

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., Suite 1018
Atlanta, GA 30303-3109

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

Appellant: [appellant]

Agency classification: Office Automation Assistant
GS-326-07

Organization: [name] Service
[name] Services
[name] Veterans Affairs
Medical Center (VAMC)
Department of Veterans Affairs
[location]

OPM decision: Computer Assistant
GS-335-07

OPM decision number: C-0335-07-06

/s/ Virginia L. Magnuson
Virginia L. Magnuson
Classification Appeals Officer

June 2, 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 title and series of the appealed position, it is to be effective no later than the beginning of the fourth 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.

Decision sent to:

PERSONAL

[appellant]

[name] Service

[name] Veterans

Affairs Medical Center (VAMC)

[address]

[location]

Supervisory Human Resources Specialist

[name] Veterans

Affairs Medical Center (VAMC)

[address]

[address]

[location]

Deputy Assistant Secretary for

Human Resources Management

Department of Veterans Affairs

810 Vermont Avenue, NW.

Room 206

Washington, DC 20420

Introduction

On March 5, 2003, the Atlanta Field Services Group, formerly the Atlanta Oversight Division, U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM), accepted a classification appeal from [appellant]. Her position is currently classified as Office Automation Assistant, GS-326-7. She works in the [name] Service, [name] Services, [name] Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC), Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), [location]. The appellant is requesting that her position be reclassified as Automated Data Processing Application Coordinator (ADPAC), GS-2210-9. We received a complete administrative report on March 5, 2003. The appeal has been accepted and processed under section 5112(b) of title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.).

General issues

The appellant makes various statements regarding her agency's review and evaluation of her position during the classification process. In adjudicating this appeal, our only concern is to make our own independent decision on the proper classification of her position. By law, we must make that decision solely by comparing her current duties and responsibilities to OPM standards and guidelines (5 U.S.C. 5106, 5107, and 5112). Therefore, we have considered the appellant's statements only insofar as they are relevant to making that comparison.

The appellant also states that her position description is inaccurate. The appellant states that she spends all of her time performing information technology (IT) responsibilities and believes that her position description does not reflect the increased duties, technical knowledge of the surgery package, and training responsibilities of her position. After carefully reviewing all the available information, including the official position description, we have concluded that the duties being performed by the appellant are adequately described for classification purposes in the assigned position description.

A position description is the official record of the major duties and responsibilities assigned to a position by an official with the authority to assign work. OPM considers a position description adequate for classification purposes when it is considered so by one knowledgeable of the occupational field involved and of the application of pertinent classification standards, principles, and policies, and is supplemented by otherwise accurate, available, and current information on the organization, functions, programs, and procedures concerned.

A position is the duties and responsibilities that make up the work performed by an employee. Position classification appeal regulations permit OPM to investigate or audit a position and decide an appeal on the basis of the actual duties and responsibilities currently assigned by management and performed by the employee. An OPM appeal decision classifies a real operating position and not simply the position description. Therefore, this decision is based on the work currently assigned to and performed by the appellant and sets aside any previous agency decision.

In reaching our classification decision, we have carefully reviewed all information furnished by the appellant and the agency, including information obtained from telephone interviews with the appellant, her supervisor, and Information Resources Management Service (IRMS) staff.

Position information

The appellant is assigned to position description number [#]. The appellant's supervisor certified the accuracy of the position description. The appellant did not.

The appellant works in the [name] Service at the VAMC. The [name] Service includes approximately 105 computers and five imaging workstations. The computers and workstations are part of a local area network (LAN) administered hospital-wide by IRMS. IRMS specialists have hospital-wide responsibility for placing new/updated software onto the LAN servers, installing all software onto new computer equipment, performing software programming maintenance requiring systems administrator access, testing equipment and software, maintaining a library system for data backup, etc.

The primary purpose of the appellant's position is to implement, direct, and support the Computerized Patient Record System (CPRS) and Veterans Integrated Systems Technology and Architecture (VISTA) software packages and other personal computer applications which automate the clinical functions throughout the [name] Service. These software applications provide computerized patient records along with electronic imaging of laboratory tests, various x-rays, etc. The electronic patient records may be retrieved and edited at numerous computers and work stations throughout the [name] Service, including the operating rooms and pre- and post-operative care units.

The appellant provides training to [name] Service staff on how to use the Surgery software and troubleshoots when staff experience problems. She has primary responsibility for monitoring the [name] Service's overall computer applications operation and status and providing local user support, training and general guidance on hardware and software issues and problems. The appellant is the surgical staff's first point of contact for end-user problems and issues arising with these systems. The appellant's position requires knowledge of a variety of computer techniques, procedures, requirements and sources.

