

U.S. Office of Personnel Management  
Division for Human Capital Leadership & Merit System Accountability  
Classification Appeals Program

San Francisco Field Services Group  
120 Howard Street, Room 760  
San Francisco, CA 94105-0001

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

**Appellant:** [Name of appellant]

**Agency classification:** Mail Clerk  
GS-305-3

**Organization:** [Appellant's organization/location]  
Department of the Army

**OPM decision:** Mail Clerk  
GS-305-3

**OPM decision number:** C-0305-03-05

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Marta Brito Pérez  
Associate Director  
Human Capital Leadership  
and Merit System Accountability

July 2, 2004  
Date

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

**Decision sent to:**

[Appellant's name and representative's name and address]

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## **Introduction**

On January 29, 2004, the San Francisco Field Services Group of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted a classification appeal from [name of appellant]. On March 23, 2004, we received the agency's complete administrative report. The appellant's position is classified as a Mail Clerk, GS-305-3, but he believes it should be graded at the GS-4 or 5 level. The appellant works in the [appellant's organization/location], Department of the Army. We have accepted and decided this appeal under section 5112, United States Code (U.S.C.).

This decision is based on a thorough review of all information submitted by the appellant and his agency. In addition, to help decide the appeal we conducted separate telephone interviews with the appellant and his supervisor.

## **General issues**

The appellant and his supervisor have certified to the accuracy of the appellant's official position description (PD) [number], but the appellant believes that certain other tasks not included in the PD should be considered in the classification of his position. He notes that he must recognize "suspicious", possibly hazardous materials leaking from packages, and notify proper authorities. He also mentions that he must x-ray mail for possible drugs or explosives. These functions are inherent in handling mail and are not grade distinguishing characteristics. Payment for handling hazardous materials is a matter for agency pay determination. Agencies determine entitlement for hazard pay differential under Part 550, Section I, paragraphs 550.903 and 904 of 5 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR); that issue is not covered by the classification appeals process.

Through his representative, the appellant compares his work to higher graded mail positions in other units. By law, we must classify positions solely by comparing their current duties and responsibilities to OPM position classification standards and guidelines (5 U.S.C 5106, 5107, and 5112). In adjudicating this appeal, our only concern is to make our own independent decision on the proper classification of the appellant's position. Since comparison to standards is the exclusive method for classifying positions, we cannot compare the appellant's position to others, which may or may not be properly classified, as a basis for deciding his appeal.

Like OPM, the appellant's agency must classify positions based on comparison to OPM standards and guidelines. However, the agency also has primary responsibility for ensuring that its positions are classified consistently with OPM appeal decisions. If the appellant considers his position so similar to others that they all warrant the same classification, he may pursue the matter by writing to his personnel office. In doing so, he should specify the precise organizational location, classification, duties, and responsibilities of the positions in question. If the positions are found to be basically the same as his, the agency must correct their classification to be consistent with this appeal decision. Otherwise, the agency should explain to him the differences between his position and the others.

## **Position information**

As noted above, the appellant and his supervisor have certified to the accuracy of the appellant's

official PD, but the appellant believes that there are other tasks that should be addressed, including “certifying on all materials and maintaining a log.” In the evaluation that follows, we will address these as appropriate.

The appellant is responsible for receiving, recording, and processing incoming and outgoing mail, correspondence and other miscellaneous materials, including certified and insured mail, and packages. He sorts and distributes incoming mail to approximately 30 distribution points, by organizational designation. This involves opening and reading mail that is not properly designated, to determine the proper routing, from the contents or subject matter.

The appellant picks up and sorts outgoing mail; sorts by destination, special handling, determines weight, and applies proper postage labels. Costs associated with metering are entered on a manual log, and the results provided to administrative staff at the [name of appellant’s organization].

The results of our interviews, the appellant’s PD and other material of record furnish more information about his duties and responsibilities and how they are performed. Based on our review, we find that the appellant’s PD accurately reflects the duties assigned by management and performed by the appellant.

### **Series, title, and standard determination**

The agency has assigned the appellant’s position to the Mail and File Series, GS-305, titling it Mail Clerk, and the appellant does not disagree. We concur with the agency’s determination. The classification standard for the GS-305 series contains appropriate criteria for grading positions in that series, which we have applied below to the appellant’s position.

