

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

Washington Oversight Division
1900 E Street, NW., Room 7675
Washington, DC 20415-6000

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

Appellant: [name]

Agency classification: Secretary (OA)
GS-318-6

Organization: [division]
[department]
[installation]
Department of the Navy
[city and State]

OPM decision: Secretary (OA)
GS-318-6

OPM decision number: C-0318-06-05

/s/

Linda Kazinetz
Classification Appeals Officer

May 24, 2001

Date

As provided in section 511.612 of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations, this decision constitutes a classification 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 the conditions and time limits specified in title 5, Code of Federal Regulations, sections 511.605, 511.613, and 511.614, as cited in the *Introduction to the Position Classification Standards*, appendix 4, section G (address provided in appendix 4, section H).

Decision sent to:

Appellant:

[name]

Agency:

[servicing personnel officer]

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Introduction

On January 22, 2001, the Washington Oversight Division of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted a position classification appeal from [appellant], who is employed as a Secretary (OA), GS-318-6, in the [division], [department], [installation], Department of the Navy, in [city and State]. [Appellant] requested that her position be classified as Administrative Assistant (OA), GS-318-7. This appeal was accepted and decided under the provisions of section 5112 of title 5, United States Code.

An on-site position audit was conducted by a Washington Oversight Division representative on April 26, 2001, and a subsequent telephone interview with the appellant's supervisor, [name], on May 21, 2001. This appeal was decided by considering the audit findings and all information of record furnished by the appellant and her agency, including her official position description (unnumbered), classified by the servicing personnel office as Secretary (OA), GS-318-6, on September 26, 2000.

Position Information

The appellant performs a wide range of clerical and administrative duties to support the operations of the division, including but not limited to: reviewing outgoing correspondence for grammar, spelling, clarity, and proper clearances, making corrections as appropriate or referring the correspondence back to the originator; receiving and distributing incoming correspondence; keeping the supervisor's calendar and scheduling appointments without prior approval; reviewing, transmitting, and recording naval messages; taking and routing telephone calls, providing assistance on her own initiative to the extent possible; making travel arrangements and preparing travel orders; preparing requests for security clearances, passports, and visas; composing and signing non-technical correspondence; maintaining personnel files for division employees; keeping time and attendance records; preparing work requests for maintenance and repair work; and purchasing supplies, equipment, services, training, and some technical items using an agency bankcard. The appellant's position description and other supporting material submitted with the appeal contain more detailed information regarding her duties.

Series Determination

The appellant's position is properly assigned to the Secretary Series, GS-318, which covers positions that serve as the principal clerical and administrative support position in the office to which assigned.

Title Determination

The prescribed title for positions in this series is Secretary. The parenthetical addition of (OA) to the title is appropriate, as the position requires knowledge of office automation systems and full typing qualifications.

Grade Determination

The position was evaluated by application of the criteria contained in the Secretary Series, GS-318, dated January 1979. This standard is written in the Factor Evaluation System (FES) format, under which factor levels and accompanying point values are to be assigned for each of the following nine factors, with the total then being converted to a grade level by use of the grade conversion table provided in the standard. The factor point values mark the lower end of the ranges for the indicated factor levels. For a position to warrant a given point value, it must be fully equivalent to the overall intent of the selected factor level description. If the position fails in any significant aspect to meet a particular factor level description, the point value for the next lower factor level must be assigned, unless the deficiency is balanced by an equally important aspect that meets a higher level.

Factor 1, Knowledge Required by the Position

This factor is expressed in terms of two elements, Work Situation and Knowledge Type. Work Situation refers to the complexity of the organization served which affects the extent of office rules, procedures, operations, and priorities the employee must apply to maintain a proper and smooth flow of work within the organization and between organizations. Knowledge Type measures the nature and extent of information the employee must understand in order to do the work, and the skills needed to apply that knowledge.

Work Situation

At Work Situation A, organizations are small and of limited complexity. Although the organization may include several subordinate sections or subgroups, the secretary's supervisor directs the staff primarily through face-to-face meetings, and internal procedural and administrative controls are simple and informal. There are few complicated problems of coordination requiring formal procedures and controls.