The appellant reports to the Chief, [name] Service, who sets objectives for the organization and provides the appellant administrative, but not technical, supervision. IRMS IT Specialists, also known as Clinical Applications Coordinators, provide technical direction to the appellant. The Clinical Applications Coordinators have overall responsibility for clinical applications (VISTA and CPRS) and commercial-off-the-shelf (COTS) software hospital-wide, and they set objectives for non-recurring assignments and provide interpretation on new policies and procedures for the ADPAC's. The appellant identifies what needs to be done and independently plans and carries out assignments. Completed work is reviewed in terms of its effectiveness in meeting goals and objectives within established deadlines and customer satisfaction.

Series, title, and standard determination

The agency placed the appellant's position in the Office Automation Series, GS-326, and titled it Office Automation Assistant. The GS-326 series covers single-grade interval positions which have as the primary duties performance of office automation work, which includes word processing, either solely or in combination with clerical work, when such work is performed in the context of general office clerical support. Positions in this series require: (1) knowledge of general office automation software, practices, and procedures; (2) competitive level proficiency in typing; and (3) ability to apply these knowledges and skills in the performance of general office support work.

The paramount duties (those most important for recruitment, selection, placement, promotion, or reduction in force purposes) of the appellant's position are to provide integration, direction, and support of the VISTA and CPRS software packages and other personal computer applications which automate clinical functions throughout the [name] Service. While knowledge of general office automation software is desirable, the position does not require this knowledge nor does it require competitive level typing skills. The position provides specialized computer application support rather than general office support work as its paramount function. The official position description documents that nearly all of the appellant's work time is spent on coordination of automated functions within and relative to the [name] Service. The appellant's duties do not represent clerical work performed in the context of general office clerical support covered by the GS-326 series.

The appellant believes that the work she performs is two-grade interval IT work. The IT Management Series, GS-2210, covers two-grade interval administrative positions that manage, supervise, lead, administer, develop, deliver, and support IT systems and services. This series covers only those positions for which the paramount requirement is knowledge of IT principles, concepts, and methods to perform functions such as planning, designing, analyzing, developing and implementing systems for the organization. IT refers to systems and services used in the automated acquisition, storage, manipulation, management, movement, control, display, switching, interchange, transmission, assurance, or reception of information. IT includes computers, network components, peripheral equipment, software, firmware, services, and related resources.

The appellant's position does not require a broad knowledge of IT principles, concepts, and methods, nor does it require an understanding of the interrelationships between the different IT specialties basic to classification in the GS-2210 series. The appellant's position supports and augments the work of IRMS specialists through the use of established methods and procedures and a practical knowledge, as opposed to a conceptual knowledge, of the techniques and guidelines pertinent to the [name] Service software systems. Although the appellant's responsibilities bear similarity to those of the Customer Support IT specialty, they do not require the broader scope of knowledge, or an understanding of the interrelationships among the different IT specialties (e.g., policy and planning; security; systems analysis; applications software; operating systems; network services; data management; Internet; systems administration; customer support) indicative of GS-2210 positions. The appellant's duties do not demonstrate the extensive skills required by IT Specialists to accomplish responsibilities related to assessing the need for and validity of proposed changes and improvements in procedures and methods; adapting methods to circumstances that deviate from the standards; and staying abreast of and evaluating technical

subjects, analyses, and advancements in the IT arena. Additionally, the appellant's position is limited in scope by the fact that the IRMS has responsibility for hospital-wide computer and network systems, hardware and software requirements and decisions involving system upgrades and/or software migrations. IRMS also makes decisions on equipment purchases and deployment throughout the hospital.

The type of work performed by the appellant is characteristic of that described in the Computer Clerk and Assistant Series, GS-335, and is properly classified using that standard. The GS-335 series covers positions involving performance or supervision of data processing support and services functions for users of digital computer systems. This work requires knowledge of external data processing sequences, controls, procedures, or user and programming languages, rather than in-depth knowledge of computer requirements or techniques associated with development and design of data processing systems. One of the functional areas identified by the standard is direct support to computer specialists. In this capacity, some computer assistants at full performance levels perform duties similar to those assigned to entry and trainee level computer specialist positions.

The standard specifies that non-supervisory positions in grade GS-5 and above are titled Computer Assistant.

The directly applicable GS-335 standard (dated February 1980), however, must be read along with the more recent information contained in the November 1990 Office Automation Grade Evaluation Guide (OAGEG) that evaluates the use of office automation (OA) technology. The OAGEG is used in combination with other standards or guides to evaluate positions when OA duties are assigned to those positions. We have used the OAGEG to help describe the range of hardware and software supported by the appellant, and to clarify and assist in determining the grade of the position that is controlled by applying the GS-335 standard.

