

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 75242-1027

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

Appellant: [appellant's name]

Agency classification: Computer Assistant (OA)
GS-335-6

Organization: [a specific Directorate]
Air Education and Training Command
Department of the Air Force
[location]

OPM decision: Computer Assistant (OA)
GS-335-6

OPM decision number: C-0335-06-03

/s/ Bonnie J. Brandon

Bonnie J. Brandon
Classification Appeals Officer

January 17, 2002

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]

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Introduction

On September 20, 2001, the Dallas Oversight Division of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted a classification appeal from [the appellant]. We received her agency's administrative report on October 12, 2001. The agency has classified the appellant's position as Computer Assistant (OA), GS-335-6. However, the appellant believes that her duties should be classified at a higher grade using the criteria in the Job Family Standard for Administrative Work in the Information Technology Group, GS-2200. The appellant's position is assigned to [a specific] Directorate, Air Education and Training Command (AETC), Department of the Air Force, at [location]. We have accepted and decided her appeal under section 5112(b) of title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.).

We conducted telephone audits with the appellant on November 16, 2001, and November 27, 2001, and a telephone interview with the appellant's first-level supervisor on November 21, 2001. In deciding this appeal, we fully considered the information obtained by telephone and all information in the appeal record provided by the appellant and her agency, including her current work assignments and position description of record [number]. The appellant and her immediate supervisor certified that the appellant's position description is current and accurate.

General issues

The agency previously classified the appellant's position as Office Automation Assistant, GS-326-6. On August 13, 2001, the agency reclassified the position as Computer Assistant (OA), GS-335-6, as the result of a position review. The appellant believes that the "Webmaster" duties and responsibilities currently assigned to her position warrant classification to a higher grade, in part, because a GS-12 Computer Specialist previously performed those duties. 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 duties to other positions to determine the series and grade level.

Position information

The [appellant's] Directorate provides advice and counsel to AETC organizations on programs affecting readiness, substance, fitness, and quality of life for active duty and retired military personnel and civilian employees. The Directorate also performs strategic planning, facility programming, and corporate financial oversight for [the Directorate's] operations.

The appellant is assigned to the immediate office of the Director for the [specific] Directorate. The Deputy [Directorate] Director supervises the appellant. The immediate office also includes a GS-318-7 Secretary (Steno/OA) position.

The primary purpose of the appellant's position is twofold: to provide general administrative and office automation support and to act as the Webmaster for the Directorate. The appellant spends about 50 percent of her time performing administrative and clerical duties in support of

the organization. She spends about 15 percent of her time performing office automation duties and about 35 percent of her time on Webmaster duties.

The appellant's clerical and administrative duties include establishing, updating, and maintaining various office procedures and records; requisitioning office supplies, printing support, and related materials and services; using office automation software to produce a range of documents with complex formats such as graphics or tables and to update or revise existing data bases or spreadsheets; and using word processing software to create, copy, edit, store, retrieve, and print forms, memorandums, and letters. The appellant develops methods and procedures for office automation tasks and identifies and solves problems in existing methods or procedures. She also prepares a wide variety of recurring and nonrecurring correspondence, reports, and other documents from information obtained from staff members, the files, and other sources.

After receiving specialized courses and on-the-job training, the appellant initially developed the public and the restricted Web sites for the [appellant's] Directorate in collaboration with the AETC Webmaster, who ensures compliance with Department of Defense standards on Web accessibility. The chief objective of the public Web site is to promote the Commercial Sponsorship Program. This program provides an avenue for private corporations to help sponsor events, e.g., air shows and open houses, in exchange for promotional opportunities within the military community. The public Web site was developed using Microsoft FrontPage, a Web development tool that allows even novice individuals to create fairly sophisticated Web sites and simplifies Web site management. The appellant devotes more time to the restricted Web site, which provides Air Force personnel with access to policy memorandums, newsletters, financial information, and a current events section. The appellant initially developed the restricted site using ASAP, a Web development program created locally to make it easier to design and maintain a Web site. The appellant maintains and ensures that Web site pages are professionally presented, current, accurate, and factual and are related to the organizational mission. She obtains and consolidates data from division or branch chiefs in the Directorate and, when appropriate, transfers formatted data to the main Web server using File Transfer Protocol for posting to the site. She also fields inquiries in [her specific] Directorate's Webmaster mailbox by responding to the inquiries herself or forwarding them to appropriate officials for reply.

