

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).

Since this decision involves a change in the classification of the appealed position, it is to be effective no earlier than the date of the certificate and not later than the beginning of the fourth pay period following the date of the certificate. The servicing personnel office must submit a compliance report containing the corrected position description and a Standard Form 50 showing the personnel action taken. The report must be submitted within 30 days from the effective date of the personnel action.

Decision sent to:

[appellant]

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Introduction

On May 9, 2002, the Washington Oversight Division of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted a position classification appeal from [appellant], who is employed as an Office Automation Clerk, GS-326-4, in [branch] of the [division], [office], [service], at OPM in [city and State]. The appellant requested that her position be classified as Contact Representative, GS-962-6. This appeal was accepted and decided under the provisions of section 5112 of title 5, United States Code.

A desk audit was conducted by a Washington Oversight Division representative on August 21, 2002, including an interview with the appellant's supervisor, [name]. This appeal was decided by considering the audit findings, all information of record furnished by the appellant, and material submitted in the agency administrative report on June 25, 2002.

Position information

The appellant answers the telephone, referring callers to the branch specialists or other OPM offices and answering routine questions herself, such as status inquiries, requests for applications, and common technical questions. She opens incoming mail, files documents with the corresponding cases, distributes mail to the appropriate specialists, and independently responds to certain repetitive inquiries. She logs new cases into a tracking system and distributes them to the specialists as assigned by the supervisor. She prepares form letters to applicants requesting additional documentation as instructed, and occasionally on her own initiative when certain common forms have not been submitted with the application. She logs completed cases out of the system, checking to ensure that the decision letter matches the disposition indicated by the specialist. Other duties carried out by the appellant consist of more detailed processes associated with the performance of these described functions.

The appellant is assigned to a standardized GS-326-4 position description that was found to be inadequate for classification purposes. It does not describe the full range of duties that she performs. For this reason, this evaluation is based on the work she actually performs as it was presented in the desk audit.

Series determination

The Office Automation Clerical and Assistance Series, GS-326, does not adequately represent the work performed by the appellant. This series covers positions the *primary* duty of which is to perform office automation work, including word processing, either solely or in combination with clerical work. The primary duties of the appellant's position are to answer the telephone, respond to general and recurring inquiries, sort and distribute mail, and log cases in and out of an automated tracking system. The appellant's use of word processing is incidental to the performance of her own duties, to produce occasional letters to applicants either providing information or requesting documentation.

However, the appellant's work does not fall within the Contact Representative Series, GS-962. This series includes positions that primarily involve contacts with the public for the purposes of

(1) providing information on rights, benefits, privileges, or obligations under a body of law; (2) explaining pertinent legal provisions, regulations, and related administrative practices and their application to specific cases; *and* (3) assisting individuals in developing needed evidence and preparing required documents, or in resolving errors, delays, or other problems in obtaining benefits. Work in this series involves explaining to individuals how to obtain benefits, the forms and documents needed, the basis for agency determinations in individual cases, and the administrative and legal recourses available in the case of denial. This series specifically excludes such work as information receptionist duties, where employees provide limited information on whom to call to get answers to benefits questions, and other clerical support work where employees review applications for benefits for completeness and consistency and give information on filing and processing requirements. Contact representatives provide these types of procedural information, but go beyond it and advise individuals of the merits of their cases and on the decisions that are likely to be made regarding their applications for benefits.

Although one of the primary duties of the appellant's position is to answer the telephone, she redirects the vast majority of calls to either one of the branch specialists or other [service] offices depending on the subject of the inquiry. She personally answers only basic, often recurring questions, where she can get the information from one of the published OPM [program area] pamphlets. For more difficult questions, she asks the supervisor or one of the specialists and relays the information. She is not expected or authorized to independently provide more detailed or complex information on regulatory provisions or to advise applicants on the merits of their particular cases.

The appellant's position is properly assigned to the Miscellaneous Clerk and Assistant Series, GS-303, which includes positions involved in performing clerical, assistant, or technician work for which no other series is appropriate. Clerical work in this series involves the processing or maintenance of records or documents representing the transactions of the organization. This generally characterizes the appellant's work, which involves processing [program area] cases in and out of the branch.

Title determination

Since there are no titles prescribed for the GS-303 series, the position may be titled at the agency's discretion, with the parenthetical title *Office Automation*.

There are no published grade-level criteria for the GS-303 series. The standard instructs that positions classified to this series be evaluated by the General Grade-Evaluation Guide for Nonsupervisory Clerical Positions. This guide was superseded by the Grade Level Guide for Clerical and Assistance Work (dated June 1989), which is used as a source of grade level guidance for work that is not covered by more specific grade level criteria in other guides or standards.

