

U.S. Office of Personnel Management
Office of Merit Systems Oversight and Effectiveness
Classification Appeals and FLSA Programs



Atlanta Oversight Division
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**Classification Appeal Decision
Under Section 5112 of Title 5, United States Code**

Appellants: [appellants' names]

Agency classification: Mechanical Engineering Technician
GS-802-9

Organization: Production Control Branch
Production Management Division
Portsmouth Site
Navy Public Works Center
[city, state]

OPM decision: Mechanical Engineering Technician
GS-802-9

OPM decision number: C-0802-09-05

Kathy W. Day
Classification Appeals Officer

2/13/98

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:

[appellants' representative]

[name]

Director, Human Resources Office

Naval Base

[city, state]

Mr. William Duffy

Chief, Classification Branch

Field Advisory Services Division

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Introduction

On July 8, 1997, the Atlanta Oversight Division, Office of Personnel Management (OPM), accepted an appeal for the position of Mechanical Engineering Technician, GS-802-9, Production Control Branch, Production Management Division, Portsmouth Site, Navy Public Works Center, [city, state]. The appellants are requesting that their position be changed to Mechanical Engineering Technician, GS-802-11.

The appeal has been accepted and processed under section 5112(b) of title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.). This is the final administrative decision on the classification of the position subject to discretionary review only under the limited conditions and time outlined in part 511, subpart F, of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations.

General issues

These appellants are part of a group appeal from engineering technicians at the Navy Public Works Center who perform work in various specializations. Information furnished with the group appeal compares their GS-9 positions with other engineering technician positions at the same location whom they believe are performing the equivalent work or below but are classified at a higher grade. Copies of position descriptions were provided for two Mechanical Engineering Technician, GS-802-11, positions; one Electrical Engineering Technician, GS-802-11, position; and one Electronics Engineering Technician, GS-856-11, position. Although the GS-11 position descriptions are certified by a management official, none have a classification certification or a position description number on the Optional Form 8. A certification by a management official certifies the accuracy of the position description which represents the official record of the duties and responsibilities assigned to a position. However, a classification certification indicates the position description has been placed in its proper class, title and grade in accordance with the OPM classification standards and guidelines by a person delegated classification authority. Since the GS-11 position descriptions lack a classification certification, the duties and responsibilities are not an official record of duties and responsibilities, have not been properly classified, and are neither reviewable nor appealable under the classification appeal process. Additionally, by law, we must classify positions solely by comparing their current duties and responsibilities to OPM standards and guidelines (5 U.S.C. 5106, 5107, and 5112). Since comparison to standards is the exclusive method for classifying positions, we cannot compare the appellants' positions to others as a basis for deciding their appeal.

In reaching our classification decision, we have carefully reviewed all information furnished by the appellants, the appellants' representative, and the agency, including information obtained from telephone interviews with the appellants and their supervisor.

Position information

The appellants are assigned to Position Number 7Y016. The appellants, supervisor, and agency have certified to the accuracy of the position description.

The appellants analyze project requests and determine the scope of the proposal to ensure that the needs of the customer are addressed. The customers may be any of the activities located at the Public Works Center Portsmouth Site, including: the Norfolk Naval Shipyard, Portsmouth; the Naval Regional Medical Center, Portsmouth; the Naval Inactive Ship Facility, Southgate Annex, Portsmouth; the Naval Ammunition Depot, St. Juliens Creek Annex, Portsmouth; Scott Center Annex, Portsmouth; Naval Security Group Activity, Northwest, Chesapeake; Naval Fuel Depot, Craney Island, Portsmouth; New Gosport Naval Housing, Portsmouth; Stanley Court Naval Housing, Portsmouth; and Saint Helena, Chesapeake. According to the appellants, their work is complicated by the age of the facilities, changes in the missions of the customers, and variable maintenance funding by the customers. Based on discussions with the customer and a site visit, as appropriate, the appellants assess the site and prepare design sketches and drawings, detailed job plans, cost estimates, and material requirements involved in the maintenance, repair, new construction and rehabilitation of real property systems and equipment. The majority of their assignments involve heating, ventilation, refrigeration and air conditioning (HVAC) systems, and plumbing and steam systems, although they do perform work in other areas, as well. Supervision is currently provided by the Supervisory Production Controller, GS-1152-12, who assigns work identifying major objectives and providing background information and guidance. Unusual problems are discussed by the appellants and the supervisor. The appellants determine the technical requirements of the job plans, construction plans, methods, components/materials, and cost estimates. The supervisor provides minimal technical assistance and completed work is reviewed for quality, timeliness, and adherence with instructions, guidelines, and policy.