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

Series, title, and standard determination

The GS-2200 Job Family Standard is a relatively new standard that covers two-grade interval administrative positions that manage, supervise, lead, administer, develop, deliver, and support information technology systems and services. The standard currently includes only the GS-2210 Information Technology Management Series. This series covers only those positions for which the paramount requirement is knowledge of information technology principles, concepts, and methods to perform functions such as planning, designing, analyzing, developing, and implementing systems for the organization.

Information technology refers to systems and services used in the automated acquisition, storage, manipulation, management, movement, control, display, switching, interchange, transmission, assurance, or reception of information. Information technology includes computers, network components, peripheral equipment, software, firmware, services, and related resources.

The GS-335 Computer Clerk and Assistant Series covers positions involving performance or supervision of data processing support and services functions for users of digital computer systems. This work requires knowledge of external data processing sequences, controls, procedures, or user and programming languages rather than in-depth knowledge of computer requirements or techniques associated with development and design of data processing systems.

The GS-335 standard states that employees in this occupation support or assist other employees who design, operate, or use automatic data processing systems applications and products by performing work in one or a mix of functional areas. One of the functional areas identified by the standard is the providing of support to computer specialists. Such support work typically requires knowledge of the scope, contents, and purposes of program documentation. The duties may also require a working knowledge of programming languages. This knowledge may also be supplemented by knowledge of internal software routines. Another functional area involves providing support to subject-matter users by working at remote terminal stations entering raw data to update or change information files.

In determining whether the appellant's position warrants classification in the GS-2210 series, we examined the appellant's assignments along the dimensions where they most closely parallel those of the GS-2210 occupation. These dimensions include the appellant's development of both the public and the restricted Web sites in collaboration with the AETC Webmaster. We found that the appellant's work varies in difficulty ranging from specialized to highly structured and recurring tasks. For example, the appellant performs initial troubleshooting, usually involving graphic and image problems. Her daily tasks include maintenance of the Directorate's Web sites. We found that the full range of the appellant's duties, including the specialized tasks, is best characterized as support work, performed by following established methods and procedures. Consistent with positions in the GS-335 series, the appellant's work is based on practical knowledge, rather than technical knowledge, of the purpose, operation, procedures, techniques, and guidelines of the assignment. The appellant performs routine, procedural, or standard Webmaster responsibilities. She is not involved in the technical planning, design, or development of systems typical of GS-2210 information technology specialists. Positions in the GS-2210 series require application of technical knowledge of Internet systems, services, and technologies. There is no evidence that the appellant's position requires the level of knowledge of information processing methodology/technology and computer capabilities and processing techniques typical of GS-2210 positions. The appellant's position is limited in scope by the fact that the Air Force has overall responsibility for establishing service-wide software and Internet and Intranet requirements and for making decisions on the need for system upgrades or software migrations (e.g., eliminating the ASAP Web development program in favor of FrontPage). Lack of server responsibilities also limits the scope of the appellant's position. Overall, the appellant's Webmaster duties are comparable to the work described in the GS-335 series. Consequently, the appellant's position is properly assigned to the GS-335 Computer Clerk and Assistant Series.

