

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



San Francisco Oversight Division
120 Howard Street, Room 760
San Francisco, CA 94105

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

Appellant: [appellant's name]

Agency classification: Mechanical Engineering Technician
GS-802-11

Organization: [appellant's installation]
Department of the Navy

OPM decision: Mechanical Engineering Technician
GS-802-11

OPM decision number: C-0802-11-02

Carlos A. Torrico
Classification Appeals Officer

6/5/98

Date

As provided in section 511.612 of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), 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 & address]

[name & address of servicing personnel office]

Director, Plans, Programs, and Diversity
Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary
of the Navy (CP/EEO)
Department of the Navy
800 North Quincy Street
Arlington, VA 22203-1998

Chief, Classification Branch
Field Advisory Services Division
Defense Civilian Personnel Management Service
1400 Key Boulevard, Suite B-200
Arlington, VA 22209-5144

Introduction

On May 4, 1998, the San Francisco Oversight Division of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) received a classification appeal from [the appellant]. His position is currently classified as Mechanical Engineering Technician, GS-802-11. However, he believes the grade level should be GS-12. The appellant works in [the appellant's installation], Department of the Navy. We have accepted and decided his appeal under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.).

General issues

The appellant believes that he is assigned the same duties as Mechanical Engineers, GS-830-12, and Electronics Technicians, GS-856-12, at the installation. Therefore, he feels that his position should also be classified at the GS-12 level. However, 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 other jobs or position descriptions as a basis for deciding his appeal.

Although the appellant's supervisor has certified to the accuracy of the appellant's standard position description (number QKR7088), the appellant believes that it does not accurately reflect the duties and responsibilities that he actually performs. He has been unable to resolve this issue with his agency. In such cases it is OPM policy to decide the appeal based on the actual duties that management assigns and that the employee performs. Therefore, to help decide this appeal we conducted a phone audit with the appellant, followed by a phone interview with his supervisor. In reaching our classification decision we have carefully considered information from our interviews, and all other information furnished by both the appellant and the agency.

Position information

The appellant is a Mechanical Engineering Technician for the Navy at the [appellant's installation]. His primary tasks are to resolve technical problems associated with submarine equipment, testing, and documentation, and analyze and evaluate repair issues and problems related to the mechanical systems for which he is assigned functional responsibility. In that capacity, our fact-finding disclosed that he applies technical knowledge and skills to evaluate and inspect mechanical equipment, rather than professional engineering knowledge and skills.

The audit and other material of record furnish much more information about the appellant's duties and responsibilities and how they are performed.

Series, title, and standard determination

We find that the appellant's position is properly covered by the Engineering Technician Series GS-802, titled Mechanical Engineering Technician, and graded using the GS-802 standard. Like positions classified in the GS-802 series, his duties primarily require application of a practical knowledge of (a) the methods and techniques of engineering, and (b) the construction, application,

properties, operation, and limitations of engineering systems, processes, structures, machinery, devices, and materials. The work does not require application of professional engineering knowledges and skills.

The GS-802 standard (dated June 1969) contains grade-level criteria only up to the GS-11 level. The grade-level criteria at grades GS-9 and GS-11 are designed to provide consistency in the classification of positions of technicians and engineers who perform similar work. Engineering technician positions that clearly exceed the GS-11 grade level may be evaluated by extension of the criteria in the GS-802 standard in combination with grade-level criteria in appropriate standards for engineering positions.

As shown below, the appellant's position does not clearly exceed the GS-11 level by application of the grade level criteria in the GS-802 standard. Therefore, it is properly evaluated using that standard alone. Nevertheless, in order to address the appellant's concerns, we have also evaluated the appellant's position by cross-series comparison to the standard for the Mechanical Engineering Series, GS-830 (dated June 1977). However, it should be noted that the GS-830 standard describes professional engineering knowledge and skills, which are not required in the appellant's position.