Since the grade-level criteria in the General Grade-Evaluation Guide for Nonsupervisory Clerical Positions are very generalized, we confirmed the grade by applying the Job Family Standard for Assistance Work in the Human Resources Management Group, GS-200, which covers work that is similar to the appellant's in terms of the types of processes she carries out.

Grade determination

Evaluation using the Grade Level Guide for Clerical and Assistance Work

This guide is written in a narrative format, with grade-level criteria expressed in terms of two evaluation factors, *Nature of assignment* (which includes the elements of knowledge required and complexity of the work), and *Level of responsibility* (which includes the elements of supervisory controls, guidelines, and contacts).

Nature of assignment

The appellant's work assignments most closely match the GS-4 level. At that level, work consists of performing a full range of standard clerical assignments and resolving recurring problems. The work consists of related steps, processes, or methods which require the employee to identify and recognize differences among a variety of recurring situations. Actions to be taken or responses to be made differ in nature and sequence because of differences in the particular characteristics of each case or transaction. In addition to knowledge of how to carry out procedures, the work requires some subject-matter knowledge of an organization's programs and operations or of a body of standardized rules, procedures, or operations in order to determine what is being done, why the action is being taken, and how it must be accomplished.

The appellant performs standard clerical assignments related to processing cases in and out of the branch. She opens incoming mail and files documents with the associated case files; distributes cases to the specialists; requests routine documentation from applicants; and logs cases in and out of an automated tracking system. The work requires taking different actions depending on the disposition of the cases, i.e., whether they are approved, disallowed, dismissed, or withdrawn. The work requires knowledge of the processes involved in the submission and review of disability applications in order to know what actions must be taken at any particular stage in the process.

The appellant's work assignments do not meet the GS-5 level. At that level, work consists of performing a full range of standard and nonstandard clerical assignments and resolving a variety of nonrecurring problems. The work includes a variety of assignments involving different and unrelated steps or processes. The employee must identify and understand the issues involved in each assignment and determine what steps and procedures are necessary and the order of their performance. Completion of each transaction typically involves selecting a course of action from a number of possibilities. The work requires extensive knowledge of an organization's rules, procedures, operations, or practices to perform the more difficult, interrelated, or one-of-a-kind clerical processing procedures.

A work example described by the Guide at this level is that of an inspectional aid who controls inbound manifests for air and sea cargo and inbound storage. The employee posts a variety of entry permits and other clearance documents against corresponding bills of lading; examines documents for completeness, discrepancies, prohibited cargo, and other special requirements; and identifies entries that may involve fraud, smuggling, etc., based on available intelligence data. The employee authorizes lay order extensions, obtains general order control numbers,

resolves manifest and entry discrepancies, and prepares official and office workload reports. The employee applies knowledge of the pertinent sections of the Tariff Act, the Inspectors Manual, and other guides to accomplish the processing functions necessary to import cargo, and applies knowledge of data in the computer system to discern entries requiring further analysis by inspectors because of possible fraud, controlled substances, and prohibited cargo.

The appellant's work is basically repetitive in the sense that it involves carrying out the same steps and procedures, i.e., sorting documents and filing them with the appropriate case files, logging cases in, and distributing them to the specialists. She is not expected to independently resolve nonrecurring problems. For example, if she receives a telephone inquiry that cannot be answered by referring to one of the OPM [program area] pamphlets, she is not expected to research the question in the regulations herself, but rather either asks one of the specialists and relays the information or refers the call. The appellant's work does not afford her the latitude to decide what steps, processes, or course of action should be taken since these are basically prescribed. Rather, she makes more limited judgments such as matching decision letters with the stated dispositions of specific cases, or requesting additional documentation in clear-cut situations. She does not make the sort of judgmental decisions reflected in the GS-5 work example, which involves actually reviewing documents to identify discrepancies requiring closer inspection by higher-graded staff.

Level of responsibility

The level of responsibility inherent in the appellant's position matches the GS-4 level. At that level, the supervisor provides little assistance with recurring assignments, and the employee uses initiative to complete work in accordance with accepted practices. Unusual situations may require the assistance of the supervisor or higher level employee, and the completed work may be reviewed more closely. Procedures for doing the work have been established and a number of specific guidelines are available. The employee uses judgment in locating and selecting the most appropriate guidelines, references, and procedures. The employee has contacts with co-workers and people outside the organization to exchange information and to resolve problems in connection with the immediate assignments.

Since most of the appellant's work is recurring and covered by established operating procedures, she receives very little supervisory assistance or review. She uses only a few limited guidelines, such as the OPM [program area] pamphlets and a reference book she assembled herself, in responding to telephone inquiries. Any questions or problems that are outside the scope of her knowledge are referred to one of the specialists for assistance. She has contacts with co-workers and telephone callers for the purpose of providing and requesting information.