At Work Situation B, the staff is organized into subordinate segments which may be further divided. Direction of the staff is exercised through intermediate supervisors, and the subordinate groups differ from each other in such aspects as subject matter, functions, relationships with other organizations, and administrative requirements in ways that place demands upon the secretary that are significantly greater than those at Work Situation A. The presence of subordinate supervisors does not by itself mean that Work Situation B applies. There is a system of *formal internal procedures and administrative controls*, and a *formal production or progress reporting system*. Coordination among subordinate units is sufficiently complex to require *continuous attention*.

Also included at Work Situation B are organizations that meet Work Situation A in terms of internal coordination but have extensive responsibility for coordinating work outside of the organization. Such organizations may be placed in Work Situation B when the external coordination requires procedures and administrative controls *equivalent to* those described above for this level.

The appellant's division has a total of 41 employees and is divided into three subordinate units, [branch names], each of which is headed by a branch chief. These branches have different functional responsibilities and, consequently, different types of external contacts and relationships and somewhat different administrative requirements. Only one of the branches has a secretary, as the secretarial positions in the other two branches were abolished when last vacated. There are no *formal* internal procedures or administrative controls that the appellant is responsible for devising and ensuring that others follow. (Although the appellant prepared and updates an office procedures handout for new employees, this contains mostly station administrative procedures and general information.) Also, there is no formal production or progress reporting system, wherein the appellant is responsible for coordinating the timely submission of reports. These are requirements under Work Situation B. However, these criteria are based to a large degree on an organizational structure that assumes the presence of multiple support personnel in the subordinate units, a model that is rapidly disappearing in most workplaces.

The appellant's division does not conform to the typical Work Situation A organization. It would not be characterized as small, nor is it of limited complexity in terms of the administrative requirements imposed on the appellant. Although the division does not have the types of formal procedures and controls described under Work Situation B, the staff is of sufficient size to require significant coordination on the part of the appellant. This includes such activities as setting up division staff meetings and soliciting agenda items, assembling material for and scheduling performance appraisal reviews, ensuring that staff members have received mandatory training, getting branch input for administrative information requests, and obtaining required materials and services for staff (such as passports, visas, security clearances, travel cards, e-mail accounts, etc.) Although this is not necessarily "coordination among subordinate units," it is continuous and involves numerous and varied contacts. Although her external contacts similarly do not require formal procedures and controls, they are also continuous and rather extensive, involving such activities as keeping logs of all messages sent to the Fleet, preparing baseline agendas for meetings, and making arrangements for visitors coming on-station (such as preparing visit requests, getting security clearances and passes, making required notifications, coordinating travel arrangements, and arranging for tours.)

The GS-318 standard includes several benchmark job descriptions for positions at varying grade levels that serve as illustrative work situations. They describe both the duties performed and the factor level assignments. In the benchmarks where Work Situation A is assigned, the organizations are identified as having from three to 17 employees. In the benchmarks where Work Situation B is assigned, the organizations are identified as having from 95 to several hundred employees. Although the staff number does not in itself determine the Work Situation assigned, there is a relationship between organizational size and the types of secretarial duties that a particular organization will support. In this respect, the appellant's division is not as large as those normally expected at Work Situation B, but clearly exceeds the smaller organizations typical of Work Situation A. This consideration, in combination with the division's network of external relationships and the associated coordination requirements, aligns the organization with Work Situation B.

Knowledge Type

The knowledge required by the appellant's position matches Knowledge Type III. Positions at this level require knowledge of the duties, priorities, commitments, policies, and program goals of the staff sufficient to perform non-routine assignments such as: independently noting and following-up on commitments made at meetings and conferences by staff members; shifting clerical staff in subordinate offices to take care of fluctuating workloads; or locating and summarizing information from files when this requires recognizing which information is relevant. At this level, the secretary is fully responsible for coordinating the work of the office with the work of other offices, and for recognizing the need for such coordination in various circumstances.