Grade determination

The GS-335 standard is written in the FES format. Positions evaluated under the FES format are compared to nine factors. Levels are assigned for each factor and the points associated with the assigned levels are totaled and converted to a grade level by application of the Grade Conversion Table contained in the position classification standard. Under the FES, factor level descriptions mark the floor threshold for the indicated factor level. If a position fails in any significant aspect to meet a particular level in the standard, the next lower level and its lower point value must be assigned, unless an equally important aspect that meets a higher level balances the deficiency.

Our evaluation with respect to the nine factors follows.

Factor 1, Knowledge required by the position

This factor measures the nature and extent of information or facts that employees must understand to do acceptable work (e.g., steps, procedures, practices, rules, policies, theories, principles, and concepts) and the nature and extent of the skills needed to apply that knowledge.

At Level 1-4, employees perform a wide range of preparing, advising, assisting, coding, and procedure-related problem solving duties using knowledge of computer procedures and processing methods. Work at this level involves knowledge used to assist programmers or other users or in scheduling, controlling, and problem-solving work.

The appellant's position meets and does not exceed Level 1-4. As at Level 1-4, the appellant performs a wide range of duties including resolution of commercial hardware, VA-specific software (VISTA and CPRS) and COTS problems requiring knowledge of hardware, software, and program capabilities and limitations. The position requires that the appellant have specific knowledge of the [name] Service packages related to VISTA and CPRS software, how they interrelate, and how they affect the work of the Service. The appellant must have knowledge of computer components, applications, and operating systems sufficient to install equipment, recover from routine software malfunctions, and provide basic training for new users. Further, as liaison between the [name] Service and IRMS, the appellant must provide fundamental technical guidance to users (e.g., interpret common error messages, resolve routine printing problems, and identify the source of problems where readily identified when computers do not boot or users cannot connect to the network).

Level 1-4, the highest level described in the OAGEG, covers work that requires a knowledge of the capabilities, operating characteristics, and advanced functions of a variety of types of OA software, and knowledge of the similarities, differences, and integration of the different software types. The appellant applies comparable knowledge in helping users by answering individual questions related to the use of multiple software applications, including VISTA and CPRS. She also applies her knowledge to assist users with general office software such as Microsoft Word, Excel, and electronic mail.

The appellant's work does not require application of Level 1-5 knowledge. At this level, assignments involve the development, test, implementation and modification of computer programs and operating procedures. Employees prepare programs or write new program documentation and operating procedures. The appellant's regular and recurring work supports users of COTS software programs. The appellant does not have responsibility for modifying programs or for application program development. Her hardware work similarly is based on applying knowledge of directly applicable manufacturers' installation, maintenance, and repair procedures. Any work equivalent to the development and modification of programs and procedures, or analogous decisions on system hardware, are vested with higher-grade employees in the IRMS.

This factor is credited at Level 1-4 for 550 points.

Factor 2, Supervisory controls

This factor covers the nature and extent of direct and indirect controls exercised by the supervisor. Employee responsibilities, as well as the review of completed work, are included. Employee responsibility depends upon the extent to which the employee is expected to develop the sequence and timing of various aspects of the work, to modify or recommend modification of

instructions, and to participate in establishing priorities and defining objectives. The degree of review of completed work depends upon the nature and extent of the review.

The appellant's position meets and does not exceed Level 2-3, the highest level for this factor described in the GS-335 standard and the OAGEG. At this level, the supervisor provides overall direction on objectives and priorities and the employee independently plans and carries out work. Employees commonly adapt or develop new work procedures and instructions for application by themselves and others. Completed work is reviewed for conformity to deadlines and accepted practices based on written documents and responses from users regarding quality and accuracy of work products. At this level in the OAGEG, the employee works independently to plan and carry out steps for completing assignments in accordance with established office instructions and practices for OA. The methods used to produce work normally are not reviewed.

Consistent with Level 2-3, the appellant's supervisor sets overall objectives and priorities, and the appellant is responsible for planning and carrying out projects and resolving technical problems. Work assignments are derived through the normal course of planning and carrying out the work to be done and through day-to-day problems as they arise. The appellant identifies the work to be done, and plans and carries out the steps required to accomplish the work. The appellant independently deviates from routine assignments and work methods to provide for situations such as changing priorities or other changes based on past experience and flexibility necessary to a hospital setting. For example, computer problems occurring in the operating room take precedence over training new residents on VISTA and CPRS.