The appellant's level of responsibility does not meet the GS-5 level. At that level, the supervisor assigns work by defining objectives, priorities, and deadlines and provides guidance on assignments which do not have clear precedents. The employee works in accordance with accepted practices and completed work is evaluated for technical soundness, appropriateness, and effectiveness in meeting goals. Extensive guides in the form of instructions, manuals, regulations, and precedents apply to the work. The employee uses judgment in locating and selecting the most appropriate guidelines for application and adapting them to the circumstances

of the specific case or transaction. Often, the employee must determine which of several alternative guidelines to use. Contacts are with a variety of persons within and outside the agency to exchange information relating to the work or to resolve operating problems.

This degree of supervisory controls is based on the performance of the correspondingly more difficult assignments described at this level. In order to meet this level, the employee would have to be performing work that is relatively complicated enough to require the supervisor to define objectives and priorities and to review it for technical soundness. Since the appellant's work is recurring and prescribed, this degree of supervisory guidance and review is not applicable. The appellant does not have to refer to extensive guides in determining what action to take in a particular case. Rather, most of her work can be carried out in accordance with standard operating procedures and without reference to any guidelines.

Evaluation using the GS-200 Standard

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 measures the nature and extent of information an employee must understand in order to do the work, and the skills needed to apply that knowledge.

The knowledge required by the appellant's position matches Level 1-2, where work requires knowledge of basic procedures and operations sufficient to perform routine support tasks; provide routine information; complete forms and applications for benefits; request records from the records center; and use a personal computer, terminal, and office software programs to enter data, complete forms, and correct errors and omissions in documents, files, and records.

Correspondingly, the appellant must understand the basic processes involved in submitting and reviewing [program area] applications sufficient to perform such routine support tasks as filing documents with the appropriate case files and processing cases out of the office; providing general information to telephone callers; transferring records to the Boyers Records Center; and logging cases in and out of an automated records system.

The position does not meet Level 1-3, where work requires knowledge of a standardized body of procedures and operations sufficient to perform a full range of support assignments; use personal computers to prepare documents with complicated formatting; and use personal computers and software programs to extract, revise, or sort information from files, records, or databases. An

example provided in the standard of Level 1-3 assignments in the employee benefits field includes assisting employees seeking general information concerning retirement benefits, disability, and other types of benefits; providing information concerning conditions to be met for reinstatement of insurance, conversion of life insurance, basic features of programs, and options associated with retirement including voluntary retirement, [program area], discontinued service, early out, buy-outs, and other reduction-in-force provisions; providing information concerning survivor benefits, voluntary deposits and redeposits, disability benefits, health and life insurance options, public pension offset, windfall elimination, Social Security, Thrift Savings Plan, and other current and emerging provisions; preparing initial retirement annuity estimates; and assisting employees with the preparation and submission of retirement application or retirement fund redeposits.

The appellant does not perform work comparable to “a full range of support assignments” as that term is intended in the standard, but rather certain prescribed, limited support functions peripheral to the review and adjudication of [program area] applications. The knowledge of retirement disability rules required by her position is fairly limited, sufficient to answer general, recurring telephone inquiries. She does not provide information of the range and complexity described at Level 1-3, nor does she assist applicants with their individual cases except to provide them with status information. Her use of personal computers is also more limited than described at this level, confined to logging cases in and out or changing address information. She does not, for example, extract data for reports or make more extensive revisions to the records in the database.

Level 1-2 is credited.

200 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 2-2. At that level, the supervisor provides continuing assignments indicating generally what is to be done, deadlines, quantities, and priorities. The employee works independently in carrying out recurring assignments, such as entering data into an automated system, follows limited procedures controlling how the work is to be done, and refers specific problems not covered by standard operating procedures to the supervisor or other designated employees. Recurring assignments are reviewed through quality control procedures.

The appellant receives most of her assignments as part of the normal workflow of the office, e.g., answering the telephone, receiving and opening mail, and logging in new cases. The nature of the work makes supervisory review impractical except from the standpoint of the overall quality and efficiency of her services.

The position does not meet Level 2-3. At that level, the supervisor makes assignments by outlining and discussing issues and defining objectives, priorities, and deadlines. The employee independently plans the work, resolves problems, carries out the successive steps, recommends

alternative actions, and refers new or controversial issues to the supervisor for direction. Work products (such as job vacancy announcements, ranking factors, position descriptions, job evaluation statements, and recommendations for disciplinary action) are reviewed for technical soundness, appropriateness, and conformity to policies and requirements.