### **Grade determination**

The classification standard for the Mail and File Series, GS-305 is written in the Factor Evaluation Series (FES) format. There are nine factors, and each factor is divided into levels; points are awarded according to the level assigned. The points awarded are totaled and the grade is determined by reference to a grade conversion table. Under the FES, each factor level description in a standard 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 a lower level. Conversely, the position may exceed those criteria in some aspects and still not be credited at a higher level. Our evaluation with respect to the nine FES factors follows.

Like his comments having to recognize “suspicious”, possibly hazardous materials leaking from packages, and notify proper authorities, and having to x-ray mail for possible drugs or explosives, the appellant also indicates that he runs and maintains a metering machine. This activity is recognized in the occupational information in the position classification standard for the Mail and File Series, GS-305, which we have applied to the appellant’s position. The use of automated systems and mechanical devices to facilitate the handling and processing of mail is incidental to the primary duties of the position, and is not grade-controlling.

*Factor 1, Knowledge required by the position*

This factor measures the nature and extent of information or facts that the worker 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 this knowledge.

At Level 1-2, the mail clerk applies a basic knowledge of the organization, subject matter content, and processing procedures, which enables the clerk to read, sort, and route materials to 50-100 distribution points when the functions of the units serviced are clearly separate in nature and the subject matter of the materials processed is identifiable by subject headings, organizational or other codes, or references, as to functional responsibility. Such knowledge also enables the mail clerk to control and process various types of mail, prepare and dispatch various kinds of outgoing materials, maintain locater files and similar supportive materials, obtain current information, and provide information to requestors.

At Level 1-3, the mail clerk uses a thorough knowledge of the functions performed within the serviced units (for example, the various operations performed within an accounting unit), a thorough knowledge of the subject matter content of the materials processed to analyze and route materials to 150 or more discrete organizational units that may have close or overlapping functions, and where the subject matter of materials may not be clearly identifiable and may pertain to matters of a substantive nature (for example technical, scientific, etc.) Mail clerk positions at this level require the practical knowledge of mail system procedures to recognize problems within a unit and recommend improved procedures and methods to increase efficiency.

The appellant's position is comparable to Level 1-2, but falls short of Level 1-3. Similar to Level 1-2, he applies a basic knowledge of mail procedures and organizational components to sort, process, and distribute mail to a comparable number of distribution points for serviced units. The supervisor and the appellant stated that the functions of the units are clearly identifiable from the unit names and codes, and they are not close or overlapping in function. Consequently, examination of mail contents to determine proper recipient rarely presents problems. He applies his knowledge to process various types of mail and dispatch outgoing material, obtain current information for mail listings, and respond to requests for information from customers. He uses a basic knowledge of the operation of a metering machine to weigh and then apply proper postage to outgoing materials. He collects cost data from this metering, as well as records data for certified mail, in manual logs.

The position does not meet Level 1-3. Unlike that level, the appellant does not possess a thorough knowledge of the functions performed in at least 150 serviced units, which at the higher level typically have close or overlapping roles. The material he may have to examine to determine the proper recipient is discrete and easily recognizable as the domain of one specific unit (distribution point), whereas at Level 1-3 units have overlapping and interrelated functions, making identification more difficult. While the appellant has, in the past, shared ideas with his supervisor on improvements in operations, the supervisor indicated that this was not a requirement of the position, and did not occur on a regular basis, as would be typical at Level 1-3.

This factor is evaluated at Level 1-2 and 200 points are credited.

### *Factor 2, Supervisory controls*

This factor covers the nature and extent of direct or indirect controls exercised by the supervisor, and the employee's responsibility, and the review of completed work.

At Level 2-2, the clerk receives instructions from the supervisor on non-recurring assignments and changes in procedures. The clerk performs most assignments independently according to established procedures and previous experience. The supervisor is consulted when problems arise for which there are no precedents. The work is reviewed for accuracy by spot-checking or selective sampling, and may be reviewed occasionally for compliance with regulations.

At Level 2-3, the supervisor (who may be concerned with other functions in addition to mail service) provides general guidance. The mail clerk independently plans and adjusts mail service to meet the requirements of the serviced units. The serviced units are concerned with new, emerging, or innovative programs (for example, research and development, engineering or scientific laboratories, etc.) that are subject to frequent change. Therefore, the mail clerk must independently recognize the need to take action to adjust or change mail processing procedures, or otherwise adapt or change established procedures. The supervisor is normally consulted only when problems arise for which there are no precedents, or no guidance exists. The work is reviewed in terms of results achieved and the effect on resources and other administrative matters.

