



United States
**Office of
Personnel Management**

Washington, DC 20415

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

Appellant: [Appellant's name]

Agency classification: Administrative Support Assistant
GS-303-5

Organization: [Appellant's organization/location]
U.S. Forest Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture

OPM decision: GS-303-5
(Title at agency discretion)

OPM decision number: C-0303-05-21

/s/ Robert D. Hendler

Robert D. Hendler
Classification and Pay Claims
Program Manager
Center for Merit System Accountability
Human Capital Leadership
and Merit System Accountability

June 28, 2006

Date

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

Decision sent to:

[Appellant's name and mailing address]

[Address of appellant's local human resources office]

[Address of appellant's regional human resources office]

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Introduction

On December 6, 2005, the San Francisco Field Services Group of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted a classification appeal from [name of appellant]. On April 10, 2006, we received the agency's complete administrative report. The appellant's position is currently classified as Administrative Support Assistant, GS-303-5, but she believes it should be graded at the GS-6 level. The appellant works at the [appellant's organization/location], U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture. We have accepted and decided this appeal under section 5112(b) of title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.).

General issues

Both the appellant and her supervisor do not believe that the appellant's current official position description (PD) [number] is completely accurate. They disagree with the percentages of time noted by her agency for some of her major duties, and believe the PD should discuss in more detail the specifics and complexity of her assignments, as well as the knowledge required to perform them. While we have fully considered their comments, the additional information provided serves only to expand upon the basic duties described and thus does not change our overall analysis of the position. A PD is the official record of the major duties and responsibilities assigned to a position by an official with the authority to assign work. A position is the duties and responsibilities that make up the work performed by the employee. 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 PD. This decision is based on the work currently assigned to and performed by the appellant.

The appellant makes various statements about the classification review process conducted by her agency. 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 her position. Since comparison to standards is the exclusive method for classifying positions, we have considered the appellant's statements only insofar as they are relevant to making that comparison. Because our decision sets aside any previous decision, the classification practices used by the appellant's agency in classifying her position are not germane to the classification appeal process.

Position information

The appellant provides a variety of clerical administrative support services to the [appellant's organization] District, including furnishing and coordinating information with the [appellant's Forest] human resources office and the [name of province]. Her duties include: (1) performing leave audits, tracking employee overtime authorizations and following-up on missing time and attendance records; (2) providing information to new employees on benefits, leave, life and health insurance, organizational rules and procedures; (3) assisting District managers on recruitment programs for summer and seasonal hiring; (4) assisting with purchasing activity for office supplies and forms and through annual service contracts; (5) tracking dollars spent for supplies and services utilizing the agency's Purchase Card Management System Program; (6)

advising employees on travel regulations and on the completion of travel vouchers, and tracking the status of problem vouchers that have resulted in non-payment. To perform many of the preceding functions, particularly the posting, tabulating and recording of data and archiving information, the appellant uses a variety of office automation systems including personal computers and office equipment, as well as software programs.

In reaching our classification decision, we have carefully reviewed all information furnished by the appellant and her agency, including her official PD which we find is sufficient for classification purposes and incorporate it by reference into this decision. In addition, to help decide the appeal, we conducted separate telephone interviews with the appellant and her supervisor.

Series, title, and standard determination

The agency has classified the appellant's position in the Miscellaneous Clerk and Assistant Series, GS-303, titling it Administrative Support Assistant, and the appellant does not disagree. We concur with the agency's series determination. Like work classified in the GS-303 series, the appellant performs one-grade interval clerical administrative support work based on a practical knowledge of the function supported and the District's administrative program operations, procedures, techniques and guidelines. Like positions in that series, her work involves specialized duties for which there is no more appropriate occupational series established.

