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

Atlanta Oversight Division
75 Spring Street, SW., Suite 972
Atlanta, GA 30303-3109

Classification Appeal Decision
Under Section 5112 of Title 5, United States Code

Appellant:	[appellant's name]
Agency classification:	Civil Engineering Technician GS-802-9
Organization:	Production Control Branch Production Management Division Virginia Beach Site (Dam Neck/Oceana) Navy Public Works Center [city, state]
OPM decision:	Civil Engineering Technician GS-802-9
OPM decision number:	C-0802-09-14

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:

[appellant's representative]

[name]
Director, Human Resources Office
Naval Base
[city, state]

Mr. William Duffy
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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 Civil Engineering Technician, GS-802-9, Production Control Branch, Production Management Division, Virginia Beach Site (Dam Neck/Oceana), Navy Public Works Center, [city, state]. The appellant is requesting that his position be changed to Civil 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

This appellant is 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 appellant's position to others as a basis for deciding his appeal.

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

Position information

The appellant is assigned to Position Number 7V163. The appellant, supervisor, and agency have certified to the accuracy of the position description.

The appellant analyzes project requests and determines the scope of proposals to ensure the needs of the customer are addressed. Customers serviced are in any of the activities located at the Public Works Center (PWC) Virginia Beach Site, as well as Naval Air Station Oceana and Fleet Combat Training Center, Atlantic, Dam Neck, Virginia; Fentress Airfield, Cape May, New Jersey, and Dare County Bombing Range, North Carolina. Based on site visits and discussions with the customer, the appellant assesses the project and scope of the work and prepares appropriate design sketches or drawings, detailed job plans, cost estimates, and material requirements involved in the maintenance, repair, new construction and rehabilitation/renovation of real property systems and equipment. The majority of his assignments involve structural work related to real property systems such as housing, messing, recreational, utility, and miscellaneous buildings although he also performs work in other areas as well. Supervision is provided by the Supervisory Engineering Technician, GS-802-11, who assigns work identifying major objectives and providing background information and guidance. Unusual problems involving the project are discussed by the appellant and the supervisor. The appellant determines the technical requirements of the job plans, construction plans, methods, components and/or materials, and cost estimates. The supervisor provides minimal procedural or technical assistance and completed work is reviewed in terms of 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 appellant does not contest the occupational series nor the title of his 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 Civil Engineering Technician applies to positions that involve work concerned with buildings, structures, dams, soil mechanics, tunnels, highways, water resources, bridges, airports, railways, and other phases of civil engineering. Since the work primarily involves development and preparation of project specifications and plans for work related to the structural maintenance, repair, new construction and rehabilitation/renovation of buildings all of which are covered by the civil engineering specialization, the position is properly titled Civil 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 employee 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 assigned a project, the appellant meets onsite with customers to analyze the project request and assess the circumstances of the particular project. These meetings are essential as the customers generally know the desired outcome but lack the specific knowledge of the trades and of the codes, specifications, requirements, and standards that must be adhered to in accomplishing the work. The appellant is also provided an opportunity to determine the existence of conditions or situations which may negatively affect the costs, timeliness, construction methods, etc., complicate the assignment, or require significant changes or modifications to the proposal submitted. He prepares preliminary field studies and concept drawings or sketches; recommends systems, materials and the most cost effective construction methods (contractor, PWC shops personnel, or naval self-help construction personnel); prepares preliminary cost estimates; and resolves technical problems regarding the customer's wishes and what is feasible in terms of codes, requirements, materials, design, equipment, etc. He prepares an estimate of the total costs of labor and materials, identifies special conditions required by the existence of asbestos and/or lead based paint or other hazardous materials, and

identifies unexpected problems involving original construction methods and materials. Once customer approval of the project is given, the appellant develops a job plan which includes a complete description of work, specifications, and milestones; requisitions materials; sequences the phases of the project; coordinates the involvement of technicians from other specializations; and plans quality assurance inspections, site cleanup and debris removal. The project is then given to the PWC shops, contractors or self-help personnel, and the appellant is responsible for the overall coordination of the work and resolving any problems that may arise. He works with PWC shops personnel, contractors, vendors and suppliers, customers, and when necessary, engineer staff to ensure that the project is properly completed. The appellant has been assigned a variety of projects such as:

- Involvement in the major renovation of a three story barracks facility, circa World War II, slated for housing enlisted personnel at Oceana to bring it into conformance with current standards for living quarters. He was the lead planner for this project as the structural portion represented the majority of the required work. Major problems were found with water seepage through the ceramic tile flooring of the upper level showers rather than flowing to shower pans beneath the tile. This would eventually result in the ceilings of the floors below being ruined. His approach to resolving the problem was to increase the slope of the floor to direct water flow to shower pans and coat the tile with a sealant. He identified and coordinated the work that needed to be completed by electrical and mechanical planners, contractors, and self-help personnel; developed drawings of the work to be performed; and prepared the preliminary list of required materials.