Grade determination

Evaluation by the Engineering Technician Standard, GS-802

The engineering technician standard uses two classification factors to evaluate positions: Nature of Assignment and Level of Responsibility. Our evaluation with respect to these factors follows.

Nature of Assignment

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

The nature and complexity of the appellant's work fully meets the GS-11 level described on pages 33-35 of the GS-802 standard and as summarized below.

- At the GS-11 level, engineering technicians interpret, select, adapt, and apply many guidelines, precedents, and engineering principles and practices. Likewise, the appellant must interpret, select, adapt, and apply logistics technical data, Naval Sea System Command (NAVSEA) or vendor drawings, technical manuals and regulations, precedents, and engineering principles and practices.
- At the GS-11 level, engineering technicians must apply some knowledge of related scientific and engineering fields. Likewise, the appellant applies knowledge of electrical engineering when analyzing a situation to determine its basic cause. In addition, he works closely with chemists to remove the buildup of corrosives and to clean pipes.

- As required at the GS-11 level, the appellant plans and accomplishes complete projects or studies of conventional nature. He must independently plan and accomplish work requests for all his assigned functional group codes. Like the GS-11 level, these projects typically require the independent adaptation of data and information and interpretation and use of precedents.
- As at the GS-11 level, the appellant's work typically includes a variety of complex problems in which considerable judgment is needed to make sound engineering compromises and decisions. For example, his adaptation of operating parameters of components due to changes in conditions on board submarines varied from the conditions at the vendor's plant, and were so significant that NAVSEA issued a new manual and operating instructions.
- As at the GS-11 level, the appellant must use ingenuity and creative thinking in devising new ways of accomplishing objectives, and in adapting existing equipment or current techniques to new uses. The appellant demonstrated these characteristics when he reworked the piping surveillance inspection program which was adopted by NAVSEA for all submarines in the Navy. Likewise, the repair procedure the appellant developed for the torpedo tube slide valve had never been done before.

The appellant's assignments clearly meet, but do not exceed the GS-11 level which is the highest level described in the standard.

Level of Responsibility

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

- At the GS-11 level (page 35), technicians have considerable freedom in planning work and carrying out assignments. The supervisor makes assignments in terms of major objectives, providing background information and advice on specific, unusual problems which are anticipated or on matters requiring coordination with other groups. Similarly, the appellant's supervisor (the Engineering Division Head) makes assignments in terms of broadly defined program and command requirements. Typically, the appellant receives his assignments from outside his organization. He completes them with minimal, if any, input from his supervisor. Because his assignments come from outside his organization, the appellant's supervisor does not provide background information and advice on specific, unusual problems which are anticipated, or on matters requiring coordination with other groups. In that respect the appellant's position slightly exceeds the level of responsibility described at the GS-11 level.
- At the GS-11 level, 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. Likewise, the appellant has a wide latitude for identifying specific technical problems and initiating procedures for completing projects. While unusual or

controversial problems or policy questions may be discussed with the supervisor, the appellant typically consults with the engineers in the office and resolves the problem or question without discussing it with the supervisor.

- As at the GS-11 level, the appellant keeps his supervisor informally apprised regarding progress, but there is little, if any, review during the progress of typical assignments. His completed work is considered to be technically correct and is accepted without significant change. The appellant's work is rated in terms of the results achieved with respect to supporting waterfront production efforts.
- Like the GS-11 level, the appellant's contacts are primarily to resolve mutual problems and coordinate the work with other personnel in related activities. His work contacts include electricians, mechanics, foremen, production controllers, ship schedulers, planning officers, repair officers, and the ships' commanding officers. The appellant also has continuing contact with other activities and commands such as Submarine Maintenance Engineering Planning and Productions (SUBMEPP), NAVSEA, and Naval Inventory Control Point (NAVICP). These contacts are also made primarily to resolve mutual problems and coordinate work with that of personnel in related activities.
- Similar to the GS-11 level, the appellant contacts contractors and other personnel regarding complex engineering and administrative problems. These are made without close supervision.

