

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

**Dallas Oversight Division**  
**1100 Commerce Street, Room 4C22**  
**Dallas, TX 75242-1027**

**Classification Appeal Decision**  
**Under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code**

**Appellant:** [name]

**Agency classification:** Secretary (Office Automation)  
GS-318-5

**Organization:** [Team]  
[appellant's organization]  
Defense Contract Management District West  
Defense Contract Management Agency  
[location]

**OPM decision:** Secretary (Office Automation)  
GS-318-5

**OPM decision number:** C-0318-05-10

/s/ Bonnie J. Brandon

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Bonnie Brandon  
Classification Appeals Officer

December 7, 2001

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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 name and address]

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## **Introduction**

On July 11, 2001, the Dallas Oversight Division of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted a classification appeal from [the appellant]. We received her agency's administrative report on August 14, 2001. The appellant's position is currently classified as Secretary (Office Automation), GS-318-5. However, she believes her work warrants a higher grade level. Her position is assigned to the [Team], [appellant's organization], Defense Contract Management District West, Defense Contract Management Agency, in [location]. We have accepted and decided this appeal under the provisions of section 5112 of title 5, United States Code.

To help decide this appeal, an Oversight representative held telephone conversations on September 20, 2001, with the appellant and on September 24, 2001, with her immediate supervisor. In reaching our decision, we have reviewed information gained from these conversations and all material of record furnished by the appellant and her agency, including the appellant's official job description [number].

## **General issues**

The appellant believes that her position supports a higher grade level, in part, because she fills in for the unit commander's secretary when that person is out of the office. However, duties performed only in another employee's absence cannot be considered in determining the grade of a position (*The Classifier's Handbook*, chapter 5). As required by law, we classified the appellant's position based upon the currently assigned duties, responsibilities, and qualification requirements as compared with the criteria specified in the appropriate OPM classification standards and guidelines (sections 5106, 5107, and 5112 of title 5, United States Code).

## **Position information**

The [appellant's Team] is one of six operations teams that make up the Defense Contract Management (DCM) [the appellant's larger organization], a part of the DCM Denver organization that covers Colorado, Utah, Wyoming, and western Nebraska. Each of the other five teams in the [appellant's] organization has a secretary position that the agency has classified at the GS-5 level. A lieutenant colonel commands the overall DCM Denver-[appellant's specific] organization. The commander's secretary is assigned to a position that the agency has classified as GS-318-6.

The appellant provides clerical and administrative support to the [appellant's] Team supervisor and her staff. The appellant receives and makes telephone calls; distributes mail and faxes; prepares occasional correspondence; compiles and analyzes various preformatted and ad hoc reports; reviews the organization's Intranet for procedure manual changes and advises the team by electronic mail of those changes; and pulls reports from various data base systems in order for team members to review updates and changes and then reconciles those reports. The appellant's duties also include typing drafts in final form ensuring accuracy of grammar, spelling, and punctuation; maintaining the calendar for her supervisor; making travel arrangements, preparing travel orders, and entering travel budget information into a data base for the supervisor and her

staff; training team staff in the use of computer software; and resolving routine administrative issues identified by supervisors and employees.

The appellant provides administrative support to the team supervisor in her responsibility for personnel management of team employees. The appellant follows up on the status of requests for personnel action, updates and maintains personnel information cards for employees, advises her supervisor of training needed by team members, maintains training records and processes training requests, and performs timekeeping duties. She provides support to her supervisor by reconciling timekeeping reports for proper coding of unit costs.

The appellant makes reference to computer skills she has gained and how those skills are applied to her current duties. According to the supervisor, the appellant is the “focal point” within the [appellant’s] organization for various software programs that staff members use (for example, Word, Excel, Cognos) and for the timekeeping data system and its associated software. She provides some training to other individuals on the use of those programs.

### **Series, title, and standard determination**

The GS-318 Secretary Series includes positions that assist one individual, and in some cases the subordinate staff of the individual, by performing general office work auxiliary to the work of the organization. A position must be the principal clerical or administrative support position in the office to be included in this series. The duties require knowledge of clerical and administrative procedures and requirements, various office skills, and the ability to apply such skills in a way that increases the effectiveness of others. The typical secretary position requires a general knowledge of the substantive work of the organization under the jurisdiction of the persons assisted. The appellant is knowledgeable about functions of the DCM and acts as the principal clerical and administrative support person for the supervisor and her staff. Therefore, her position fits within the GS-318 Secretary Series.

The position classification standard for the GS-318 Secretary Series provides for the title *Secretary* while allowing for an appropriate parenthetical addition. Since the appellant routinely performs duties with various office machines including a personal computer, the position is correctly titled *Secretary (Office Automation)*.