This level is based on the performance of more difficult technical assignments comparable to the examples provided above. Work of this nature would require such supervisory input as discussing issues and objectives and reviewing written products, and it would involve employee responsibility for planning the work and handling problems. The appellant's work, in contrast, consists of a limited number of processes that require virtually no intervention by the supervisor or any planning or problem resolution by the appellant. She produces no written products that would be susceptible to the type of supervisory review addressed at this level.

Level 2-2 is credited.

125 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, the employee uses a number of established procedural guidelines such as work samples, references, and operating manuals, and applies judgment in selecting procedures for application to specific cases.

The appellant uses established procedures in processing cases in and out of the office. However, she must use judgment in, for example, ensuring that decision letters match the stated dispositions of the cases.

The position does not meet Level 3-3. At that level, the employee uses guidelines that are not applicable to all work situations, and must select the most appropriate guideline and decide how to complete the various transactions. For example, this includes such work as devising more efficient methods for procedural processing, gathering and organizing information for inquiries, and resolving problems referred by others.

The appellant's work is repetitive and the judgment required to perform it is limited. She performs a limited number of assignments, and the methods for carrying them out are prescribed. If she encounters problems, or if questions arise which she cannot answer, she refers them to her supervisor or a specialist. She does not develop processing procedures, gather and organize information, or resolve problems referred by others.

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, work consists of related steps, processes, and standard explanations of methods or programs. The employee makes decisions on appropriate actions from various choices and uses information that is factual in nature. The employee recognizes different processes required to assist customers. For example, the employee provides basic information to employees concerning health benefits, life insurance, and routine retirement actions; explains eligibility requirements, the enrollment process, and basic features of the employee benefits program; and processes simple claims submitted by employees for compensation benefits.

The appellant's work consists of carrying out a few related tasks associated with processing cases in and out of the office. She provides standard, generalized information on disability requirements and benefits in response to inquiries.

The position does not meet Level 4-3. At that level, the work consists of different and unrelated steps. The employee analyzes factual data, identifies the scope and nature of problems or issues, and determines the appropriate action from among many alternatives. An example provided in the standard of Level 4-3 complexity describes providing information and assistance to employees regarding program requirements, processing procedures, and issues of various types of retirement programs including voluntary, disability, discontinued service, early out, buy-outs, and other reduction-in-force provisions; explaining survivor benefits, computations, health and life insurance options, public pension offset, windfall elimination, Social Security, Thrift Savings Plan, and other current and emerging provisions; and assisting employees with problems applying for benefits.

The appellant's work has few variations in terms of the steps that she follows in carrying it out. It does not require that she read or analyze the cases themselves to determine what action is required. She is not expected to be able to independently provide in-depth information on retirement benefits to the degree described at this level.

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, work involves technical services and practices and applying specific rules or procedures. The work affects the accuracy of records and other data. For example, the employee processes benefit requests, obtains required information or supporting documentation, and provides basic information concerning employee benefits to employees.

The appellant processes cases in and out of the office, obtains required forms from applicants, and provides basic information concerning processing procedures and benefits. Her work affects the completeness of individual case documentation.

The position does not meet Level 5-3. At that level, work involves treating a variety of routine problems or questions using established procedures, such as rating employees for promotion. The work has a direct effect on the quality and adequacy of employee records, program operations, and services provided. For example, the employee explains benefit options available to employees based upon analysis of individual cases and processes claims that require identifying and substantiating relevant information.

This level basically describes the performance of limited case work. In contrast, the purpose of the appellant's work is to carry out prescribed clerical processes. Her work affects the efficient flow of work in and out of the office, but does not directly affect the quality of the core services and operations carried out in the organization.

Level 5-2 is credited.

75 points

Factor 6, Personal contacts
and
Factor 7, Purpose of contacts

These factors include face-to-face and telephone contacts with persons not in the supervisory chain and the purpose of those contacts. 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 2 (the highest level described under this factor), where contacts are with employees and managers in the agency and with applicants, retirees, beneficiaries, and/or the general public. The appellant has contacts with co-workers and applicants.

The purpose of the appellant's contacts match Level A, where contacts are for the purposes of acquiring or exchanging facts or information needed to complete assignments. Level B is not met, where contacts are for the purposes of planning and coordinating work or resolving operating problems by persuading others. The appellant's contacts are solely for providing or requesting information rather than for planning and coordinating her work with other staff's work or resolving problems.

Level 2A is credited.

45 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	1-2	200
Supervisory controls	2-2	125
Guidelines	3-2	125
Complexity	4-2	75
Scope and effect	5-2	75
Personal contacts/ Purpose of contacts	2A	45
Physical demands	8-1	5
Work environment	9-1	<u>5</u>
Total		655

The total of 655 points falls within the GS-4 range (655-850) on the grade conversion table provided in the standard.

Decision

The appealed position is properly classified as GS-303-4, with the title at agency discretion and with the parenthetical title *Office Automation*.