The GS-335 standard prescribes the title *Computer Clerk* for nonsupervisory positions in grades GS-1 through GS-4. The title *Computer Assistant* is used for nonsupervisory positions at the GS-5 level and above. As explained later in this decision, we find the appellant's position is properly graded at the GS-6 level and titled *Computer Assistant*. The parenthetical title *Office Automation*, which may be abbreviated *OA*, is used for positions that require significant knowledge of office automation systems and a fully qualified typist to perform word processing duties. We concur with the appellant's agency that she performs office automation duties that warrant the parenthetical title *Office Automation*. Consequently, the full title for the appellant's position is *Computer Assistant (OA)*.

We evaluated the appellant's office automation duties against the criteria in the Office Automation Grade Evaluation Guide and found that those duties are not grade controlling. Since those duties do not affect the grade of the position, we will not discuss them further. After comparing the appellant's clerical duties (such as maintaining files, preparing and reviewing correspondence, screening and forwarding mail, and requisitioning supplies) to appropriate OPM standards (GS-318 Secretary and the Grade Level Guide for Clerical and Assistance Work), we found that the grade of those duties is not grade controlling. Consequently, we used the GS-335 standard to determine the appropriate grade level for the appellant's position.

Grade determination

The GS-335 standard uses the Factor Evaluation System (FES), which uses nine 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 aspects, 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. Under FES, positions which significantly exceed the highest factor level or fail to meet the lowest factor level described in a classification standard must be evaluated by reference to the Primary Standard, contained in Appendix 3 of the *Introduction to the Position Classification Standards*. The Primary Standard is the "standard for standards" for the FES.

Each factor level has a corresponding point value. The total points assigned are converted to a grade by use of the grade conversion chart in the standard.

Factor 1, Knowledge required by the position

This factor measures the nature and extent of information or facts which the employee must understand to do acceptable work and the nature and extent of the skills needed to apply those knowledges. To be used as a basis for selecting a level under this factor, a knowledge must be required and applied.

At Level 1-4, employees perform a wide range of duties including preparing, advising, assisting, coding, and procedure-related problem solving duties using a knowledge of computer procedures and processing methods. Similar to assistants at Level 1-4, the appellant performs a wide range of duties associated with her Webmaster responsibilities, requiring a practical knowledge of computer techniques and procedures and software capabilities related to Web pages. The

appellant's position also requires knowledge of the Web scripting language and the ability to transfer pages she either created or modified to the Web server. Comparable to assistants at Level 1-4, the appellant maintains [her specific] Directorate Web sites. For example, she checks links to make sure they are working and updates and corrects information when necessary. The appellant can readily identify, interpret, and resolve routine problems that typically involve spatial or graphics difficulties. She believes that her development of a Web site that meets Air Force regulations for handicap accessibility requires a higher level of knowledge. The handicap accessible Web site allows print-impaired persons, including blind and low-vision users, to be able to read a Web document. Print-impaired persons usually have a speech synthesizer or Braille display attached to their computers. The speech synthesizer vocalizes the on-screen data, while the Braille system converts character streams to Braille and puts the data onto the display. Although the appellant is now independently responsible for compliance with the handicap accessibility requirements, initial accessibility was completed with aid from the AETC Webmaster. The appellant also uses "Bobby," a tool created by the Center for Applied Special Technology to help identify changes needed to Web pages so that users with disabilities can more easily use the Web pages. Overall, the knowledge required for the appellant's position is consistent with Level 1-4.

The appellant's position does not meet Level 1-5. Although the duties and responsibilities performed by the appellant require an understanding of Web software, the work does not require the in-depth knowledge of systems and programs indicative of Level 1-5. Assistants at Level 1-5 carry out limited specialized projects and assignments using knowledge of fundamental data processing methods, practices, and techniques in work involving development, test, implementation, and modification of computer programs and operating procedures. Assistants prepare programs or write new program documentation and operating procedures. In contrast, the appellant is required to use off-the-shelf software programs that require no modification. At Level 1-5, employees use their knowledge as the bases for analysis and decision making in several functional settings. In addition, employees at this level use knowledge of data content and output options for a variety of administrative, scientific, and/or technical program applications that are processed on any of several multiprogram operating systems. In contrast, the appellant does not make any substantive determinations regarding the content of the Web pages. The content is largely determined by the preferences of her immediate supervisor and the division and branch chiefs within the [appellant's] Directorate. In summary, the appellant's position does not require the level of knowledge for decision making or modifying or developing new program or operating procedures commensurate with Level 1-5.