While many of her duties cover aspects of work typically performed by positions in other established series, the appellant's position is not properly placed in any of those series. For example, although the appellant performs limited support in the human resources (HR) area such as furnishing recruitment and employee benefits information, her work does not require substantial knowledge of civilian HR terminology, requirements, procedures, operations, functions and regulatory policy and procedural requirements applicable to HR transactions found in positions classified in the HR Assistance Series, GS-0203. Such positions are located at the Forest Supervisor's Office which provides direct HR services to District staff. In addition, her duties involving purchasing of office supplies and other items do not require substantial knowledge of the policies and procedures for the delivery of supplies, and knowledge of commercial supply sources and common business practices related to sales, prices, discounts, stocks, and shipments found in positions classified in the Purchasing Series, GS-1105. Moreover, although she advises employees on travel regulations and on the completion of travel vouchers as needed, her duties do not encompass the formal examination of vouchers for accuracy, documentation, justification, and regulatory compliance typical of positions classified in the Voucher Examining Series, GS-540. We note that the appellant applies knowledge of office automation systems. However, her duties do not require a fully qualified typist to perform word processing thus addition of the parenthetical title "Office Automation" to the title of her position is not appropriate. Indeed, the record shows that a separate Office Automation Clerk, GS-326, position is present in her organization to perform word processing and office automation functions.

There are no titles specified for positions in the GS-303 series. Therefore, the agency may construct a title in keeping with the nature of the support work performed. In doing so the agency should adhere to the position titling guidance contained in the *Introduction to the*

Position Classification Standards. To grade the appellant's administrative support work, we have applied the criteria in the Grade Level Guide for Clerical and Assistance Work (hereafter referred to as the Guide).

Grade determination

The Guide provides general criteria for use in determining the grade level of non-supervisory clerical and assistance work. It uses two classification factors to evaluate the work of a position: (1) Nature of Assignment which includes knowledge required and complexity of the work, and (2) Level of Responsibility which includes supervisory controls, guidelines, and contacts. Our evaluation by application of the two classification factors in the Guide follows.

Nature of Assignment

At the GS-5 level, work consists of performing a full range of standard and non-standard clerical assignments and resolving a variety of non-recurring problems. Work includes a variety of assignments involving different and unrelated steps, processes, or methods. The employee must identify and understand the issues involved in each assignment and determine what steps and procedures are necessary and the order of their performance. Completion of each transaction typically involves selecting a course of action from a number of possibilities. The work requires extensive knowledge of an organization's rules, procedures, operations, or business practices to perform the more complex, interrelated, or one-of-a-kind clerical processing procedures.

At the GS-6 level, clerical work typically entails processing a wide variety of transactions for more than one type of assigned activity or functional specialization. Assignments are subject to different sets of rules, regulations, and procedures. The issues being examined must be such that a course of action has substantive impact on the outcome of the assignments. Additionally, the work requires comprehensive knowledge of rules, regulations, and other guidelines relating to completing assignments in the program area assigned. This knowledge is usually attained through extensive, increasingly difficult, and practical experience and training in the subject matter field. The work also requires ability to interpret and apply regulatory and procedural requirements to process unusually difficult and complicated transactions.

The GS-5 level is met. Like that level, the appellant performs the full range of standard and non-standard office clerical assignments and resolves a variety of non-recurring administrative problems. She carries out a variety of assignments involving different and unrelated steps, processes, or methods including:

- providing technical advice for the Paycheck Program including researching and resolving
- non-recurring pay problems, and maintaining time and attendance files;
- assisting with resolving a variety of human resources-related matters;
- assisting with the presentation of the District's New Employee Orientation Program;
- providing advice and technical assistance on recruitment programs for summer and
- seasonal employees to District managers and supervisors;

- advising and informing employees on travel regulations, assisting them with the
- processing of travel vouchers, and maintaining and updating travel authorizations;

- Purchasing supplies including determining the sequence of steps and procedures
- necessary, and choosing the best course of action, and providing advice and assistance on
- District purchasing activity; and

- providing training and user support for applicable computer software program use.

Like the GS-5 level, the appellant must have an in-depth knowledge of the rules, procedures, and operations to be able to identify and understand the issues involved, and perform the more complex clerical processing assignments. For example, in reviewing a complicated travel voucher before submission and/or one that has been administratively rejected due to errors, she must research the relevant travel rules and documentation requirements, advise the employee on corrections, and follow through with the appropriate finance office to ensure payment.

The GS-6 level is not met. Although her work is varied in that she does some purchasing, and resolves individual employee pay and travel voucher problems where different rules are applied, unlike the GS-6 level her duties do not entail performing a wide variety of transactions in those administrative functions. In addition, given the limited nature of her assignments in the particular administrative program subject matter, unlike the GS-6 level she is not required to apply a comprehensive knowledge of the rules, procedures and guidelines in those program areas and possess the extensive practical experience typical of the higher level. In contrast to the GS-6 level, her assignments do not require the ability to interpret and apply regulatory and procedural requirements to process unusually difficult and complicated transactions. Such transactions are dealt with at the Forest Supervisor's office or higher levels in the agency.

