



United States Office of Personnel Management

Office of Merit Systems Oversight and Effectiveness
Digest of Significant Classification Decisions and Opinions
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Standards: Narrative Standards
Factors: Nature of Assignments and Level of Responsibility
Issue: Grade Impact of differing factor levels

Identification of the Classification Issue

The Office of Personnel Management has adjudicated several position classification appeals involving the classification of positions where the nature of assignments and level of responsibility were at different levels, applying narrative standards. While some classifiers have denied granting a higher grade level, other classifiers have classified positions at higher grade levels based on just one of the two factors. There is not only inconsistency among agencies, but inconsistency within agencies. Therefore, this item is presented to clarify the Office of Personnel Management's position on the issue.

Resolution

In narrative standards, "Nature of Assignments" and "Level of Responsibility" are often the two evaluation factors. Do both factors have to be matched at a grade level to justify evaluation of the position at that level? We are not addressing the classification judgment to grant an additional grade level when one of the two factors exceeds the other by two levels, thereby facilitating consideration of evaluation of the position at the middle level. Rather, the typical situation involves a one-level differential between the two factors. In such a case, the higher factor level *cannot* control the grade of the position (except for those rare situations in which the applicable standard specifically provides other guidance). The Office of Personnel Management publication *Classification Principles and Policies* explicitly states that "care must be taken to insure that the classification decision is in harmony with the total concept of the grade as depicted in the standard." Thus, determining the intent of the standard requires consideration of the interrelationship of nature of assignments and level of responsibility. Neither increased

independence nor increased difficulty of assignments is meaningful unless each is viewed concomitantly with the other. Further support is provided by the point that in order to justify an additional grade level above the highest level described in the standard, the General Introduction, Background and Instructions for the position classification standards makes it clear that both the duties and responsibilities must "substantially and significantly exceed the highest level of work described in the printed standards." Accordingly, it would be inappropriate to raise a grade level of a position unless both duty assignments and level of responsibility clearly exceed the preceding level.

To summarize, when applying narrative classification standards in determining grade level, when the nature of assignments and level of responsibility are one level apart, the lower of the two levels almost always controls the grade of the position as a whole in order to insure that the classification decision is in harmony with the total concept of the grade as depicted in the standard.