This factor is evaluated at Level 1-4 and 550 points are credited.

Factor 2, Supervisory controls

This factor covers the nature and extent of direct or indirect controls exercised by the supervisor, the responsibility of the employee, and the degree to which work is reviewed by the supervisor.

The appellant's position meets Level 2-3, the highest level described in the standard. At this level, the supervisor provides direction on objectives and priorities for new work, deadlines, and deadline changes for new and established work. The employee identifies the work to be done,

plans and carries out the steps required, and submits completed work without supervisory review. At this level, employees adapt or develop new work procedures and instructions for application by themselves and others. Consistent with Level 2-3, the appellant independently plans and carries out steps for completing assignments in accordance with established instructions and practices. She seeks assistance from the supervisor when conflicts arise that are out of the ordinary, e.g., the appellant receives a request from a division or branch chief to put information on the Web page where the content would be questionable. Although the appellant has no direct reporting relationship to the AETC Webmaster, the appellant obtains assistance from the AETC Webmaster when a situation arises that is beyond the knowledge or skill of the appellant. For example, the appellant contacts the AETC Webmaster when the appellant is unable to use the File Transfer Protocol to send a page to the server. The appellant is usually approached by division and branch chiefs with requests to put additional information in either the restricted or the public Web site. She then independently determines the format of the information. Before the site is made public, the appellant's completed work is reviewed by the immediate supervisor for conformity to deadlines and accepted practices. Similar to assistants at Level 2-3, the appellant's work methods are not normally reviewed unless a recurring, common pattern of problems develops.

At Level 2-4 of the Primary Standard, the supervisor sets the overall objectives and resources available. The employee and supervisor, in consultation, develop the deadlines, projects, and work to be done. The assistant, having developed expertise in the line of work, is responsible for planning and carrying out the assignment, resolving most of the conflicts that arise, coordinating the work with others as necessary, and interpreting policy on own initiative in terms of established objectives. In some assignments, the employee also determines the approach to be taken and the methodology to be used. The employee keeps the supervisor informed of progress and potentially controversial matters. In contrast, the appellant is not required to interpret policies or to establish approaches or methodologies as envisioned for positions at Level 2-4. Unlike employees at Level 2-4, the appellant refers to her supervisor or the AETC Webmaster for assistance and guidance when conflicts arise. The appellant's position does not meet Level 2-4.

This factor is evaluated at Level 2-3 and 275 points are credited.

Factor 3, Guidelines

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

At Level 3-2, procedures for doing the work have been established and a number of specific guidelines are available. The number and similarity of guidelines and work situations require the assistant to use judgment in selecting appropriate guidelines. Guidelines for the appellant's position include general procedural guidelines in the form of equipment and software manuals and Air Force and base policies, procedures, and instructions. The recurring nature of the appellant's assignments and user problems permits considerable additional reliance on established procedures and previous experience. The appellant's position is similar to Level 3-2 in that guidelines are available, selection of an appropriate guideline is relatively clear, and some judgment is needed in selecting from a number of guidelines or alternative procedures for

accomplishing the work. Comparable to Level 3-2, the appellant refers to the supervisor or AETC Webmaster for guidance when digression from guidelines has not been established by the appellant's experience and precedent situations.

The appellant's position does not meet Level 3-3. At this level, an assistant works with new requirements or new applications for which only general guidance is available. In addition, judgment is used in adjusting the most appropriate guidelines to fit new processing requirements or developing new methods for accomplishing the tasks at hand. Assistants at this level adapt guidelines when their judgment is based on an understanding of the intent of the guidelines. In contrast, the appellant does not work with new requirements or new applications for which only general guidance is available. While the appellant faces an evolving technology that requires frequent changes and modifications, the fundamental nature of the guidelines remains unchanged. Guidelines are available for nearly all areas of her work and do not require the appellant to modify, adapt, or adjust guidelines as intended at Level 3-3.