Standards determination

Engineering Technician Series, GS-802, June 1969.

Series determination

The agency placed the position in the Engineering Technician Series, GS-802. The appellants do not contest the occupational series nor the title of their position.

The GS-802 series includes technical positions that require primarily application of a practical knowledge of (a) the methods and techniques of engineering or architecture; and (b) the construction, application, properties, operation, and limitations of engineering systems, processes, structures, machinery, devices, and materials. The positions do not require professional knowledges and abilities for full performance, and therefore, do not require training equivalent in type and scope to that represented by the completion of a professional curriculum leading to a bachelor's degree in engineering or architecture. The position is properly placed in the GS-802 series.

Title determination

The title Mechanical Engineering Technician applies to positions that involve work concerned with systems, plants, machines, equipment, and instruments for the generation, transmission, measurement

or utilization of heat or mechanical power. Included are steam and internal combustion powerplants, automotive and ordnance equipment and components, heating and air conditioning, piping, machine tools, and instruments and controls. The work involves preparation of project specifications for real property systems including all types of refrigeration and air conditioning systems comprised of components such as compressors, condensers, pumps, receivers, valves, coils, pipes, tubing gauges, fans, thermostats, filters, solenoids, duct work, electric and pneumatic controls. Projects may also involve equipment such as boilers, motors, pumps, generators, gear transmissions, cranes, hoists, and similar devices and plumbing/piping systems including sprinkler systems and high and low pressure water/air/steam distribution lines, all of which are covered by the mechanical specialization. The position is properly titled Mechanical Engineering Technician.

Grade determination

The grading criteria in the GS-802 standard is written in the narrative format. Grade levels are discussed in terms of two factors: (1) Nature of Assignment, and (2) Level of Responsibility. The position is evaluated as follows:

Nature of Assignment

This factor considers the scope and difficulty of the project, and the skills and knowledge required to complete the assignment.

At the GS-9 level, engineering technicians typically perform a variety of work relating to an area of specialization that requires the application of a considerable number of different basic but established methods, procedures, and techniques. Assignments usually involve independent responsibility for the planning and conduct of a block of work which is a complete conventional project of relatively limited scope, or a portion of a larger and more diverse project. Assignments require study, analysis, and consideration of several possible courses of action, techniques, general layouts, or designs, and selection of the most appropriate. This generally requires consideration of numerous precedents and some adaptation of previous plans or techniques. Often changes or deviations must be made during the progress of an assignment to incorporate additional factors requested after commencement of the project or to adjust to findings and conclusions which could not be predicted accurately in the original plans. The GS-9 assignments typically require coordination of several parts, each requiring independent analysis and solution. When phases or details of the project are performed by other groups or personnel outside the organizational unit, the technician reviews, analyzes, and integrates their work. In addition, assignments at this level require a good understanding of the effect that recommendations made or other results of the assignment may have on an item, system, or process and its end-use application.