Since the application of office automation technology is a recurrent part of the appellant’s job, we evaluated the grade level of these duties in accordance with the criteria published in the Office Automation Grade Evaluation Guide, dated November 1990. We found that the appellant’s office automation duties do not exceed the GS-5 grade level. Since the office automation duties are not grade determining, we will not discuss them further.

### **Grade determination**

The position classification standard for the GS-318 Secretary Series (dated January 1979) was used to evaluate the grade level of the position. The standard is written in the Factor Evaluation System (FES) format, which uses nine factors. Each factor is evaluated separately and is assigned a point value consistent with factor level definitions described in the standard. The total

number of points for all nine factors is converted to a grade by use of the standard's grade conversion table. Under the FES, each factor level description describes the minimum characteristics needed to receive credit for the described level. Therefore, if a position fails to meet the criteria in a factor level description in any significant aspect, it must be credited at the next lower level. Conversely, the position may exceed those criteria in some aspects and still not be credited at the higher level. Our evaluation with respect to the nine FES factors follows.

*Factor 1, Knowledge required by the position*

This factor measures the nature and extent of information or facts which the secretary must understand to do acceptable work and the nature and extent of skills needed to apply that knowledge. Along with measuring this element, Factor 1 examines the work situation itself. It considers the complexity of the organization served, which affects the extent of office rules, procedures, operation, and priorities the secretary must apply to maintain a proper and smooth flow of work within the organization.

Knowledge Type III positions require knowledge of an extensive body of rules, procedures, or operations applied to clerical assignments; knowledge of the organization and functions of the office; and knowledge of the duties, priorities, commitments, policies, and program goals of the staff sufficient to perform non-routine assignments. Secretaries at this level are fully responsible for coordinating the work of the office with other offices and for recognizing the need for such coordination in various circumstances.

At Knowledge Type IV, in addition to the knowledge's and skills required at lower levels, the employee must have a basic foundation of administrative concepts, principles, and practices sufficient to perform independently such duties as eliminating conflict and duplication in extensive office procedures, determining when new procedures are needed, and studying and recommending restructuring of clerical activities of the office and subordinate offices. This level also requires a comprehensive knowledge of the supervisor's policies and views on all significant matters affecting the organization.

The knowledge required by the appellant's position meets the intent of Knowledge Type III. To perform her assigned duties and responsibilities, the appellant must apply a thorough knowledge of DCM policies, procedures, operations, functions, and organization. She must have knowledge of agency policies and functional knowledge of the DCM in order to provide information to her team supervisor, subordinate staff, and other organizations within DCM West through preparation of reports and correspondence. The appellant must use her knowledge of office procedures to receive and refer telephone calls and visitors, maintain control over the calendar of meetings for the supervisor and other staff, record and prepare team meeting minutes, process time and attendance information, maintain training records and process training requests, and provide administrative support to the team supervisor in the execution of personnel and budget management responsibilities.

The appellant's position does not meet Knowledge Type IV as described in the standard. The appellant works in a small organization and there is little, if any, opportunity for the independent performance of duties similar to those found at this level. There are no subordinate organizations

or other clerical staff necessitating the analysis of extensive office procedures or restructuring of clerical activities as envisioned at this level.

In Work Situation A, the organization is small and of limited complexity. The supervisor directs the staff primarily through face-to-face meetings, and internal procedural and administrative controls are simple and informal. In Work Situation B, the staff is organized into subordinate segments that may in turn be further divided. The subordinate groups differ in many ways that place demands on the secretary which are significantly greater than in Work Situation A. Coordination among subordinate units is sufficiently complex to require continuous attention.

The [appellant's] Team has 17 staff members and administrative controls that are simple and informal. The supervisor directs her staff through frequent face-to-face meetings and electronic mail communications. The appellant's position meets Work Situation A.

The combination of Knowledge Type III and Work Situation A equates to Level 1-3 and is credited at 350 points.

### *Factor 2, Supervisory Controls*

This factor measures the nature and extent of supervision exercised over the position. Controls measured by this factor include the way assignments are made, the way priorities and deadlines are set, and the way work is reviewed.

At Level 2-3, the supervisor defines the overall objectives and priorities of the work in the office. The secretary plans and carries out the work of the office and handles problems and deviations in accordance with established instructions; priorities, policies, commitments, and program goals of the supervisor; and accepted practices in the occupation. At this level, completed work is evaluated for adequacy, appropriateness, and conformance to established policy.

At Level 2-4, the supervisor sets the overall objectives of the work. The secretary and the supervisor, in consultation, develop the guidelines and the work to be done. At this level, the secretary handles a variety of situations and conflicts requiring the use of initiative to determine the approach to be taken or methods used. This level is most likely to be found in organizations of such size and scope that many complex office problems arise that cannot be brought to the attention of the supervisor. Completed work is reviewed only for overall effectiveness.