As discussed above, the appellant's level of responsibility exceeds the GS-11 criteria in one aspect. However, when combined with the other elements of this factor, the position does not clearly exceed the overall intent of the GS-11 level of responsibility.

Further, careful reading of the engineering technician standard and other OPM guidelines indicates that for an employee's level of responsibility to truly meet GS-12 criteria, those responsibilities should be exercised within the context of GS-12 level assignments. In discussing the first classification factor of this standard, Nature of Assignments, we have found that the appellant's assignments are best evaluated at GS-11. Therefore the level of responsibility overall is evaluated at GS-11.

By application of the grading criteria in the standard for the Engineering Technician Series, GS-802, we have found that both the nature of the appellant's assignments and his level of responsibility meet the GS-11 level. Therefore this position is graded at GS-11.

Evaluation by the Mechanical Engineering Standard, GS-830

As previously mentioned, in order to respond to the appellant's concerns we have also evaluated his position by cross-series comparison to the grade level criteria in the standard for the Mechanical Engineering Series, GS-830. However, it should be noted that the GS-830 standard has limited applicability to the appellant's position because it discusses work requiring professional engineering knowledge and skills.

The GS-830 standard is written in the Factor Evaluation System (FES) format, under which factor levels and accompanying point values are assigned for each of the nine factors discussed below. The total number of points assigned is then 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, Level 1-7, 1250 points

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.

As required at Level 1-7 (page 6), the appellant's work requires knowledge and ability applicable to a wide range of duties in a specialty area; ability to modify standard practices and adapt equipment or techniques to solve a variety of engineering problems; ability to adapt precedents or make significant departures from previous approaches to similar projects in order to provide for the specialized requirements of some projects; and ability to apply the standardized practices of related engineering disciplines as they relate to the specialty area.

The appellant's work is generally comparable to the second illustration given in the standard as representative of work performed at this level:

Knowledge and skills necessary to develop design features and plans for both repair and improvement projects and complete design of new mechanical systems for a variety of specialized floating plants, such as hopper dredges, floating power plants, tugboats, derrick boats, oil and water barges, etc.

Similarly, the appellant's work requires the knowledge and skills necessary to develop solutions to technical problems associated with submarine equipment, testing, and documentation. He must analyze and evaluate repair issues and problems related to the mechanical systems for which he is assigned functional responsibility.

This factor is evaluated at Level 1-7 and 1250 points are credited.

Factor 2, Supervisory controls, Level 2-4, 450 points

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 appellant's position meets Level 2-4 (page 9). Similar to that level, the appellant's assignments are given in terms of defined program and command requirements. He is responsible for planning

and carrying out his assignments; resolving most of the conflicts which arise; coordinating the work with others; interpreting policy and determining the approach to be taken and the methodology to be used. The appellant keeps his supervisor informed of progress, potentially controversial matters, or far-reaching implications. The appellant's work is reviewed only from an overall standpoint in terms of feasibility, compatibility with other work, or effectiveness in meeting requirements or expected results.

This factor is evaluated at Level 2-4 and 450 points are credited.

Factor 3, Guidelines, Level 3-4, 450 points

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

As at Level 3-4 (page 11), the appellant's guidelines are often inadequate in dealing with the more complex or unusual problems. He must use resourcefulness, initiative, and judgment based on experience to deviate from or extend traditional engineering methods and practices in developing solutions to problems where precedents are not applicable. The appellant has developed material to supplement and adapt guidelines to meet local criteria.

This factor is assigned Level 3-4 and 450 points are credited.

Factor 4, Complexity, Level 4-4, 225 points

This factor covers the nature and variety of tasks, steps, processes, methods, or activities in the work performed; and the degree to which the employee must vary the work, discern interrelationships and deviations, or develop new techniques, criteria or information.