Discussions with the employees and the supervisor indicate that the supervisor assigns the jobs based upon the discipline involved, the skills of the employee, and the workload priorities of the unit. Once given a project, the appellants meet with the customer to analyze the project request and assess the circumstances. They prepare preliminary field studies and concept drawings; recommend systems and

materials and construction methods; prepare preliminary cost estimates; and resolve problems pertaining to design, installation and operation of the systems, equipment, etc. They prepare estimates of the project costs, including labor and materials. Once the customer approves the project, the appellants develop a job plan encompassing a complete description of work, specifications, and milestones; requisition materials; sequence the phases of the project; and plan quality assurance inspections and removal of waste and site cleanup. The project is then given to the shops, and the appellants are responsible for overseeing the project and resolving problems that may arise. They work with the shops, contractors, vendors and the customers to see that the project is appropriately completed. The four appellants have been assigned diverse projects such as:

- ▶ Completing a fundable estimate for shop work to renovate a bathroom. According to the appellant who worked on this project, the work request was stated simply as renovating a bathroom, but a meeting with the customer and onsite inspection revealed a more complex situation. The bathroom had not worked in over 20 years and needed to be completely replaced. In addition, the water line was no longer in existence. The existing sewer line tied into the river, which is no longer allowed. The appellant designed a new bathroom based on the customer's requirements and the plumbing code. This involved examining sub-surface drawings to determine the nearest sewer location and designing a new water and sewer line. The appellant determined the correct size of piping, the specific types of fixtures to be used, and the correct size of the water drain, waste and vent piping to each fixture. He also determined the correct size for the water heater and the correct insulation materials and thickness. He also attached sketches he made with the estimate to assist the shops in their work. He coordinated his work with the electrical engineering technician before turning the estimate in for funding. After the job is funded, the appellant will write the job plan. All this was done without supervision, according to the appellant.
- ▶ Completing a fundable estimate for the shop to install a heating and air conditioning system in a building. The appellant met with the customer to discuss the job and finalize the scope of the work. He took measurements of the building to determine the proper location of the equipment and calculated the load requirements for heating and air conditioning to determine the proper equipment needed. He also determined the size and location of duct work to ensure proper air delivery. He drew plans to illustrate the correct location of the different components and determined the kinds and amounts of materials necessary to carry out the job. He also contacted the electrical engineering technician to ensure that an adequate source of power was available to operate the heating and air conditioning equipment. He developed a cost estimate and prepared a detailed job plan for the shop to install the system, phasing the different tasks to be performed.
- ▶ Renovating a building to house a spray painting facility. The appellant designed an air handling system to ensure proper ventilation so that employees were protected and proper drying conditions existed for the products. He drew sketches of the work to be accomplished and prepared cost estimates, a job plan, and a list of materials required. He contacted the shops to efficiently phase in the steps of the project.

- ▶ Installing an overhead steam line between buildings. The appellant took the engineering drawings and decided what was needed to complete the job. He determined what fittings, pipe, insulation, and other materials would be needed and contacted vendors to determine the prices of various components. He used the contract line items to figure out the cost of part of the job and then used the RS Mean system to estimate the work hours needed to accomplish the part not listed in the line items. He then wrote the delivery order for the contractor to perform the work.

These assignments are similar in terms of complexity to the seventh illustrative assignment presented in the classification standard under nature of assignment at the GS-9 level. Although the illustration in the standard describes electrical work, the steps involved are similar to the mechanical work done by the appellants, including preparing plans, specifications, and cost estimates for new construction or major modification of existing systems, and making design changes needed to overcome deficiencies or to make improvements.

As a result of their experience, the appellants are able to apply sound engineering practices to accomplish the work. Although modifications are necessary, these are not highly unique or unusual. The appellants do not routinely have to develop extensive new or extremely complex procedures. Navy instructions, manufacturers' specifications and directives, along with national and local codes for different disciplines, engineering drawings, sketches and files of similar projects are available in many situations. In those situations necessitating changes in design, precedents are usually available and applicable, and the appellants are able to choose an appropriate means of accomplishing the work from these existing bodies of knowledge.

