position is to provide a variety of support work that is essential to the smooth operation of her organization. She serves as liaison between the Command staff and subordinate supervisors. She gathers various types of information used by her supervisor and his staff to carry out their responsibilities, e.g., correspondence on a variety of subjects, follow-up actions from meetings, and reports. She serves as the initial point of contact for arranging meetings, including time and space requirements and for administrative matters such as travel, training, and logistics. Some meetings may involve visitors and officials from outside organizations including other Air Force Commands, members of Congress, and foreign visitors. The appellant’s work primarily involves coordination within the organization, comparable to Level 5-2.

At 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 modifies and devises methods and procedures that significantly and
consistently affect accomplishment of the mission of the office. Secretaries at this level identify and resolve various problems and situations that affect the flow of work in transactions with parties outside the organization. While the mission of the Wing is to provide [type] aircraft support to military theater commanders throughout the world, the record does not show that the appellant is regularly required to devise methods and procedures or that the work has the wide affect described in at Level 5-3 of standard, i.e., identify and resolve problems and situations that affect the flow of work with outside organizations.

Level 5-2 is credited for 75 points.

Factor 6, Personal Contacts

This factor includes face-to-face and telephone contacts 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.

Personal contacts at Level 6-2 are with employees within the same agency, but outside the immediate organization. Persons contacted are generally engaged in different functions, missions, and kinds of work. Also at this level, contacts may be with members of the general public, in a moderately structured setting. Contacts at this level require the secretary to clarify first why the caller or visitor is in contact with the office.

Personal contacts at Level 6-3 are with individuals or groups from outside the employing agency in a moderately unstructured setting, e.g., the contacts are not established on a routine basis, requiring the secretary to identify and locate the appropriate person to contact or to apply significant skill and knowledge in determining to whom a telephone call or visitor should be directed. At this level, the purpose and extent of each contact is different, and the role and authority of each party is identified and developed during the course of contact. Typical contacts at this level include attorneys, representatives of professional organizations, the news media, or public action groups.

The appellant has a variety of personal contacts needed to complete her assignments. The more routine are those within the organization and other organizations on base, comparable to Level 6-2. Because of the mission of the Wing, the appellant’s personal contacts also include high ranking military officials from various U.S. military services, foreign military dignitaries, various members of Congress, State and local government officials, and the general public. She arranges for meetings and visits to the base, working with visitor’s staff and/or directly. While the military Public Affairs or Protocol offices may make initial contacts, the appellant makes and coordinates arrangements, travel, meeting room space, etc. She serves as receptionist for the office, personally greeting most distinguished visitors on arrival and providing any required services during their visit. These may include changing travel arrangements, placing telephone calls, etc. These contacts are a regular and recurring part of her job, averaging between one and two visitors per week, and meet the minimum requirements for crediting Level 6-3.

Level 6-3 is credited for 60 points.
Factor 7, Purpose of Contacts

In this occupation, purpose of personal contacts may range from factual exchanges of information to resolving problems affecting the efficient operation of the office. The personal contacts which serve as the basis for the level selected for this factor must be the same as the contacts which are the basis for the level selected for Factor 6.

The appellant’s position exceeds Level 7-1 where the primary purpose of contacts is to obtain, clarify, or give facts or information directly related to the work, for example, exchanging information when providing telephone and receptionist service.

At Level 7-2, the purpose of the work is to plan, coordinate, or advise on work efforts or to resolve operating problems. The appellant coordinates work within the organization, assuring suspense dates are met on reports and other written products; coordinating schedules of the staff, arranging travel and lodging; scheduling meetings and conferences; and advising the staff, including the subordinate organizations’ support staff on changes to administrative processes. Her contacts with outside visitors are serving the same purpose, coordinating schedules, resolving problems, etc. The position meets but does not exceed Level 7-2 which is the highest level described in the standard.

Level 7-2 is credited for 50 points.

Factor 8, Physical Demands

This factor covers the requirements and physical demands placed on the employee by the work assignment. This includes physical characteristics and abilities required and the physical exertion involved in the work. As at Level 8-1, the appellant’s work is sedentary. While there may be some walking, standing, etc., there are no special physical requirements to perform the work.

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. As illustrated at Level 9-1, the appellant’s work occurs in a standard office setting with good lighting and ventilation. There are no hazards posing greater than normal everyday risks to her personal safety.

Level 9-1 is credited for 5 points.
Summary

We have evaluated the appellant’s position as follows:

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<th>Level</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<td>9. Work environment</td>
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Total 1445

The point total falls within the point range (1355-1600) for the GS-7 grade level.

Decision

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