This factor is evaluated at Level 3-2 and 125 points are credited.

Factor 4, Complexity

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

The appellant's position is comparable to Level 4-2 where employees perform a few different although related tasks, using specified procedures and methods. Consistent with this level, the appellant decides what needs to be done, identifies and carries out methods and variations within established procedures, and makes other similar decisions to perform such work. For example, after receiving a request from a division or branch chief to place information on the Web site, the appellant is responsible for determining the best possible course of action in terms of design and format. Comparable to Level 4-2 assistants, the appellant selects and applies established procedures and methods to perform work that meets Air Force policies and regulations.

At Level 4-3, work is distinguished by the employee performing a variety of tasks involving discrete methods and procedures or a variety of related tasks that require a sequence of actions involving differing methods and procedures. At this level, assistants identify the sequence of standard and variable procedures and methods needed to prepare and process the assignment or to resolve error conditions. Unlike positions at Level 4-3, the appellant's work is relatively routine and new or unusual situations rarely occur where she would be required to apply the various methods and procedures characterized at this level. The appellant's work does not typically involve situations where there are several courses of action to choose from. The complexity of the appellant's duties does not equate to Level 4-3.

This factor is evaluated at Level 4-2 and 75 points are credited.

Factor 5, Scope and effect

This factor covers the relationship between the nature of the work, e.g., the purpose, breadth, and depth of the assignment, and the effect of work products or services both within and outside the organization.

At Level 5-2, employees perform a range of duties in scheduling, production control, library, or other computer support positions according to established procedures and methods. Results of the work are complete products or complete segments of other products or work processes. An example of work at this level is an assistant who collects raw information, prepares flowcharts, codes programs, or performs other similar kinds of work on a variety of projects. At Level 5-2, the work affects the accuracy of processing by providing for data contention and other potential conflicts during processing and coding according to specifications. Reliability and acceptability are affected by completing the work within deadlines, ensuring against media and control related processing failures, and providing the requested output. Work at this level affects the availability and usefulness of the information involved.

The appellant's position meets Level 5-2 for both scope and effect. The purpose of the appellant's position is to collect, select, organize, and provide information in accordance with established rules, regulations, procedures, and practices. The work affects the way in which others receive information and the availability and usefulness of the information.

The appellant's position does not meet Level 5-3. This level is distinguished from Level 5-2 by the addition of requirements for solving problems and answering technical questions about control, scheduling, and/or direct support functions. Problems and error conditions at this level are conventional to data processing although solutions are not always covered by established or standardized procedures. Results of the work affect the efficiency of processing services and adequacy of products used in subsequent activities. Work at this level includes explaining to and assisting customers in the application of system capabilities when the customer has unusual or unique processing requirements that are difficult to formulate. Work at this level may also involve adjusting and rebalancing a number of single system schedules to enhance processing services by using the capacities of several computer systems. Unlike assistants at Level 5-3, the appellant uses standardized approaches in assisting users. Although the appellant's work affects the way in which individuals receive information, the results of the work do not affect the efficiency of processing services, adequacy of products used in subsequent activities, and processing procedures and methods as envisioned at Level 5-3.

This factor is evaluated at Level 5-2 and 75 points are credited.

Factor 6, Personal contacts

Factor 6 includes face-to-face and telephone contacts with persons not in the supervisory chain.

The appellant's contacts meet Level 6-2, the highest level described in the standard, where contacts are with employees in the agency, inside and outside of the immediate organization; the general public; or special users. The appellant has frequent and ongoing contact with division

and branch chiefs within the Directorate. She also has occasional contact with specialists at the Communications Squadron and with users of the public and the restricted Web sites. As at Level 6-2, the appellant's contacts are structured and routine and the role of each participant is readily determined.