This accurately characterizes the nature of the appellant's work and her role in the office. The appellant must know the policies and priorities of the division chief in order to perform such non-routine assignments as reviewing correspondence for his signature, not only for such aspects as grammar and clarity, but also for conformance with his viewpoints and previous decisions on administrative issues; organizing her work independently to ensure that priority matters are dealt with expeditiously; composing non-technical correspondence on her own initiative; and resolving shipment or payment problems on items ordered. She also must know the duties, functional assignments, and commitments of the subordinate staff in order to, for example, route or refer callers and correspondence based on subject matter; keep track of individual staff's whereabouts to inform the division chief as necessary; and ensure that all administrative requirements (such as passports, clearances, visit requests, etc.) have been completed in connection with upcoming assignments or events. Consistent with Knowledge Type III, the appellant is fully responsible for coordinating the work of the office with the work of other offices and outside parties (e.g., in obtaining administrative services, arranging meetings, and conveying information).

The position does not meet Knowledge Type IV. Positions at this level must have, as a continuing requirement, 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; systematically studying and evaluating new office machines and recommending acceptance and rejection of their use; and studying the clerical activities of the office and subordinate offices and recommending a specific restructuring of the way activities are carried out. Positions at this level also require comprehensive knowledge of the supervisor's policies and views on all significant matters affecting the organization, to perform such duties as developing material for the supervisor's use in public speaking engagements, and briefing staff members or outside parties on the supervisor's views on current issues affecting the organization (e.g., the supervisor feels that a proposed reorganization would increase the effectiveness of the program because it reduces some administrative burdens.) The standard notes that *Work Situation B rarely involves application of Knowledge Type IV.*

This knowledge type applies to positions located at higher levels in the overall organization served (e.g., the secretary to the director of a large facility.) The supervisor would have a very large staff and significant representational responsibilities. It is unlikely that a secretary at the

division level of a field installation would have the opportunity to perform the types of duties associated with Knowledge Type IV. The appellant provided no examples of work she has performed that is equivalent to those duties in any respect.

Work Situation B in combination with Knowledge Type III equates to Level 1-4.

Level 1-4 is credited.

550 points

Factor 2, Supervisory Controls

This factor covers the nature and extent of direct or indirect controls exercised by the supervisor, the employee's responsibility, and the review of completed work.

The level of responsibility under which the appellant works is comparable to Level 2-3. At that level, the supervisor defines the overall objectives and priorities of the work in the office, and the secretary plans and carries out the work and handles problems and deviations in accordance with established instructions, priorities, and policies. By its nature, the work cannot be reviewed in detail, but rather is evaluated for adequacy, appropriateness, and conformance to established policy.

The appellant's major duties are specifically addressed in the standard at this level. These include the following: receiving telephone calls and visitors, personally taking care of many matters and questions not requiring technical knowledge; keeping the supervisor's calendar, scheduling appointments and conferences without prior approval and briefing him beforehand; receiving requests for program information and personally preparing the material; receiving and routing incoming correspondence, personally drafting replies to nontechnical inquiries; and reviewing outgoing correspondence for procedural and grammatical accuracy, general policy conformance, factual correctness, and adequacy of treatment, advising the originators of problems. Also consistent with this level, the appellant's work is reviewed by the supervisor only for the overall adequacy and efficiency of the services provided. As such, the appellant's position closely matches this level in terms of the supervision received and the types of responsibilities assigned.

The position does not meet Level 2-4. At that level, the supervisor sets the overall objectives of the work. The secretary and the supervisor, in consultation, develop the deadlines and the work to be done. The secretary handles a wide variety of situations and conflicts and must determine the approach or methods to use. Completed work is reviewed only for overall effectiveness. The standard notes that this level is most likely to be found in *organizations of such size and scope that many complex office problems arise which cannot be brought to the attention of the supervisor.*

The standard describes several duties as typical of those performed at this level. These consist of the following: noting commitments made by the supervisor during meetings and arranging for the staff to implement them; reviewing correspondence for policy departures or conflicts with previous correspondence and resolving these problems before presentation to the supervisor; in addition to independently arranging conferences, also arranging for a subordinate of the

supervisor to represent the organization; drafting letters of acknowledgement, commendation, notification, etc., on his/her own initiative, e.g., after reviewing publications for program citations; ensuring that official social obligations are met, such as arranging luncheons, issuing invitations, and providing for protocol requirements; obtaining information on specialized subject matter that is scattered in numerous documents or must be obtained orally from several sources; and preparing administrative or procedural notices or instructions to the staff on his/her own initiative.