The appellants are given their assignments and the time frame for completing them by the supervisor. Once a project is assigned, the appellants are essentially on their own and do not receive assistance from the supervisor in coming up with the completed assignment or in meeting with customers, vendors, or shop personnel involved in the project. In the event technical assistance is required, they consult with an engineer. The appellants investigate the job site, consult with the customer, prepare and/or validate drawings, and ultimately provide a work plan, a cost estimate, and requisition material. Once approved by the customer, the work is assigned to the appropriate work center, and the appellants are responsible for providing quality assurance on the project to the workers onsite and meeting with the customer to resolve any job-related problems or concerns. Guidelines generally available to the appellants include PWC and NAVFAC instructions and design manuals, Engineering Handbook, Architectural Graphic Standards, RS Mean cost estimating, technical directives, procedures, engineering drawings, sketches, specifications, manufacturers' literature, and precedents, along with the appropriate codes and standards for the different trades concerning environmental issues such as asbestos and lead paint removal. The estimates prepared by the appellants are based on historical data from other jobs when available and their own trades experience. They may use estimations based on Engineer Performance Standards (EPS) and the Estimator system. The EPS is used to assist in estimating jobs by identifying tasks and man-hours, materials, and other cost factors. All projects require the use and application of established engineering principles, methods,

and techniques and must conform to any applicable codes. These assignments are comparable to the GS-9 level.

At the GS-11 level, engineering technicians perform work of broad scope and complexity that requires application of (1) demonstrated ability to interpret, select, adapt, and apply many guidelines, precedents, and engineering principles and practices related to the area of specialization; and (2) some knowledge of related scientific and engineering fields. GS-11 technicians plan and accomplish complete projects or studies of a conventional nature requiring independent adaptation of a general fund of background data and information, and interpretation and use of precedents. They are typically confronted with a variety of complex problems in which considerable judgment is needed to make sound engineering compromises and decisions. Other related interests must often be considered, entailing frequent coordination with personnel in the fields concerned. There is a continuing requirement for contact work. Initiative, resourcefulness, and sound judgment are needed in planning and coordinating phases of assignments and in selecting which of several sound alternatives is to be used in arriving at acceptable engineering compromises. Ingenuity and creative thinking are required in devising ways of accomplishing objectives, and in adapting existing equipment or current techniques to new uses.

By comparison, technicians at lower levels receive assignments which are usually segments or phases of the type independently carried out at grade GS-11 or which involve less complex systems and facilities requiring design adaptation. GS-9 technicians apply standard engineering methods and techniques whereas GS-11 technicians are typically required to be creative in devising ways to accomplish the work. Assignments typically found at the GS-11 level include: (1) Develops cost estimates for competitive bidding for a variety of multiple-use construction projects. Determines (a) construction operations and methods involved and the time required to complete each phase or feature, (b) various types and capacities of construction equipment required and cost of operation and maintenance, (c) material types and quantities, and (d) overhead, tax, and other costs; or, (2) Prepares designs and specifications for various utility systems such as heating, plumbing, air conditioning, ventilating, pumping, gas supply, and pneumatic control systems. Assignments characteristically involve utility systems for office buildings, pumping stations, and flood control facilities, where the complexity or nonconventional nature of the buildings and facilities entails design problems requiring considerable adaptation of precedents or design of features for which precedents are not directly applicable. Performs technical review of contractor-prepared designs and specifications for such systems.

The appellants do not meet the GS-11 level of responsibility. Larger and more complex projects generally go to the Engineering Division. The appellants' assignments deal primarily with the mechanical aspects of conventional construction projects, design features, drawings and contract specifications for portions or complete buildings or facilities. While the buildings being worked on are typically older, there are established national, local, industrial, and manufacturer codes, specifications, and engineering principles which the appellants can use. In addition, in some cases, there are files of previous work available which they can reference in order to help accomplish their

portions of the projects. The appellants do not generally deal with a variety of multiple-use construction projects and do not develop new procedures/systems as is envisioned at this level.

