

**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

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

| | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Appellant: | [appellant] |
| Agency classification: | Computer Specialist GS-334-11 |
| Organization: | [appellant's organization] Immigration and Naturalization Service Department of Justice [geographic location] |
| OPM decision: | Computer Specialist GS-334-11 |
| OPM decision number: | C-0334-11-07 |

/s/ Bonnie J. Brandon
Bonnie J. Brandon
Classification Appeals Officer

5/21/99
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]

[address of servicing personnel office]
Immigration and Naturalization Service
U.S. Department of Justice

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Introduction

On November 20, 1998, the Dallas Oversight Division of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted a classification appeal from [the appellant]. Her position is currently classified as Computer Specialist, GS-344-11, Position Description (PD) number [number]. The appellant, however, believes the classification should be Computer Specialist, GS-334-12. The position is in the [appellant's organization], Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), Department of Justice, [city, state]. We have accepted and decided this appeal under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code.

Position information

The appellant is one of about eight employees within [a specific organization's] Automated Data Processing (ADP) group. They are led by a GS-12 Supervisory Systems Analyst/Computer Specialist. The ADP group includes one GS-12 and five GS-11 Computer Specialists, as well as a GS-1 Clerk Typist.

The appellant's major duties include serving as administrator of the local area network and as the computer systems security officer, overseeing the installation of new hardware and software on the network, and providing technical advice to the field office personnel. She is responsible for establishing and maintaining system security and data integrity. She designs, develops, maintains, and controls generalized batch oriented, on-line software, and interactive programs, including commercially obtainable software and hardware to be used on or with computer systems; controls network access and security, utilizes the latest and most advanced technology as applicable to the data processing system; and uses high level programming languages and operating systems and other high level programming languages in a top-down, structured format for programming and development tasks. The appellant evaluates production work flow, identifying strengths and weaknesses, and assists in the preparation of the budget for the ADP program in the sector.

Series, title, and standard determination

The appellant does not dispute the series or title of her position. The Computer Specialist, GS-334, series covers positions like the appellant's, whose primary requirement is knowledge of information processing methodology and technology, computer capabilities, and processing techniques. The prescribed title for positions in this series is *Computer Specialist*. We find the appellant's position is covered by the Computer Specialist Series, GS-334, and graded using the Computer Specialist, GS-334, Position Classification Standard.

Grade level determination

The classification standard for the GS-334 Computer Specialist Series is written in the Factor Evaluation System (FES) format which consists of nine evaluation factors. Under the FES, each factor level description in a standard 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 a lower level. Conversely, the position may exceed those criteria in some aspects and still not be credited at a 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 required to do acceptable work and the nature and extent of skill necessary to apply this knowledge. To be used as a basis for selecting a level under this factor, a knowledge must be required and applied.

At Level 1-6 employees use knowledge of established techniques and requirements of the employing organization, including data processing documentation procedures, standard data elements and codes, available utility routines, customary factfinding approaches, decision logic tables and structured analysis and design methodologies. The primary requirement at Level 1-6 is for knowledge of how to execute assignments. Computer specialists at this level develop individual programs, test plans, or reports within an approved framework; or facilitate user interface and access to computer systems by giving training on using generalized software. An applications oriented assignment normally entails knowledge of the technical characteristics of an operating mode; the system software; the appropriate programming language; the inputs, outputs, and overall processing logic; and the work process to be accomplished. Such knowledge is used to carry out assignments where the objectives to be reached are clearly identified and realized by straightforward adaptation of precedents and established practices.

In contrast, Level 1-7 requires knowledge of system software and systems development life cycles, including systems documentation, design development, configuration management, cost analysis, data administration, systems integration, and testing. This is used to track the use and status of resources for system design projects through development, modification, maintenance, and evaluation of a standard program management system. Employees use knowledge and skill to modify and adapt precedent solutions to unique or specialized requirements. Typically, they develop plans or specifications necessary for a proposed application. Also, at this level are troubleshooting design and software implementation problems.

The knowledge required by the appellant's position meets Level 1-6 for developing individual programs for limited internal applications within an existing automated system, e.g., developing new approaches or procedures and solutions using knowledge of high level languages applicable to computer systems. The appellant's use of Novell Clients, Gelco's Travel Manager, CCMail software, and Virus Scanning software also reflect the use of well-established off-the-shelf software typical of Level 1-6. Serving as the focal point for technical advice on personal computer and local systems involves applications of limited scope, difficulty, and complexity, and does not entail developing the extensive plans, specifications, and extensive system interactions and interrelations found at Level 1-7.