Level of Responsibility

At the GS-5 level, the supervisor assigns work by defining objectives, priorities, and deadlines and provides guidance on assignments that do not have clear precedents. The employee works in accordance with accepted practices, and completed work is evaluated for technical soundness, appropriateness, and effectiveness in meeting goals. Extensive guides in the form of instructions, manuals, regulations, and precedents apply to the work. The number and similarity of guidelines and work situations require the employee to use judgment in locating and selecting the most appropriate guidelines for application and adapting them according to circumstances of the specific case or transaction. A number of procedural problems may arise that also require interpretation and adaptation of established guides. Often, the employee must determine which of several alternative guidelines to use. If existing guidelines cannot be applied, the employee refers the matter to the supervisor. Contacts are with a variety of persons within and outside the agency for the purpose of receiving or providing information relating to the work, or to resolve operating problems in connection with recurring responsibilities.

At the GS-6 level, the supervisor reviews completed work for conformance with policy and requirements. The clerical employee is recognized as an authority on processing transactions or completing assignments within a complicated framework of established procedures and

guidelines, often where there are no clear precedents. This recognition typically extends beyond the immediate office or work unit to the overall organization or, in some cases, outside the organization. The employee is regarded as an expert source of information on regulatory requirements for the various transactions, and is frequently called upon to provide accurate information rapidly on short notice. Guidelines for the work are numerous and varied, making it difficult for the employee to choose the most appropriate instruction and decide how the various transactions are to be completed. Guidelines often do not apply directly, requiring the employee to make adaptations to cover new and unusual work situations. This may involve deviating from established procedures to process transactions which cannot be completed through regular channels or involve actions where guidelines are conflicting or unusable. Contacts are with employees in the agency, in other agencies, or with management or users or providers of agency services. The employee provides information, explains the application of regulations, or resolves problems relating to the assignment.

The GS-5 level is met. Like that level, the appellant's supervisor assigns work in terms of objectives, priorities and schedules, and furnishes guidance on tasks which do not have clear precedents. The appellant carries out her assignments in accordance with accepted procedures and practices. Completed work is reviewed for technical soundness and consistency with office requirements and meeting administrative program goals. Like the GS-5 level, the appellant uses extensive guidelines including agency instructions, manuals, and publications covering processing requirements. The number and similarity of these references require her to use judgment in selecting the appropriate one from several alternatives, and she sometimes adapts them to the specific travel or pay transaction. She seeks guidance from the supervisor if existing references cannot be applied. Like the GS-5 level, the appellant's contacts are with persons within and outside the District office and agency for the purpose of receiving or exchanging information relating to the work, particularly pay, travel, and purchasing transactions.

The GS-6 level is not met. Although the appellant independently performs her assignments, her completed work is reviewed more closely than described at the GS-6 level. In addition, she is not the authority on processing pay, travel, purchasing, and human resources related transactions. The record shows that her assignments are of limited scope and complexity in those functions, and definitive guidance, information, and expertise on those topics is provided by technicians and specialists at the Forest Supervisor's office and higher levels within the region/agency. Although she must exercise judgment in selecting the most appropriate guidelines, contrary to the GS-6 level they are not so numerous and varied as to make it difficult to select and apply the most appropriate one to a specific transaction. Unlike the GS-6 level, most guidelines are applicable to her assignments. When new or unusual situations occur where references and precedents are not available, she seeks guidance and assistance from her supervisor or higher level technicians within or outside her organization. Although the appellant may have contact with employees in other agencies, in contrast to the GS-6 level the primary purpose of her work contacts is to provide information and assistance relating to the immediate transaction at hand, rather than explaining as an authoritative source the application of particular regulations.

Summary

By application of the grading criteria in the Guide, we find that the nature of the appellant's assignments and her level of responsibility meet the GS-5 level. Therefore, the position is graded at that level.

Decision

The proper series and grade of the appellant's position is GS-303-5. Selection of an appropriate title is at the discretion of the agency.