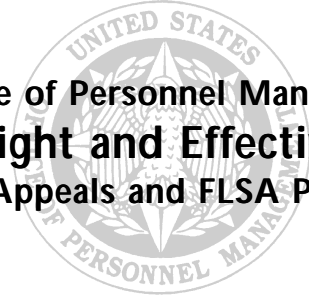


U.S. Office of Personnel Management  
Office of Merit Systems Oversight and Effectiveness  
Classification Appeals and FLSA Programs



Philadelphia Oversight Division  
600 Arch Street, Room 3400  
Philadelphia, PA 19106-1596

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

**Appellant:** [appellant's name]

**Agency classification:** Mechanical Engineering Technician  
GS-802

**Organization:** Engineering Design and Development Division  
Directorate of [name]  
[name] Army Depot  
Department of the Army  
[location]

**OPM decision:** Mechanical Engineering Technician  
GS-802

**OPM decision number:** C-0802-00-05

\_\_\_\_\_  
Robert D. Hendler  
Classification Appeals Officer

\_\_\_\_\_  
3/28/00  
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 (PCS's), appendix 4, section G (address provided in appendix 4, section H).

### **Decision sent to:**

[appellant's name]  
[address]  
[location]

Director  
Department of the Army  
Office of the Assistant Secretary  
Manpower and Reserve Affairs  
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Civilian Personnel Policy/Civilian  
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Department of the Army  
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## **Introduction**

On January 5, 2000, the Philadelphia Oversight Division of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted a classification appeal from [appellant's name]. His position is currently classified as Mechanical Engineering Technician, GS-802-11. The appellant requested that his position be reclassified as a Mechanical Engineer, GS-830-11. He works in the Engineering Design and Development Division, Directorate of [name], [name] Army Depot, Department of the Army, [location]. We have accepted and decided this appeal under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.).

## **General issues**

The appellant believes his position should be reclassified as Mechanical Engineer, GS-830-11, based on his associate's degree in engineering and 11 years of experience as a GS-11 engineering technician. Implicit in the appellant's rationale is that duties, such as managing projects for fabrication and/or independently modifying highly complex mechanisms and electromechanical supplies from initial design phase to delivery of the completed product, require the professional knowledge of a mechanical engineer. A classification appeal does not determine personal qualifications. It determines the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to perform the work of the position. A position must, by law, be classified based solely by comparing current duties and responsibilities to the appropriate OPM PCS's and guidelines (5 U.S.C. 5106, 5107, and 5112).

We conducted a telephone interview with the appellant on March 15, 2000, and an interview with his supervisor, [name], on March 16, 2000. In reaching our decision, we carefully reviewed all information provided by the appellant and the agency. The appellant and his first-level supervisor agree that the Job Description (JD) of record, Number 11629, adequately describes the duties and responsibilities of the appellant's position, and we incorporate it by reference into this decision. Because the appellant has not challenged the grade level of his position, we will restrict this decision to a series and title determination.

## **Position information**

The appellant's primary duties are to coordinate and manage projects for fabrication and/or modifications of highly complex mechanisms and electromechanical supplies. This includes analyzing engineering drawings and specifications, initiating basic design and preliminary layouts, developing sketches for fabrication of special tooling essential to the completion of the project, developing work order requests, ordering material, and resolving problems directly with the customer, fabrication shops, and procurement vendor. The JD does not state that professional knowledge, skills, and abilities are required to perform the work.

In carrying out his duties, he serves as a project manager of assigned projects, including all stages of planning and implementation. He represents the interests of his organization when coordinating with other agency organizations and with materials vendors. The appellant designs, develops, and performs technical review of design plans and specifications; prepares detailed cost estimates for competitive bidding; inspects and evaluates assigned fabrication projects for compliance with design

requirements; and as needed, develops recommendations for changes/modifications to design. He meets with the customer to resolve problems, makes recommendations to correct design deficiencies, and incorporates them into the new requirements. Typical assignments include: designing a van or trailer to hold specialized equipment, investigating a failed item and determining the best method to fix it, and designing a tool to fit the requirements of a project or re-designing a tool that is no longer made.

The division works in teams. Work is assigned to the lead employee based on their area of expertise and the requirements of the project. The team consists of mechanical and electrical engineers or technicians. The appellant has lead responsibilities for the mechanical portion of various projects. He receives assignments from his supervisor in terms of broad objectives including projects requirements, design parameters and costs. He updates the supervisor every two to three weeks depending on scope and size of project. The supervisor reviews the project to ensure it conforms to requirements and budget. The appellant may refer problems or questions to the supervisor if there is a large change in the scope of the project, if the customer would like to talk directly with the supervisor, or if the appellant is not receiving cooperation from another supervisor involved in the project.