The appellant, however, devotes a sufficient portion of her work time at Level 1-7 to systems development and design and troubleshooting projects to minimally warrant evaluation of the position at Level 1-7. These projects require a thorough knowledge of the mission, objectives, terminology and management practices in the INS in order to recognize areas of interaction and overlap between proposed applications and existing systems. The appellant must have a thorough knowledge of ADP procedures and prevailing practices in other government agencies and the private sector to determine and advise on alternative approaches in application of system development or problem solving. Skill in the modification of existing systems, as well as skill in relating major considerations or aspects of the work to overall projects, is a must in the appellant's major duties.

Employees at Level 1-8 use Level 1-7 knowledge and have a mastery of a specialty area or comprehensive knowledge of Federal ADP policy, as promulgated by Congress, the Office of Management and Budget, the National Institute of Standards and Technology, and the General Services Administration. Examples of specialty areas include applications system design, data base management, computer equipment analysis, and system software design. At Level 1-8 employees function as a technical authority in either a specialty area or as a general data processing expert covering a wide range of technology and applications. The appellant's position, while minimally meeting Level 1-7, does not approach the knowledge required at Level 1-8.

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

Factor 2, Supervisory controls

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

At level 2-4, the supervisor sets the overall objectives and, in consultation with the employee, determines timeframes, and possible shifts in staff or other resources required. The employee independently plans and carries out projects and analyses of the organizations's requirements, interprets policies in conformance with established mission objectives, integrates and coordinates the work of others as necessary, and resolves most conflicts that arise. The employee informs the supervisor about progress, potentially controversial matters, or far-reaching implications. Completed work is reviewed from an overall standpoint in terms of feasibility, compatibility with other work, or effectiveness in meeting requirements or achieving expected results.

While the appellant's position description states that she is under the general supervision of the INS District Director/[title of another management official], she is actually supervised by a Supervisory Systems Analyst/Computer Specialist, GS-334-12. She is assigned project responsibility for work assignments for which policy and operating procedural guidance, priorities, general objectives, and other information necessary to carry out the required assignments are established. For example, planning and technical programming work is accomplished in accordance with the general program structure provided with assignments. We

find that the substantial delegation of work planning authority from the supervisor to the appellant permits her position to function for a sufficient portion of the work time at Level 2-4. The appellant is expected to inform the supervisor of the work being performed, while the supervisor is required to assure that goals and objectives are being met.

At Level 2-5, the supervisor provides administrative direction with assignments in terms of broadly defined missions or functions. Full technical authority is delegated to the specialist. Typically, this level of authority is accompanied by responsibility for a significant program or functions. While the appellant has significant technical responsibility for a portion of [her organization's] computer program, her supervisor is ultimately responsible for administration of the program. As previously described, Level 2-4 allows a high degree of independence and responsibility and, thus, fully recognizes the technical responsibility inherent in the appellant's position.

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

Factor 3, Guidelines

This factor covers the nature of guidelines used and the judgment needed to apply them. Guides used include established procedures and policies, traditional practices, and reference material such as manuals and handbooks. Guidelines should not be confused with knowledge described under Factor 1. Guidelines either provide reference data or impose certain constraints on the use of knowledge.

At Level 3-3, reference material such as handbooks, manuals, models, and plans are available, but they are not completely applicable to work assignments or gaps exist in significant areas. This requires the employee to adapt guides and precedents to assigned projects or gather considerable information to supplement lack of specific information for a particular problem. Judgment is required in relating precedent approaches to specific situations. Established guidelines must often be interpreted to advise others on the application of policy or regulation.

In contrast, guidelines at Level 3-4 are typically policies and precedents that provide guidance that is general in nature with little specificity regarding the approach to be followed in accomplishing work. As stated in the FES Primary Standard, guidelines for performing the work at Level 3-4 are scarce and of limited use. Performance of assigned work usually requires deviating from traditional methods or researching trends and patterns to develop improved methods or formulate criteria. The employee uses state-of-the-art techniques and technologies to develop new and improved methods to deal with particular projects. The employee exercises considerable judgment in relating technical developments or requirements to particular projects. At this level, the employee shows initiative and resourcefulness in projects that encompass (a) unprecedented design efforts, (b) integrating the work of others as a team or project leader, (c) or predicting future environments or the impact on future processing.

The guidelines available to the appellant include an administrative manual, user manuals, operating instructions, tactical plans, and oral and written guidelines from INS Regional and Headquarters Offices. The appellant is required to adapt guides and precedents for application to assigned projects or gather considerable information to supplement gaps or lack of specificity to particular problems. While the appellant must use judgment in interpreting guidelines and dealing with administrative complexities, the guidelines do not exceed Level 3-3.

The nature of the guidelines available for this position does not meet Level 3-4. While the appellant's guidelines often lack specific criteria for updating systems and implementing changes, the work does not regularly require the need for developing improved methods or deviating from traditional methods. The applicants' guidelines are more specific and applicable to the work than are guidelines at Level 3-4.

This factor is evaluated at Level 3-3 and credited with 275 points.