The complexity of the appellant's work is evaluated at Level 4-4 (page 13). His assignments typically contain combinations of complex features. In addition he applies standard engineering practices to new situations, relates new work situations to precedent ones, and modifies or adapts or makes compromises with standard regulations.

This factor is evaluated at Level 4-4 and 225 points are assigned.

Factor 5, Scope and Effect, Level 5-3, 150 points

This factor covers the relationship between the nature of the work and the effect of the work products or services.

At Level 5-3 (page 15), the purpose of the work is to investigate and analyze any of a variety of problems or conditions and to provide or recommend ways of dealing with them. The engineering determinations affect the design or operation of equipment or facilities, with regard to economy, efficiency and safety of the systems involved. Likewise, the appellant must identify, evaluate, and

resolve a variety of waterfront technical problems as well as test and documentation deficiencies. In addition, he makes engineering determinations that affect the design of the piping inspection surveillance program.

This factor is evaluated at Level 5-3 and 150 points are credited.

Factor 6, Personal Contacts, Level 6-2, 25 points

Factor 6 covers the people and conditions or settings under which contacts are made. It includes face-to-face contacts and telephone and radio dialogue with persons not in the supervisory chain.

The appellant's personal contacts are evaluated at Level 6-2 (page 16). Similar to that level, his contacts are primarily with a number of employees in the agency, but outside the immediate office. His primary contacts are with electricians, mechanics, foremen, production controllers, ship schedulers, planning officers, repair officers, the ships' commanding officers, and engineers at NAVSEA headquarters.

This factor is evaluated at Level 6-2 and 25 points are credited.

Factor 7, Purpose of Contacts, Level 7-2, 50 points

Factor 7 covers the reasons for the contacts described in Factor 6.

This factor is evaluated at Level 7-2 (page 17). Like that level, the appellant's contacts are typically made for the purposes of exchanging information, planning and coordinating work efforts with co-workers, discussing technical requirements of equipment with manufacturers and resolving any problems in its use, resolving questions of field personnel, discussing contract requirements, and generally clarifying problems and reaching agreement on overall plans and schedules. The persons contacted are usually working towards a common goal and generally are cooperative.

This factor is evaluated at Level 7-2 and 50 points are credited.

Factor 8, Physical Demands, Level 8-2, 20 points

This factor covers the requirements and physical demands placed on the engineer by the work assignment.

The physical demands on the appellant meet Level 8-2 (page 17) as the work requires regular and recurring inspections on board the submarines, in which there is a considerable amount of walking, stooping, bending and climbing.

This factor is evaluated at Level 8-2 and 20 points are credited.

Factor 9, Work Environment, Level 9-2, 20 points

This factor considers the risks and discomforts that may be imposed upon employees by various physical surroundings or job situations.

The appellant's work environment is evaluated at 9-2 (page 18). The appellant has regular and recurring exposure to shipboard and industrial work site conditions and occasionally rides submerged vessels on sea trials. This factor is evaluated at Level 9-2 and 20 points are credited.

By cross-series comparison to the grade level criteria in the GS-830 standard, we have evaluated the appellant's position as follows:

Factor	Level	Points
1. Knowledge required by the position	1-7	1250
2. Supervisory controls	2-4	450
3. Guidelines	3-4	450
4. Complexity	4-4	225
5. Scope and effect	5-3	150
6. Personal contacts	6-2	25
7. Purpose of contacts	7-2	50
8. Physical demands	8-2	20
9. Work environment	9-2	20
Total Points:		2640

The appellant's position totals 2640 points. By application of the grade conversion table on page 4 of the GS-830 standard, 2640 points falls within the GS-11 range (2355-2750). Thus the position is graded at the GS-11 level.

Summary

We have found that by application of the grading criteria in the standards for the Engineering Technician Series, GS-802, and the Mechanical Engineering Series, GS-830, the appellant's position meets the GS-11 level. Therefore the position is properly graded at the GS-11 level.

Decision

The appellant's position is properly classified as Mechanical Engineering Technician, GS-802-11.