The appellant does not perform *any* of these duties or any other duties of a comparable level of responsibility. These types of duties would normally be found in offices at high organizational echelons with supervisors who have many official programmatic and social commitments, or in extremely large organizations where the supervisor delegates considerable authority to the secretary to take actions on his/her behalf. These types of conditions do not apply in the appellant's case.

The distinction between Levels 2-3 and 2-4 lies less in the independence of action exercised by the secretary (supervisory controls) or the degree of review to which the secretary's work is subjected (supervisory review), but more in the actual level of responsibility exercised by the secretary as a direct function of the types of duties performed. Under this factor, the factor levels do not represent simply a progression of decreasing supervisory oversight over the work. They also represent responsibility for carrying out progressively more complex duties with a correspondingly greater degree of independence. For example, the performance of routine, relatively simple assignments would not be classifiable at Level 2-4, even if the secretary carried them out with virtually no supervision or review, since they would not impose significant demands on the secretary in terms of developing the sequence and timing of the work, modifying instructions, or establishing priorities and defining objectives. Thus, level of responsibility is directly related to the difficulty of the duties performed. Since the appellant's duties and the degree of responsibility she exercises in carrying them out are fully represented at Level 2-3, there is no basis for assignment of Level 2-4.

Level 2-3 is credited.

275 points

Factor 3, Guidelines

This factor covers the nature of the guidelines used and the judgment needed to apply them.

The guidelines used by the appellant match Level 3-2. At that level, guidelines include dictionaries, style manuals, and agency instructions concerning such matters as correspondence or the handling of classified information, and the operating policies of the supervisor. The secretary locates and selects the appropriate guidelines and references for application to specific cases, referring situations to which existing guidelines cannot be applied or significant proposed deviations to the supervisor. The secretary may also determine which of established alternatives to use.

The appellant uses standard references such as correspondence manuals, station instructions, and established procedures. She is expected to locate the appropriate reference sources or administrative instructions for the tasks at hand.

The position does not meet Level 3-3. At that level, 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 with procedural concerns. For example, they may include decisions made by the supervisor in cases that are similar, but not completely analogous. The secretary applies and adapts guidelines, such as regulations or the supervisor's policies, to specific problems for which the guidelines are not completely applicable.

Most of the appellant's duties are carried out on the basis of instructions provided, standard administrative operating procedures, or the established policies and priorities of the division. This is not meant to imply that she does not exercise discretion in her work. She must know, for example, which matters the supervisor wants to handle personally and which can be referred to the subordinate staff, and his preferred style in composing or revising correspondence for his signature. However, most of the work is of a recurring nature, and general priorities and time frames are associated with the various tasks. The appellant provided no examples of situations where she has to make decisions based on her knowledge of *program* rather than clerical priorities.

Level 3-2 is credited.

125 points

Factor 4, Complexity

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

The complexity of the appellant's work is comparable to Level 4-2. At that level, secretaries perform a full range of procedural duties in support of the office, including such duties as requisitioning supplies, printing, or maintenance service; filling out various travel forms for staff members; arranging for meeting rooms; and preparing scheduled reports from information available in the files. Decisions at this level 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.

This basically characterizes the nature of the appellant's work. She performs the full range of standard procedural duties in support of the division. She must know the actions required to accomplish various tasks (e.g., purchasing supplies and equipment, making travel arrangements, getting passports and visas, using messaging systems and databases), and she must know the specific staff functional and program assignments within the division.

The position does not meet Level 4-3. At that level, the secretary performs a number of duties comparable to the following: preparing one-of-a-kind reports from information in various

documents when this requires reading correspondence and reports to identify relevant items, and when decisions are based on familiarity with the issues involved and the relationship between the various types of information; and setting up conferences requiring the planning and arranging of travel and hotel accommodations based on knowledge of the schedules and commitments of the participants. Decisions regarding what needs to be done and how to accomplish it are based on the secretary's knowledge of the duties, priorities, commitments, policies, and program goals of the supervisor and staff, and involve analysis of the subject, phase, or issues involved in each assignment. The chosen courses are selected from many alternatives.