The appellant's position meets Level 2-2, but does not meet Level 2-3. Like Level 2-2, he works independently, following established procedures, and receiving instructions only for non-recurring assignments. He consults his supervisor only when situations arise for which there are no precedents (a rare occurrence, according to his supervisor.) As at Level 2-2, the appellant's work is spot checked, and is occasionally reviewed for compliance with regulations.

The appellant's position does not meet Level 2-3. Unlike that level, the appellant does not adjust procedures to meet changing needs. The organizations serviced are stable, with relatively unchanging roles, and are not concerned with highly technical or constantly changing functions, e.g., research, engineering. The supervisor indicated that the appellant must follow prescribed procedures as well as postal service regulations without deviation.

This factor is evaluated at Level 2-2 and 125 points are credited.

### *Factor 3, Guidelines*

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

At Level 3-1, the guidelines are both oral instructions and written guidelines. While they may be numerous, they are complete and specific, permitting little discretion in application. Mail clerks are expected to strictly adhere to guidelines, referring deviations to the supervisor for decision.

At Level 3-2, the guidelines consist of numerous oral and written instructions that are applicable to several, differing work situations. The mail clerk must use judgment and initiative to select and apply the most appropriate guide (for example, in reading and routing mail to a number of serviced units having very similar functions).

The appellant's position meets Level 3-1, but falls short of Level 3-2. Like Level 3-1, the appellant uses standing oral instructions from his supervisor, and written guidelines from a variety of sources, (e.g., U.S. Postal Service guidelines on express mail, certified mail, and regular mail, security guidelines for "suspicious" packages, leaking packages, etc.) The appellant also must follow directions in the operation of metering and x-ray machines. These rules must be adhered to without deviation. The supervisor is available in the event that a deviation seems appropriate.

The appellant's position does not meet Level 3-2. Unlike that level, his guidelines are specific, meet a designated circumstance (which is readily recognizable), rather than guidelines which cover a number of circumstances, and where the mail clerk must use judgment and initiative to select the proper guideline.

This factor is evaluated at Level 3-1 and 25 points are credited.

#### *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 4-2, the mail clerk performs several related duties involving consideration of choices of appropriate actions taken in a variety of situations. At this level, there is generally a variety of materials processed and activities required, and a number of steps or processes involving several different types of mail and recognizing which procedure is appropriate for each type (for example, registered, insured, certified, classified, etc.)

At Level 4-3, the mail clerk's duties involve the full range of mail procedures. There is a great variety in materials received and complexity of subject matter content when trying to determine proper routing action. The clerk must recognize the need for (and take action to obtain) improvements in mail processing procedures.

The appellant's position meets Level 4-2, but does not reach Level 4-3. Similar to Level 4-2, he performs several related duties such as collecting, processing, examining, x-raying, sorting, and routing incoming mail including reading of mail contents (where the designated addressee is unclear), and collecting, weighing, and processing outgoing mail and packages. He works with a variety of mail types, e.g., registered, certified, express, packages and letters.

The appellant's position does not meet Level 4-3. Unlike that level, he is not faced with a work situation where there is a great variety of materials received, highly complex and diverse subject-

matter materials and required processing actions. While he occasionally makes suggestions on adjustments to current procedures, this is not complicated by the variety and complexity of the materials as is the case at the higher level.

This factor is evaluated at Level 4-2 and 75 points are assigned.

*Factor 5, Scope and effect*

Scope and effect 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.

At Level 5-1, the mail clerk is involved with well-established mail functions, the timely performance of which facilitates the work performed in the serviced units.

At Level 5-2, the work of the mail clerk involves the improvement of methods or procedures affecting the overall efficiency of the mail unit. The clerk's performance affects the ability of personnel in the serviced units to perform their duties in an accurate manner, or to provide services to others.

The appellant's position meets Level 5-1, but does not reach Level 5-2. Like Level 5-1, the appellant follows well-established procedures and processes. As at that level, the collection, processing, and routing of incoming and outgoing mail, when completed in a timely fashion, facilitates the work of serviced units.