Factor 4, Complexity

This factor covers the nature, number, variety, and intricacy of 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.

At Level 4-4, assignments consist of projects, studies, or evaluations characterized by the need for substantial problem analysis. Concern is with several stages in an automation project, or project assignments in a specialty area that require a variety of techniques and methods to evaluate alternatives. Decisions involve assessing situations complicated by conflicting or insufficient data that must be analyzed to determine applicability of established methods. Different technical approaches must often be tested and projections made. Consideration must be given to probable areas of future systems changes of comparable automation problems that will ease subsequent modifications. The work requires consideration of considerable data. The level of difficulty is typified by developing programming specifications for major modifications to existing systems or new systems where precedents exist at the same general scale of operation as the new systems. Computer equipment or system software evaluation and modification at this level primarily concern items available from vendors already in use in Government ADP operations.

In contrast, Level 4-5 assignments consist of various project or studies characterized by the need for significant departures from past practices and typically involve (1) a number of stages in an automation project to include studies preliminary to the decision to automate or (2) an unusual depth of analysis are evidenced by such features as (a) responsibility for integrating facets of work performed by others, (b) concern with fields of rapidly changing technology, and (c) problems of a type that have been resistant to solutions in the past. Decisions about what needs to be done are complicated by the novel or obscure nature of the problems and/or special requirements for organization and coordination, e.g., an integrated payroll, personnel, and accounting system. Usually there are conflicting requirements, the problems are defined poorly, or they require

projects based on variable data or technological developments. Developments in system software or equipment technology make project designs obsolete and require major reconsideration of many or all aspects of the project, and impact on related systems or project funding. Technical difficulty is exceptional, such as developing major items of system software (e.g., assemblers, compilers, multiprogramming routines, files maintenance routines) where numerous conditions, options, and machine characteristics must be considered, or developing specifications for a major segment of a new application system where the work is unprecedented in nature or scope.

The appellant's position is consistent with Level 4-4. She is involved in a variety of functions in support of [her organization's] ADP program, e.g., scheduling, solving programming problems, and assisting and controlling users of the system. The appellant is responsible for reviewing each work requirement and deciding what needs to be done and the methods to use. She provides solutions to system and programming problems based on workload, priorities, existing system capabilities, system status, and the needs of the users of the system. Typical of Level 4-4, the appellant must consider a variety of data. The complexity of the appellant's work requires major modifications to the existing, or new, systems where precedents exist at the same general scale of operation as the new systems. Computer equipment or system software evaluation and modifications at the appellant's level primarily concern items available from vendors that are already in use in Government operations or private ADP systems. The appellant's position, therefore, does not meet Level 4-5, which is distinguished by the need for significant departures from established practice and the need to make decisions which are complicated by the novel or obscure nature of problems or the special requirements for organization and coordination.

The position is credited at Level 4-4 (225 points).

Factor 5, Scope and effect

Scope and Effect covers the relationship between the nature of the work, i.e., the purpose, breadth, and depth of the assignment, and the effect of work products or services both within and outside the organization. Only the effect of properly performed work is considered.

Effect measures such things as whether the work output facilitates the work of others, provides timely services, affects agency programs or missions, or affects other agencies, private industry, or the general public. The concept of effect alone does not provide sufficient information to properly understand and evaluate the impact of the position. The scope of the work completes the picture, allowing consistent evaluations. Only the effect of properly performed work is to be considered.

Level 5-3 work involves resolving a variety of conventional problems, questions, or situations such as typically is the case where responsibility has been assigned for maintenance of a set of programs. Established practices and techniques are used. The work affects the adequacy of such activities as field investigations or internal operations. This level includes responsibility for projects that, although affecting activities or individuals throughout the agency, are primarily to

support a local operation. An example at this level is the development or modification of an automated records keeping system at an agency training center responsible for maintaining training records on agency employees found throughout the country.

The appellant's position fully meets Level 5-3. She works to support the automation efforts of [her organization]. The results of her work affect the accuracy, timeliness, and acceptability of programming services and products. Duties and responsibilities assigned to this position flow from the mission assigned to the organization in which they are found. As such, programs reviewed, analyzed and maintained, created or installed affect the operation and efficiency of virtually all facets of the [organization's] operations. The scope of the work performed by the appellants does not exceed those described in Level 5-3, as it involves established ADP procedures.

The scope and effect of the appellant's work do not meet Level 5-4 as described in the standard. The purpose of work at Level 5-4 involves investigating and analyzing a variety of unusual problems, questions, or conditions associated with a particular application or specialty area; formulating projects or studies such as those to substantially alter major systems; or establishing criteria in an assigned application or specialty area, e.g., developing programming or procurement specifications. The work performed affects a wide range of agency activities, activities of non-Government organizations, or functions of other agencies. Typically assignments at this level are concerned with:

- 1) the agency's single centralized ADP operation that is linked to terminals at numerous agency sites throughout the country; or
- 2) standard systems to be used subsequently on numerous equipment units or at numerous installation level ADP operations in the agency.