The appellant completes work within the Service without technical review by the supervisor. When technical assistance is required, or unusual situations arise, the appellant requests support from IT specialists in the IRMS. The supervisor is kept informed of progress and completed work is reviewed for conformity to deadlines and accepted practices and as a result of feedback from users about the quality and accuracy of the work. The appellant's work methods are not normally reviewed unless a recurring, common pattern of problems develop.

This factor is credited at Level 2-3 for 275 points.

Factor 3, Guidelines

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

At Level 3-3, the highest level described in the standard, the employee works with new requirements or new applications for which only general guidelines are available. The employee uses judgment in adjusting the most appropriate guidelines to fit new processing requirements or develops new methods for accomplishing the work. Guidelines may require modification to provide for adding new forms of input, allowing for flexible as opposed to fixed scheduling, adjusting to new or conflicting requirements, or to adapting to a new hardware or software capability. At this level in the OAGEG, guides normally include user's manuals and tutorials for several software packages or different types. Much of the work requires adaptation of available guides to meet requirements for new tasks or to solve processing problems and judgment is

required to search manuals for methods that can be applied and to adapt those methods to specific requirements.

Level 3-3 is met. The appellant's guidelines are in the form of user manuals, training books, procedural materials provided by hardware and software vendors, and information, training materials, and guidance issued by the IRMS. Although much of the guidance is specific in nature, the appellant is required to use judgment to interpret, adapt, and apply this guidance. Consistent with Level 3-3, the appellant determines guidance most appropriate for resolving local problems relating to computer workstations or system operations. She interprets and applies available guidance to integrate new hardware and software into existing systems to maintain continuity between these systems and patient care in the [name] Service. She exercises judgment in the application and adaptation of available guidance to respond to end-user requests for assistance or problem resolution. The nature of the appellant's guidelines, the judgment required, and the need to modify existing guidance meet, but do not exceed, Level 3-3.

This factor is credited at Level 3-3 for 275.

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.

At Level 4-3 in the standard, the employee performs a variety of tasks involving discrete methods and procedures, or a variety of related tasks that require a sequence of actions involving differing methods and procedures. The decision regarding what is to be done results from studying each assignment or problem situation. At this same level in the OAGEG, the highest level described there for this factor, work involves using several types of software packages for different office needs. In deciding how to proceed, the employee considers many factors that are varied and that are not always clearly established. For example, these include the nature and capability of different software types or software packages of the same type; similarities, differences, and integration compatibilities among software types and software packages; and the general operations of the unit such as the source and timing of data for reports.

Level 4-3 is met. The appellant performs a variety of systems support tasks. As liaison to IRMS, she serves as the first point of contact for [name] Service staff experiencing problems with patient-care related automated systems. She independently determines actions necessary to identify and resolve end-user problems based on her past experience, on-going training by IRMS staff, and her operational knowledge of the [name] Service. After identifying the problem, she then determines if resolution can be accomplished through the use of routine or standard corrective procedures and selects the one most appropriate for the situation. When problems are beyond the appellant's experience or knowledge, assistance is requested from IT specialists in the IRMS.

At Level 4-4, the highest level described in the standard, complexity is distinguished from Level 4-3 by: (1) the variety and complexity of operating systems monitored; (2) the nature and variety

of problems encountered and resolved; and (3) the nature of independent decisions made by the employee. The employee at this level typically monitors the operations of several major computer systems. Programs run on these systems are a mix of independent and interdependent applications. Employees at this level perform problem solving duties involving a wide range of problem or error conditions in equipment, program data, and processing methods and procedures. The diagnosis and resolution of error and problem conditions involve equipment configurations having different operating characteristics, a wide variety of data and programs, and many different processes and methods to arrive at solutions or develop new procedures. Decisions regarding what needs to be done include assessing unusual circumstances or conditions, developing variations in approach to fit specific problems, or dealing with incomplete or conflicting data. The employee makes decisions and devises solutions based on program, equipment, and systems knowledge.

Level 4-4 is not met. The appellant's work involves overall responsibility for the day-to-day operations of VISTA and CPRS systems' software and hardware providing for automated patient records and diagnostic imaging. This responsibility does not equate to Level 4-4 where the employee works with several major systems and its variety of associated interrelated systems and programs. Although the appellant is responsible for resolving a variety of problems or error conditions related to the system, the problems she encounters are not of the unusual nature, magnitude, or complexity as those typically found in multiple major computer systems. These more difficult problems are handled by the IRMS staff.

Level 4-3 is credited for 150 points.