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

The appellant believes he should be in the Mechanical Engineering Series, GS-830, based on the education and experience he has in the engineering field. The qualifications of an employee alone do not control the classification of a position. The *Introduction to the PCS* states that work is professional when it requires the exercise of discretion, judgment, and personal responsibility for the applications of an organized body of knowledge that is constantly studied to make new discoveries and interpretations, and to improve data, materials, and methods. The *Classifier's Handbook* further explains that positions can be considered professional only if the work requires application of professional knowledge and ability. The desirability of such qualifications or the employee's possession of them is not a factor in determining the series. The determination of the series is based on the primary work of the position, the highest level of work performed, and the paramount qualifications required.

The Engineering Group, GS-800 PCS explains that in organizations where engineer and technician assignments are similar but the bulk of work is done by technicians, positions are professional only when there is a specified, justifiable requirement that the work be performed on the basis of professional knowledge of and insight into the physical phenomena and relationships underlying consideration of the various engineering factors and methods. For example, in an organization engaged primarily in the design of piping installations using standardized materials, parts, and assemblies that have been used in similar installations, assignments may arise that require developing prototype installations using standardized materials, parts, and assemblies that have been used in similar installations, or that require developing prototype installations with different characteristics of size, capacity, efficiency, durability, and economy. Occasional assignments may require exploratory analyses of possible design approaches and criteria that necessitates the use of professional engineers in supervisory or staff specialist positions to fill in gaps in available scientific and technologic knowledge required for the work. The record shows that the appellant's work does not routinely require the application of professional knowledge. Management has established

professional positions to which such work can be assigned.

The Engineering Series, GS-802 PCS, covers positions that primarily require application of a practical knowledge of the methods and techniques of engineering; and of the construction, application, properties, operation, and limitations of engineering systems, processes, structures, machinery, devices, and materials. They do not require professional knowledge and abilities for full performance and do not require training equivalent in type and scope to that represented by the completion of a professional curriculum leading to a bachelor's degree in engineering. We find the appellant's position closely matches the GS-802 PCS coverage criteria. The appellant's work involves using established calculations and standards such as estimating the pay load capacity of a container, finding the center of gravity, and determining the proper mil standards to use for the design. The methods of attack on the best solution have been established and formulas and guides have been developed and published in a number of handbooks. Although calculus and scientific principles may have been applied in derivation of the formulas, the application of the formulas to the practical problems encountered is typical of technician positions.

In contrast, the Mechanical Engineering Series, GS-830 PCS includes professional engineer positions that require the application of thermo-dynamics, mechanics, and other physical, mathematical, and engineering sciences to problems concerned with the production, transmission, measurement, and use of energy, especially heat and mechanical power. The professional knowledge and abilities that distinguish professional engineering positions from technician positions are knowledge of diversified, fundamental scientific and engineering concepts, phenomena, and relationships, and ability to apply such knowledge to theoretical and practical engineering problems with versatility, judgment, and perception. This depth of knowledge gives engineers the ability to plan and conduct work for which precedent data, criteria, methods, and techniques are inadequate.

Although the appellant exercises initiative and creative thinking to devise ways of accomplishing objectives, the work assigned to his position relies on established techniques, handbooks, and practical knowledge of engineering. For example, the appellant serves as a technical consultant to fabrication shops on production problems. If the fabrication shop has a problem with material breaking while they are bending it, the appellant investigates the problem through several methods. He inspects the design to see if there are any flaws such as, the design requires a 60 degree angle, but the tool requires it to be bent at a 50 degree angle to align the screw holes or the material is not hard enough to withstand the pressure. If the design is flawed, the appellant will submit a change request to the specific department who made the design with specific recommendations to correct the problem. If the problem is with the material, he examines the material's label to determine if the hardness of the metal is appropriate. If the material is not adequate, he consults an engineering handbook to determine the proper strength of the material to use and submits a request for the new order. This reflects the exercise of a practical knowledge of and reliance on well established methods and techniques of engineering typical of GS-802 work. It does not require applying the intensive knowledge of physical phenomena and fundamental scientific and engineering concepts envisioned in the GS-830 PCS.

Based on the preceding analysis, we find the appellant's work is allocated properly to the Engineering Series, GS-802.

**Decision**

Based on the titling practices in the GS-802 PCS, the appellant's position is classified properly as Mechanical Engineering Technician, GS-802.