



## 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:** All  
**Factors:** Extrapolation and cross-series comparisons  
**Issue:** Evaluating positions above the highest level

### **Identification of the Classification Issue**

An appellant in a position classification appeal requested the use of different standards to determine the grade level of her position because the directly applicable standard did not provide specific grade level criteria above the current level of her position. In another case, a personnel office had used several standards to evaluate limited portions of an appellant's duties and responsibilities. In each case, the Office of Personnel Management had to determine whether extrapolation of the grade-level criteria of the applicable standard or application of other series standards should be the primary determinant of the grade of a position.

### **Resolution**

Often the applicable series provides guidance for evaluation through a statement permitting extension of the criteria with the application of sound position classification judgment. Standards in the Factor Evaluation System format provide that the primary standard be used to evaluate factors of positions that significantly exceed the factor descriptions contained in the standard. The Office of Personnel Management's publication *Classification Principles and Policies* states:

. . . in most cases the published standard for a series will furnish the best guidance for evaluating positions classifiable within the series but which are above or below the grade range provided by the standard, or which are in other specializations not covered by the standard. In these instances, then, the published standards for the series in which the position is classified should normally serve as the first point of

reference, with other standards being used primarily to corroborate or reinforce the initial evaluation.

Thus, official Office of Personnel Management guidance emphasizes the primary importance of extrapolation of the applicable standard in recognition of the fact that other series standards have limited applicability and are intended for positions with differing qualification requirements.

As to the case involving the use of several series standards, Office of Personnel Management guidance requires comparing positions with the entire pattern of the grade-level characteristics as set forth in the standard. Therefore, a part of one standard cannot be used without applying the entire standard. While cross-series comparisons can sometimes be useful, the use of too many additional standards places too much emphasis on duties that are not paramount in influence or weight and duties that do not consume a substantial portion of time.

The applicable series standards are best because they are based on the appropriate knowledges, skills and abilities. While sound classification judgment is required to determine how much a position exceeds the highest level described, it should be understood that to credit even just one additional level requires that the duties, responsibilities and qualification requirements "substantially and significantly" exceed the printed grade-level criteria. (See General Introduction, Background and Instructions for the position classification standards.)