- Involvement in the renovation of the kitchen in Building 300, a base chapel. Initially, the customer was interested only in undertaking limited repairs for certain areas of the kitchen. This project evolved into a total kitchen remodel after the appellant's determination that the structural areas involved were in such bad shape that repairs would not be cost effective. The project included walls, cabinets/counters, plumbing, electrical circuits/fixtures, flooring, ventilation, ceiling, and the addition of a pass through window. This particular project involved a concern regarding the possible hazards of removing floor tiles and plumbing insulation containing asbestos. Arrangements were made to have samples sent out for testing to determine the extent to which specific safety equipment and procedures would have to be employed. The appellant worked with the customer and developed a series drawings of proposed layouts from which a selection of the final layout could be made. Assisting with the project were planners from the electrical and mechanical specializations whose involvement was coordinated by the appellant as lead planner. The appellant prepared drawings of each area as it existed and identified the specific modifications required, including a detailed work plan and materials list. He ordered the necessary materials and provided guidance and quality assurance oversight while the project was in progress.

The appellant has more than 25 years of experience in the building construction field and a wide range of trade knowledge related to building codes, fire codes, engineering standards, construction requirements and techniques, safety requirements, and environmental requirements related to the proper handling of asbestos, lead based paints, and other hazardous materials. This experience allows

him to apply sound engineering practices in carrying out assignments and accomplishing the work. The supervisor stated that the appellant is given wide latitude to make the technical decisions necessary to accomplish the work. The work frequently requires that plans be modified based on circumstances encountered during site visits, discussions with customers as to their expectations or wishes, and equipment and structural peculiarities of the buildings involved. However, these modifications do not normally require a radical departure from established procedures or the development of a wide range of new or extremely complex procedures. Reference materials are available in the form of Navy/PWC directives, manufacturers' specifications and recommendations, national and local codes and standards for different disciplines, engineering drawings, and sketches and files of similar projects. Where modifications or changes must be made, existing precedents are usually available and applicable, allowing the appellant to choose an appropriate means of accomplishing the work from these existing bodies of knowledge and his own experience.

The appellant is given his assignments along with major objectives, time frames, background information and guidance by the supervisor. Following the assignment of a project, the appellant is responsible for determining the technical requirements of the job. He visits job sites, consults with the customer, develops construction plans and estimates of project related costs, determines the construction methods/techniques to be used, and material requirements. The appellant does not receive technical assistance from the supervisor in completing the assignment or assistance in meetings or discussions with customers, contractors, vendors, suppliers, shop personnel or other technicians involved in the project. In those instances where technical assistance is required, he consults with an engineer or architect as necessary.

Following approval by the customer, the work is assigned to the appropriate work center and the appellant is responsible for coordinating the work of other personnel involved in the project and assuring that the final product conforms with all applicable codes and standards. He is also responsible for meeting with customers during the execution of projects to resolve any job-related problems or concerns they may have. The supervisor is advised of project status during weekly meetings with subordinate technicians and is apprised of unusual problems or delays that may affect project costs and timeliness. Guidelines generally available to the appellant include PWC and NAVFAC instructions and directives, design manuals, Engineering Performance Standards, technical directives, procedures, engineering drawings, sketches, specifications, manufacturers' specifications and recommendations, and precedents and files of previous projects. Also included are appropriate national, state or local building codes, standards and practices for the different trades, fire protection, and requirements related to environmental issues such as the removal and disposal of asbestos, lead paint and other materials. 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 appellant does not meet the GS-11 level. Larger and more complex projects are generally assigned to the Engineering Division. The appellant's assignments deal primarily with the civil aspects of conventional structural construction projects, design features, drawings and contract specifications for portions or complete buildings or other facilities. Although the buildings on which the appellant works tend to be older and contain hazardous materials, there are established national, local, industrial, and manufacturer codes, specifications, and engineering principles which the appellant can apply. Additionally, in some cases, there may be files of previous work available which he can reference in order to help him accomplish his portion of the project. The appellant does not generally deal with a variety of multiple-use construction projects and does not develop new procedures/systems as is envisioned at this level.

GS-10 level assignments are not specifically described in the standard. The appellant's assignments do not in any way regularly exceed those described at the GS-9 level. Therefore, his 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 appellant operates in an independent manner with very little "in process" supervision. However, technical advice and guidance is readily available whenever unusual or controversial problems or policy questions arising in the course of a project are encountered. These are discussed with the supervisor, but technical supervisory assistance is infrequently sought or required. The appellant has regular contact with customers, other engineering technicians, engineers, suppliers, vendors, civilian and military managers or officers, and contractors. These contacts are to gather and provide information, define the scope of the requested work, resolve problems, 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 appellant works independently under general supervision, the intent of the GS-11 level is not met. He may recommend a course of action, but the appellant seeks 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 appellant is responsible for applying conventional engineering practices, techniques, and knowledge of the codes, specifications, and regulations to his projects. He exercises some judgment in determining the applicability of the specifications, codes, and engineering principles to the specific project, but consults with his supervisor 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 appellant's position does not regularly require him 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 Civil Engineering Technician, GS-802-9.