

FAQ: How Does the Rule of Many Compare to Category Rating?

What is the Rule of Many, and how does it work?

The Rule of Many is a numerical ranking referral and selection procedure that allows agencies to refer and consider more than three candidates who are closely ranked at the top of a competitive certificate. It replaces the traditional "Rule of Three" by expanding the selection pool when hiring managers need to make granular distinctions among candidates.

Key features:

- Applies to hiring in the competitive and excepted services.
- Based on final rating/ranking scores.
- Eligible candidates with the same or indistinguishable scores may be referred.
- Aims to increase flexibility and reduce the artificial constraint of a hard "top three" limit.

What is Category Rating, and how does it work?

Category Rating is a rating and ranking method where eligible candidates are placed into two or more quality categories (e.g., Best Qualified, Well Qualified, Qualified) rather than ranked numerically.

Key features:

- Applies to hiring in the competitive and excepted services
- Preference eligibles must be placed at the top of their assigned category and cannot be passed over by non-preference eligibles in the same category without OPM approval.
- Agencies may select any candidate within the highest quality category, providing broad selection flexibility.

How are Rule of Many and Category Rating similar?

- Both are used when filling competitive service positions under delegated examining procedures.
- Both expand selection options beyond the traditional "Rule of Three."
- Both can increase the pool of candidates eligible for selection. Both still preserve veterans' preference rights and require documentation when passing over preference eligibles.

How do Rule of Many and Category Rating differ in approach?

Feature	Rule of Many	Category Rating
Basis of Ranking	Numerical scores	Quality categories
Candidate Referral	All candidates with tied/closely ranked scores at or above the cut-off	All candidates in the highest category
Veterans' Preference	Must be applied; pass over rules apply	Preference eligibles placed at top of category; cannot be passed over by non-preference eligibles
Flexibility in Selection	Select from a range of top ranked individuals	Select any in the top category
Score Use	Retains point-based scoring	Uses category-based qualification judgments

Can Rule of Many and Category Rating be used together?

No. These are distinct selection procedures, and an agency must choose one approach per competitive announcement.

What are the implementation considerations for each?

Rule of Many:

- Must be explicitly stated in the job announcement.
- Requires clear internal procedures and documentation of referrals.
- Agencies must train HR specialists and hiring managers in proper use.
- Supports competitive examining recruitments that require clear, meaningful differentiation among candidates.

Category Rating:

- Must be explicitly stated in the job announcement
- Requires establishment of clearly defined categories and rating criteria.
- Requires clear internal procedures and documentation of referrals
- Agencies must train HR specialists and hiring managers in proper use.
- Can support merit-based hiring reforms by reducing reliance on point scores.

Rule of Many vs. Category Rating

Feature	Rule of Many	Category Rating
Selection Method	Candidates are ranked numerically based on assessment scores	Candidates are grouped into quality categories (e.g., Best Qualified, Well Qualified)
Selection Pool	Managers may select from an agency determined range of top-ranked candidates	Managers may select from top quality category only
Flexibility	Offers greater flexibility in choosing among top scorers	More limited flexibility —must stay within the highest category
Supports EO 14170	✅ Yes – aligns with merit-based hiring reforms	✅ Yes – still permitted, but not the preferred method
Use Together?	❌ No – cannot be used with Category Rating in the same hiring action	❌ No – cannot be used with Rule of Many in the same hiring action
Best Used When	You have robust assessments that make fine distinction among candidates	You are filling positions that don't require technical qualifications and applicants have similar competency levels