The work of the appellant does not involve responsibility for any major local system changes or large scale testing operations that may approach or meet Level 5-4. Therefore, this factor is evaluated at Level 5-3 and credited with 150 points.

Factors 6 and 7, Personal contacts and Purpose of contacts

Factor 6 includes face-to-face and telephone contact and other dialogue with persons not in the supervisory chain. The levels for this factor are based on what is required to make the initial contact, the difficulty of communicating with those contacted, and the setting in which the contact takes place, e.g., the degree to which the employee and those contacted recognize their roles and authority.

At Level 2, contacts include those with employees in the agency but outside the immediate organization, such as user representatives or field personnel engaged in different work, i.e., non-ADP work. The FES Primary Standard also discusses contacts outside the agency at Level 2.

These contacts are with members of the general public in a moderately structured setting, e.g., the contacts generally are established routinely and are usually at the employee's work place, the exact purpose of the contact may be unclear at first to one or more of the parties, and one or more of the parties may be uninformed concerning the role or authority of other participants.

Level 3 contacts, in addition to those within the agency, are with vendor representatives, computer personnel of other agencies, representatives of professional associations, and the like. This level may also include contacts with the head of the agency or program officials several managerial levels above the employee when such contacts occur on an ad hoc or other irregular basis. As indicated in the FES Primary Standard, Level 3 contacts are in a moderately unstructured setting, e.g., contacts are not established on a routine basis, and the role and authority of each party is identified and developed during the contacts. At this level, contacts are with persons in their capacity as attorneys, contractors, or representatives of professional organizations, the news media, or public action groups.

The work that controls the classification of a position must be regular and recurring. The contacts considered in the grade level analysis of a position, therefore, must contribute to the performance of those grade controlling duties. The PD of record states that the appellant has contacts primarily with ADP and user personnel in the agency on the local, regional, and/or headquarters level, as well as representatives of vendors and contractors. Contacts are noncontroversial and are for the purpose of planning, coordinating, or resolving problems. The appellant reinforces the basis for the personal structured contacts in which each person is aware of each others role and authority. The appellant's external contacts are typical of those at Level 2 and are accomplished with sufficient frequency within the moderately unstructured setting envisioned at Level 2. Factor 6 is evaluated at Level 2.

The purpose of contacts that serves as a basis for Factor 7 must be the same as the contacts that are the basis for the level awarded for Factor 6.

At Level b, the purpose of contacts is to coordinate work efforts, solve problems, or to provide advice to managers on noncontroversial organization or program related issues and concerns. Problems are resolved by influencing or motivating individuals or groups who are working toward mutual goals and who have basically cooperative attitudes.

At Level c, the purpose of contacts is to (a) influence others to utilize particular technical methods and procedures, or (b) to persuade others to cooperate in meeting objectives when, in either case, there are problems in securing cooperation. The FES Primary Standard adds that the people contacted may be fearful, skeptical, uncooperative, or dangerous, e.g., gaining compliance with established policies and regulations by persuasion or negotiation.

The PD of record states that contacts are to exchange and obtain technical information necessary to the maintenance of the ADP program of the [appellant's organization]. It also states the appellant provides local training and must influence others to utilize particular methods and

procedures. The purpose of the appellant's most demanding contacts is to influence or persuade others to use particular technical methods and procedures typical of Level c. However, the contacts do not regularly entail the difficulties in securing cooperation found at Level c, e.g., securing support from contractors who are uncooperative because of significant demands entailed in a request. Thus, while aspects of the appellant's contacts approach Level c, only Level b is fully met.

Level 2 in combination with Level b results in crediting the position at Level 2-b (75 points).

Factor 8, Physical demands

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

The physical demands of the appellant's position are typical of Level 8-1, which describes sedentary work with no special physical demands required to perform the work.

This factor is evaluated at Level 8-1 and credited with 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 appellant's work is performed in an office environment with no unusual risks or discomforts, as described at Level 9-1.

This factor is evaluated at Level 9-1 and credited with 5 points.

Summary

In sum, 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 | 3-3 | 275 |
| 4 | Complexity | 4-4 | 225 |
| 5 | Scope and effect | 5-3 | 150 |
| 6 & 7 | Personal contacts and Purpose of contacts | 2b | 75 |
| 8 | Physical demands | 8-1 | 5 |
| 9 | Work environment | 9-1 | 5 |
| Total Points | | | 2435 |

The appellant's position warrants 2,435 points. Therefore, in accordance with the grade conversion table in the GS-334 Position Classification Standard, 2435 points equate to GS-11.

Decision

The appellant's position is properly classified as Computer Specialist, GS-334-11.