Factor 5, Scope and effect

This factor covers the relationship between the nature of the work, e.g., the purpose, breadth, and depth of the assignment, and the effect of work products or services both within and outside the organization.

The appellant's position meets, but does not exceed, Level 5-3, the highest level in the standard. This level is distinguished from Level 5-2 in both the standard and the OAGEG, where Level 5-2 is the highest level, by the addition of requirements for solving problems and answering technical questions about control, scheduling, and/or direct support functions. The problems encountered are conventional to data processing although solutions are not always covered by established or standardized procedures. Results of the work affect the efficiency of processing services and adequacy of products used in subsequent activities and processing procedures and methods.

Comparable to Level 5-3, the appellant assists users and resolves problems using standardized approaches. The purpose of the appellant's position is to set up computers, ensure that pre-installed software is working properly, integrate new hardware and software into existing systems, instruct local users on efficient and effective means of using [name] Service software packages, respond to problems or issues related to the computers, workstations, and service-specific software, and serve as liaison with IRMS. She carries out her duties and responsibilities in accordance with established or standardized rules, regulations, procedures, and practices and

precedent solutions. She exercises judgment in the interpretation, application and adaptation of available guidance to respond to end-user requests for assistance or problem resolution. The appellant's work, like that at Level 5-3, affects the efficiency of the organization's services and the way [name] Service staff document, store, receive, and transmit or make available patient information.

Level 5-3 is credited for 150 points.

Factor 6, Personal contacts

This factor considers face-to-face and telephone contacts with persons not in the supervisory chain.

At Level 6-2, the highest level described in the standard, contacts are with specialists and recipients of services who are employees of the same agency but outside the data processing organization; with employees of other agencies who use the facility; or with contractors' representatives such as vendor repair technicians or customer engineers. These contacts are structured and routine, and the role of each participant is readily determined.

The appellant's contacts fully meet and do not exceed Level 6-2. As at Level 6-2, the appellant's personal contacts are with end users within her immediate work unit, counterparts in other services within the hospital, IT specialists in the IRMS, and employees at various levels in the medical center. Contacts may also be with employees located at other medical centers within the VA systems. These contacts are relatively structured and routine in nature and the roles of all parties involved are easily determined.

Level 6-2 is credited for 25 points.

Factor 7, Purpose of contacts

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

The purpose of the appellant's contacts meets and does not exceed Level 7-2, the highest level for this factor described in the standard. At this level, the purpose of personal contacts is to plan or coordinate changes in scheduling requirements or priorities as a result of data or equipment related problems; to participate with users in planning and coordinating new or modified requirements when the work fits generally within system options, schedules, etc.; or to plan user participation, methodology, and deadlines for new projects. Comparable to this level, the appellant meets with IT Specialists and [name] Service staff to discuss work objectives within the scope of the CPRS and VISTA, systems design, work flow, and coordinate projects and plans within the service and between other services.

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 and physical exertion involved in the work.

Level 8-2 is met. At this level, positions require extended periods of standing, walking, stretching, bending, stooping or carrying of items weighing as much as 45 pounds. The appellant's position requires mobility to physically visit locations of local users for observation or problem solving purposes. It requires lifting, bending, etc. for setting up and/or connecting computers, printers, or other automated data processing equipment.

Level 8-3 is not met. This level includes the regular and recurring lifting of objects over 50 pounds and occasional lifting and carrying of heavier materials.

Level 8-2 is credited for 20 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 and occupational health regulations required.

Level 9-1 is met. At this level, the work involves the common risks or discomforts, requiring normal safety precautions typical of offices, meeting rooms, libraries and the like. When setting up workstations or installing computer equipment, the appellant must observe common electrical safety practices. As at Level 9-1, the appellant's work area is adequately lighted, heated, and ventilated.

At Level 9-2, the work involves moderate risks requiring exercise of safety precautions when operating or working around equipment with exposed moving parts. The appellant's work does not require comparable risk.

Level 9-1 is credited for 5 points.

Summary

In summary, we have evaluated the position as follows:

<i>Factor</i>	<i>Level</i>	<i>Points</i>
1. Knowledge required by the position	1-4	550
2. Supervisory controls	2-3	275
3. Guidelines	3-3	275
4. Complexity	4-3	150
5. Scope and effect	5-3	150

6. Personal contacts and	6-2	25
7. Purpose of contacts	7-2	50
8. Physical demands	8-2	20
9. Work environment	9-1	5
<i>Total</i>		1500

A total of 1500 points falls within the GS-7 grade level point range of 1355-1600 points on the Grade Conversion Table.

Decision

The position is properly classified as Computer Assistant, GS-335-7.