GS-10 level assignments are not specifically described in the standard. The appellants' assignments do not in any way regularly exceed those described at the GS-9 level. Therefore, their assignments cannot properly be classified at the GS-10 level.

GS-9 is assigned for Nature of Assignment.

Level of Responsibility

This factor considers the nature and purpose of person-to-person work relationships, and the supervision received in terms of intensity of review of work and of guidance received during the course of the work cycle.

At the GS-9 level, the supervisor provides information on any related work being performed and furnishes general instruction as to the scope of objectives, time limitations, priorities, and similar aspects. The supervisor is available for consultation and advice where significant deviations from standard engineering practices must be made. The supervisor observes the work for progress and for coordination with work performed by other employees or other sections and for adherence to completion and cost schedules. Standard methods employed are seldom reviewed, but review is made for adequacy and for conformance with established policies, precedents and sound engineering concepts and usage. Personal work contacts typically are more frequent and demanding and are primarily to resolve mutual problems and coordinate the work with that of personnel in related activities. Some contacts are made with using agencies for whom work is done, and with contractors and architecture-engineer firms. The contacts are made to clear up doubtful points, to advise as to discrepancies found in meeting contract terms, to consider recommendations for acceptable substitutes, and to promote adherence to agency standards and concepts of good engineering.

Comparable to the GS-9 level, the appellants operate in an independent manner with very little "in process" supervision. However, technical advice and guidance are readily available. Unusual or controversial problems or policy questions arising in the course of a project may be discussed with the supervisor, but technical supervisory assistance is infrequently sought or required. The appellants have regular contact with other engineering technicians, engineers, requesting officials, and contractors. These contacts are to gather information, to define the scope of the requested work, to clarify policy issues, etc.

At the GS-11 level, technicians have considerable freedom in planning work and carrying out assignments. The supervisor makes assignments in terms of the major objectives, providing background information and advice on specific unusual problems which are anticipated or on matters requiring coordination with other groups. Unusual or controversial problems, or policy questions arising in the course of a project, may be discussed with the supervisor, but technical supervisory assistance is infrequently sought or required. The supervisor is usually informally advised regarding

progress but there is little review during progress of typical assignments. Completed work in the form of recommendations, plans, designs, reports, or correspondence is reviewed for general adequacy, conformity to purpose of the assignment, and sound engineering judgment. Contacts in the course of his work are with the same groups of individuals at lower grade levels and the purpose of the contacts is similar. Because of the increased scope of GS-11 assignments, these contacts tend to become more extensive than at lower levels. Contacts with contractors and other personnel regarding complex engineering and administrative problems are carried out without close supervision. However, the technician generally discusses with the supervisor the approach to be taken.

Although the appellants work independently under general supervision, the intent of the GS-11 level is not met. They may recommend a course of action, but the appellants seek technical advice on unusual problems and policy issues. The GS-11 level of responsibility assumes that the employee is performing assignments equivalent to the GS-11 level and would, therefore, have responsibility for adapting a general font of knowledge and interpreting precedents to handle complex assignments requiring the exercise of considerable judgment. In comparison, the appellants apply conventional engineering practices and a knowledge of the codes, specifications, and regulations to their projects. They exercise some judgment in determining the applicability of the specifications, codes, and engineering principles to the specific project, but consult with the supervisor or engineers on difficult problems or situations. This level of responsibility does not meet the intent of the GS-11 level.

The GS-10 level is not specifically described in the standard. To be appropriately classified at the GS-10 level, the technician's Level of Responsibility would have to regularly and clearly exceed the level described at grade GS-9. The appellants' position does not regularly require them to perform at a level that exceeds the GS-9 level.

GS-9 is assigned for Level of Responsibility.

Summary

Both factors are evaluated at the GS-9 level.

Decision

This position is properly classified as Mechanical Engineering Technician, GS-802-9.