The appellant's contacts do not meet Level 6-3 of the Primary Standard where contacts are with individuals or groups from outside the employing agency in a moderately unstructured setting. For example, the contacts are not established on a routine basis, the purpose and extent of each contact is different, and the role and authority of each party is identified and developed during the course of the contact. Contacts at Level 6-3 are regularly established with people in their capacities as attorneys, contractors, representatives of professional organizations, the news media, or public action groups. The appellant's contacts are not normally with the type of individuals described at this level, and the contacts do not involve the variety of issues intended at Level 6-3.

Level 6-2 is credited for 25 points.

Factor 7, Purpose of contacts

This factor covers the purpose of personal contacts, which ranges from factual exchanges of information to situations involving significant or controversial issues and differing viewpoints, goals, or objectives.

The purpose of the appellant's contacts meets Level 7-2, the highest level described in the standard. At this level, the purpose of personal contacts is to plan or coordinate changes in scheduling requirements or priorities as the result of data or equipment related problems; to participate with users in planning and coordinating new or modified requirements when the work fits generally within system options, schedules, etc.; or to plan user participation, methodology, and deadlines for new projects. Comparable to this level, the appellant meets with division and branch chiefs to set deadlines and priorities in planning and coordinating her work.

Level 7-3 is not met. As described in the Primary Standard, the purpose of contacts at this level is to influence, motivate, interrogate, or control people or groups. The people contacted may be fearful, skeptical, uncooperative, or dangerous. The appellant's contacts do not require motivating, interrogating, or controlling parties who are fearful, skeptical, or uncooperative.

Level 7-2 is credited for 50 points.

Factor 8, Physical demands

This factor covers the requirements and physical demands placed on the employee by the work assignment. This includes physical characteristics and abilities and physical exertion involved in the work.

At Level 8-1, the work is generally sedentary, although there may be some nominal walking or standing for short periods of time or carrying of light loads (e.g., paper, books, reports) that

require only moderate physical ability and physical stress. The appellant's position fully meets Level 8-1.

The appellant's position does not meet Level 8-2, which requires extended periods of standing, walking, stretching, bending, and stooping or carrying of loads that may weigh as much as 45 pounds. Although the appellant's position may at times require her to walk a greater than normal distance, carry heavier loads, climb stairs, or be in a position requiring stooping or bending, these occasions are too rare to meet the intent of Level 8-2. The majority of the appellant's time is spent sitting at a workstation.

This factor is evaluated at Level 8-1 and 5 points are credited.

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 and occupational health regulations required.

At Level 9-1, the work involves common risks or discomforts requiring normal safety precautions typical of offices, meeting rooms, libraries, and the like. The work area is adequately lighted, heated, and ventilated. The appellant's work environment consists of the everyday risks and discomforts of offices and similar work sites, warranting evaluation at Level 9-1.

The appellant's position does not meet Level 9-2, which involves moderate risk requiring exercise of safety precautions. Special clothing or protective equipment is not normally required although there is moderate risk of bodily injury. The appellant's work environment is in an office and does not require the safety precautions typical for positions at Level 9-2.

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

Summary

We have evaluated the appellant's position as follows:

<i>Factor</i>	<i>Level</i>	<i>Points</i>
1. Knowledge required by the position	1-4	550
2. Supervisory controls	2-3	275
3. Guidelines	3-2	125
4. Complexity	4-2	75
5. Scope and effect	5-2	75
6. Personal contacts	6-2	25
7. Purpose of personal contacts	7-2	50
8. Physical demands	8-1	5
9. Work environment	9-1	5
<i>Total</i>		1,185

The appellant's position warrants 1,185 points. In accordance with the grade conversion table in the GS-335 standard, 1,185 points falls in the range for the GS-6 level.

Decision

The appellant's position is properly classified as Computer Assistant (OA), GS-335-6.