The appellant works with the independence described at Level 2-3. She handles problems and deviations without close supervision from the team supervisor. She normally establishes her own daily priorities in a manner that is consistent with program goals communicated to her periodically by her supervisor. Her work is reviewed primarily for effectiveness.

Although the appellant works with considerable freedom and handles most problems, the limited size and structure of her organization preclude her from encountering the scope of complex problems envisioned at Level 2-4 on a regular or recurring basis. Any unusual or complex assignments or difficulties are referred to the supervisor.

Level 2-3 (275 points) is credited for this factor.

### *Factor 3, Guidelines*

This factor measures the nature of guidelines and the judgment needed to apply them. Guides include reference materials such as dictionaries and style manuals, agency instructions concerning correspondence, and operating procedures of the organization served.

At Level 3-2, guidelines typically include dictionaries, style manuals, agency instructions concerning correspondence, and operating policies of the supervisor or organization served. The secretary locates and selects the appropriate guidelines, references, and procedures for application to specific cases. The secretary refers to the supervisor significant proposed deviations or situations to which existing guidelines cannot be applied.

At Level 3-3, the guidelines include a large body of unwritten policies, precedents, and practices which are not completely applicable to the work or are not specific and deal with matters relating to judgment, efficiency, and relative priorities rather than procedural concerns. The secretary may apply and adapt guidelines, such as regulations or the supervisor's policies, to specific problems for which the guidelines are not clearly applicable.

Although the appellant is expected to make judgments and interpret guidelines, they are usually relatively specific and can be applied without much deviation. Typical guidelines used by the appellant consist of correspondence guidelines, agency regulations and guidelines, Defense Contract Management "One Book" guidance and regulations, various software package guidance, and policies established by the supervisor. The guidelines used and the judgment required for the appellant's position meet and do not exceed Level 3-2.

Level 3-2 (125 points) is credited.

### *Factor 4, Complexity*

This factor measures the nature, number, variety, and intricacy of tasks, steps, processes, or methods in the work performed; the difficulty in identifying what needs to be done; and the difficulty and originality in performing the work.

At Level 4-2, the secretary's duties involve various related steps, processes, or methods and include a full range of procedural duties in support of the office. Decisions at this level involve various choices requiring the secretary to recognize the existence of and differences among clearly recognizable situations. Decisions are based on knowledge of the procedural requirements of the work coupled with an awareness of the specific functions and staff assignments of the office.

At Level 4-3, the work includes various duties involving different and unrelated processes and methods. Decisions regarding what needs to be done and how it should be done are based on the secretary's knowledge of the duties, priorities, commitments, policies, and program goals of the supervisor and staff. Decisions involve analysis of the subject, phase, or issues involved in each assignment. The chosen courses of action are selected from many alternatives.

The complexity of the appellant's position meets Level 4-2. The work involves a full range of clerical and administrative duties and responsibilities that support the team supervisor and her

staff. The appellant's work comprises various related processes and methods that require her to make decisions based on choices among recognizable situations, procedural requirements, and the functions of the DCM [appellant's] Team. The appellant's work is regular and scheduled with few deviations from her normal routine. While the appellant performs some analysis of various reports, such analysis is preliminary to the supervisor's more detailed review and approval of the report information. Decisions related to the appellant's work involve choosing between a few alternatives that are readily identifiable.

The appellant's work does not meet the complexity of Level 4-3. While the appellant's position performs a variety of duties using different processes appropriate to each assignment, there is minimal need for the analysis of issues and subjects described at this level. The appellant's work requires her to act in situations that are less ambiguous and to follow procedures that are clearer than those typical of Level 4-3.

This factor is credited at Level 4-2 (75 points).

#### *Factor 5, Scope and effect*

This factor measures the relationship between the nature of the work, as measured by the purpose, breadth, and depth of the assignment, and the effect of work products or services both within and outside the organization.

At Level 5-2, the purpose of the work is to carry out specific procedures. The work affects the accuracy and reliability of the work of others and of other work processes. Duties at this level include serving as a liaison between the supervisor and subordinates, consolidating information into reports, and making various arrangements to assist the supervisor with administrative responsibilities.

At Level 5-3, the secretary serves offices that clearly and directly affect a wide range of agency activities, operations in other agencies, or large segments of the public. Positions at this level work in the context of situations outside the organization, and the work regularly requires the secretary to modify usual office methods in ways that consistently and directly affect the organization's mission accomplishment.

The scope and effect of the position meet Level 5-2. The purpose of the position is to provide clerical and administrative support to the team supervisor and her staff. The appellant prepares and reviews correspondence, distributes mail and faxes, makes travel arrangements and completes necessary forms for travel, serves as the timekeeper for the [appellant's] Team, and also serves as computer liaison for the DMC [larger] organization for several software and data base system packages. She collects various types of information used in her supervisor's decision making regarding budget planning, personnel actions, and employee training. The appellant's work affects the efficiency and effectiveness of contract management processes within the DMC Denver-[major] organization.