The appellant performs a wide variety of assignments, but they are largely recurring. The procedures for carrying them out are established, or she is given specific instructions on what is needed (e.g., in making travel arrangements or helping set up conferences.) She provided no examples of special, one-time projects where she had to determine exactly what actions needed to be taken and how to accomplish them, or any other assignments where the content or results were left largely to her discretion.

Level 4-2 is credited.

75 points

Factor 5, Scope and Effect

This factor covers the relationship between the nature of the work, and the effect of the work products or services both within and outside the organization.

The scope and effect of the appellant's work match Level 5-2. At that level, the purpose of the work is to carry out specific procedures. The work affects the accuracy and reliability of further processes.

The purpose of the appellant's work is to carry out the procedural processes of the office. The work affects the ability of the staff to accomplish their work through the provision of essential support services.

The position does not meet Level 5-3. Positions at that level serve offices that clearly and *directly* affect a wide range of *agency* activities, operations in other agencies, or a large segment of the public or business community. The secretary at this level modifies and devises methods and procedures that significantly and consistently affect the accomplishment of the mission of the office. The secretary identifies and resolves various problems and situations that affect the orderly and efficient flow of work in transactions with parties outside the organization.

The appellant's position is located at division level at a field installation. Thus, the scope of the work is significantly less than intended at this level.

Level 5-2 is credited.

75 points

Factor 6, Personal Contacts

This factor includes face-to-face and telephone contacts with persons not in the supervisory chain. The relationship between Factors 6 and 7 presumes that the same contacts will be evaluated under both factors.

The appellant's personal contacts match Level 6-2. At that level, contacts are with employees in the same agency, but outside the immediate organization, and/or with members of the general public. Contacts at this level are typically found in offices where visitors and callers contact the office to, for example, find several different kinds of information. The appellant answers calls from staff at all levels of the agency. The more substantive contacts are with Fleet personnel who call the division to request information relating to particular equipment items.

The position does not meet Level 6-3. At that level, contacts are with individuals or groups from outside the agency in a moderately unstructured setting, e.g., the purpose of each contact is different, and the secretary must apply significant skill and knowledge in determining to whom to direct the call. Typical contacts at this level include attorneys, contractors, the news media, or public action groups when the office deals with them on a variety of issues. Although the appellant takes calls from contractors, the context is not as unstructured as described at this level in that it is not particularly difficult to determine to whom to refer the call (i.e., the database system lists staff assignments for particular equipment items.)

Level 6-2 is credited.

25 points

Factor 7, Purpose of Contacts

This factor covers the purpose of personal contacts ranging from factual exchange of information to situations involving significant or controversial issues and differing viewpoints and objectives.

The purpose of the appellant's contacts is consistent with Level 7-2 (the highest level described under this factor), where contacts are for the purposes of planning and coordinating work or resolving operating problems.

Level 7-2 is credited.

50 points

Factor 8, Physical Demands

This factor covers the requirements and physical demands placed on the employee by the work situation.

The position matches Level 8-1, which covers sedentary work.

Level 8-1 is credited.

5 points

Factor 9, Work Environment

This factor considers the risks and discomforts in the employee's physical surroundings or the nature of the work assigned and the safety regulations required.

The position matches Level 9-1, which describes a typical office environment.

Level 9-1 is credited.

5 points

Summary

| <u>Factors</u> | <u>Level</u> | <u>Points</u> |
|----------------------|--------------|---------------|
| Knowledge Required | 1-4 | 550 |
| Supervisory Controls | 2-3 | 275 |
| Guidelines | 3-2 | 125 |
| Complexity | 4-2 | 75 |
| Scope and Effect | 5-2 | 75 |
| Personal Contacts | 6-2 | 25 |
| Purpose of Contacts | 7-2 | 50 |
| Physical Demands | 8-1 | 5 |
| Work Environment | 9-1 | <u>5</u> |
| Total | | 1185 |

The total of 1185 points falls within the GS-6 range (1105-1350) on the grade conversion table provided in the standard.

Decision

The appealed position is properly classified as Secretary (OA), GS-318-6.