The appellant's work does not meet Level 5-2. Unlike that level, his work does not involve the development and implementation of improvements to methods and processes in order to increase the overall efficiency of the mail unit. While timely service from the mail unit may affect the timeliness of actions taken in the serviced units, it does not substantially affect their accuracy or ability to provide service to others.

This factor is evaluated at Level 5-1 and 25 points are assigned.

*Factor 6, Personal contacts*

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

At Level 6-2 (the highest level for this factor described in the standard), the mail clerk's personal contacts are typically with employees in serviced units, but may also include personnel outside the organization, e.g., U.S. Postal Service employees, personnel in administrative units in higher or subordinate units in the same agency.

The appellant's personal contacts meet but do not exceed Level 6-2. In addition to having contact with employees in his own work unit, he regularly has contact with those in serviced units, and personnel outside his organization.



This factor is evaluated at Level 6-2 and 25 points are credited.

*Factor 7, Purpose of contacts*

In General Schedule occupations, purpose of contacts ranges from factual exchanges of information to situations involving significant or controversial issues and differing viewpoints, goals, or objectives. The personal contacts that serve as a basis for the level selected for this factor must be the same as the contacts that are the basis for the level selected for Factor 6.

At Level 7-1, the purpose of the mail clerk's contacts is to obtain or exchange information regarding performance of functions in the immediate work unit and (as required) to provide information to personnel in serviced units regarding mail operations.

At Level 7-2, the purpose of contacts is to work with personnel in serviced units to resolve operating problems such as delays in receipt of materials, or problems of similar difficulty.

The appellant's position meets Level 7-1, but does not reach Level 7-2. Like Level 7-1, the appellant exchanges information regarding mail services to serviced units, and requests (on behalf of serviced units) information from the postal service and other carriers regarding their services, as needed.

The appellant's position does not meet Level 7-2. Unlike that level, the appellant does not resolve operating problems such as delays in receipt of materials, or problems of similar difficulty. Such issues are generally resolved by the appellant's supervisor.

This factor is evaluated at Level 7-1 and 20 points are credited.

*Factor 8, Physical demands*

This factor covers the requirements and physical demands placed on the employee by the work assignment.

At Level 8-2, the work requires long periods of standing, walking, bending, etc.; or requires recurring lifting and carrying of packages, pouches, or bags of moderate weight (under 50 pounds) and occasional lifting and carrying of heavier materials.

At Level 8-3, the work requires regular and recurring lifting and carrying of objects of heavy weight (over 50 pounds) and occasional lifting and carrying of heavier materials.

The appellant's position meets Level 8-2. Like that level, the appellant's work requires prolonged periods of standing, walking, bending and lifting of objects of moderate weight (under 50 pounds.) Unlike Level 8-3, he is not required, on a regular and recurring basis, to lift/carry objects in excess of 50 pounds.

This factor is evaluated at Level 8-2 and 20 points are credited.

*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 safety regulations required.

At Level 9-1, the work is performed in an office setting that is adequately lighted, heated, and ventilated.

At Level 9-2, the work is performed on loading docks or other areas exposed to the weather, or in areas subject to high noise levels and vibrations, and may require protective clothing. This level encompasses working around moving equipment.

The appellant's work environment meets Level 9-1. Like that level, he works in an office setting, with adequate lighting, heating, and ventilation. Unlike Level 9-2, he does not work on loading docks or other areas exposed to the weather, or in areas having high levels of noise or vibration which may require use of protective clothing, or around moving equipment.

This factor is evaluated at Level 9-1 and 5 points are credited.

*Summary of FES factors*

<i>Factor</i>	<i>Level</i>	<i>Points</i>
1. Knowledge required by the position	1-2	200
2. Supervisory controls	2-2	125
3. Guidelines	3-1	25
4. Complexity	4-2	75
5. Scope and effect	5-1	25
6. Personal contacts and	6-2	25
7. Purpose of contacts	7-1	20
8. Physical demands	8-2	20
9. Work environment	9-1	<u>5</u>
<i>Total points</i>		520

A total of 520 points falls within the GS-3 range (455-650) on the grade conversion table in the GS-305 standard. Therefore, the appellant's position is graded at the GS-3 level.

**Decision**

The appellant's position is properly classified as Mail Clerk, GS-305-3.