The appellant's work does not meet Level 5-3. Her work does not affect a wide range of agency activities, operations in other agencies, or a large segment of the public or business community. The appellant does not modify and devise methods and procedures that significantly affect the mission of the [appellant's] Team.



Level 5-2 (75 points) is credited for this factor.

*Factor 6, Personal contacts*

This factor is based on what is required to make the initial contact, difficulty of communicating with those contacted, and the setting in which the contact takes place. This factor does not cover persons within the supervisory chain.

At Level 6-2, contacts include employees in the same agency but outside the immediate organization who are generally engaged in different functions, missions, and kinds of work than the secretary's immediate organization. Contacts also include members of the general public in a moderately structured setting.

At Level 6-3, contacts are with individuals or groups from outside the employing agency in moderately unstructured settings. The purpose and extent of each contact may be different, and the role and authority of each party is identified and developed during the course of the contact. These contacts are not established on a routine basis. Typical contacts at this level might include attorneys, contractors, representatives of professional organizations, news media, or public action groups.

The appellant's personal contacts meet Level 6-2. The appellant is in contact with various staff throughout DCM Denver-[major organization], DCM personnel office staff, and with contractors in a moderately structured setting.

The appellant's contacts do not meet Level 6-3. The contacts do not require her to identify and develop the role and authority of each party. For example, contact with contractors only requires her to identify the best staff person to provide assistance. Her contacts are more routine and structured than contacts envisioned at Level 6-3.

Level 6-2 (25 points) is credited for this factor.

*Factor 7, Purpose of contacts*

The purpose of personal contacts ranges from factual exchanges of information to situations involving significant or controversial issues and differing viewpoints, goals, and objectives. The personal contacts that serve as the basis for the level selected for this factor must be the contacts that are the basis for the level selected for Factor 6.

The purpose of contacts at Level 7-2 is to plan, coordinate, or advise on work efforts or to resolve operating problems. Level 7-3 is not addressed in the GS-318 standard; therefore we referred to the Primary Standard (the "standard" for FES classification standards). The Primary Standard states that the purpose of contacts at Level 7-3 is to influence, motivate, or control uncooperative persons or groups.

The appellant's personal contacts are typically made with a variety of parties in order to plan, coordinate, and carry out her office work. This is comparable with Level 7-2. Since she provides principal administrative support to the [appellant's] Team supervisor and staff, she is frequently involved in resolving administrative problems and operating issues relevant to the

DCM [appellant's] Team. The purpose of the appellant's contacts is not to motivate or influence uncooperative persons as at Level 7-3.

This factor is credited at Level 7-2 (50 points).

*Factor 8, Physical demands*

This factor measures the requirements and physical demands placed on the employee by the work assignment, including the agility and dexterity required and the extent of physical exertion. At Level 8-1, the work is sedentary with some walking and standing. No special physical demands are required to perform the work. Only Level 8-1 is addressed in the GS-318 Secretary Series classification standard. At Level 8-2, as described in the Primary Standard, the work requires physical exertion.

The physical demands on the appellant meet Level 8-1. The work is primarily sedentary and may involve some walking, standing, bending, and carrying light items. The appellant's work does not require physical exertion as described at Level 8-2.

Level 8-1 (5 points) is credited.

*Factor 9, Work environment*

This factor measures the risks and discomforts in the employee's physical surroundings or the nature of the work assigned and the safety regulations required. The work environment at Level 9-1 includes the minimal risks and discomforts normally found in offices. In the Primary Standard, Level 9-2 describes a work environment that involves moderate risks or discomforts that require special safety precautions.

The appellant's work environment meets Level 9-1. Her work occurs in a standard office environment with good lighting and ventilation. The office environment has normal discomforts and risks but not those associated with Level 9-2.

Level 9-1 (5 points) is credited.

*Summary*

| <i>Factor</i>                         | <i>Level</i> | <i>Points</i> |
|---------------------------------------|--------------|---------------|
| 1. Knowledge required by the position | 1-3          | 350           |
| 2. Supervisory controls               | 2-3          | 275           |
| 3. Guidelines                         | 3-2          | 125           |
| 4. Complexity                         | 4-2          | 75            |
| 5. Scope and effect                   | 5-2          | 75            |
| 6. Personal contacts and              | 6-2          | 25            |
| 7. Purpose of contacts                | 7-2          | 50            |
| 8. Physical demands                   | 8-1          | 5             |
| 9. Work environment                   | 9-1          | 5             |
| <i>Total</i>                          |              | 985           |

The point total for the nine factors is 985. When compared to the GS-318 standard's grade conversion table, this total converts to the GS-5 grade level (point range of 855-1,100).

**Decision**

The appellant's position is properly classified as Secretary (Office Automation), GS-318-5.