

**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-334-9
Organization:	[appellant's activity] Department of Defense [geographic location]
OPM decision:	Computer Specialist GS-334-9
OPM decision number:	C-0334-09-04

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

11/4/99
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]

[servicing personnel office]

Chief, Position Management and Classification Branch
Office of the Assistant Secretary (Manpower and Reserve
Affairs)

Department of the Army
Attn: SAMR-CPP-MP, Hoffman Building II
200 Stovall Street, Suite 5N35
Alexandria, VA 22332-0340

Deputy Assistant Secretary
Civilian Personnel Policy/Civilian Personnel Director
Department of the Army
Room 23681, Pentagon
Washington, DC 20310-0300

Director, U.S. Army Civilian Personnel
Evaluation Agency
Department of the Army
Crystal Mall 4, Suite 918
1941 Jefferson Davis Highway
Arlington, VA 22202-4508

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 17, 1999, the Dallas Oversight Division of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted a classification appeal from the appellant, an employee in [a health services operations], Department of Defense, [geographic location]. The appellant is currently employed as a Computer Specialist, GS-334-9. The appellant believes his position should be classified as Computer Specialist, GS-334-12.

The appeal has been accepted and decided under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code. To help decide the appeal, an Oversight Division representative conducted a telephonic interview with the appellant and his immediate supervisor. In reaching our classification decision, we have reviewed the audit findings and all information of record furnished by the appellant and his agency, including [the position description, number].

Position information

The appellant's position is one of three Computer Specialist positions (one GS-12, one GS-11, and one GS-9) in the [appellant's immediate organization]. These positions report to [a supervisory position currently held by a military officer]. The GS-11 Computer Specialist position was vacated in [date] and the GS-12 Computer Specialist position was vacated in [date]. Both of those positions were still unfilled when this decision was issued.

The appellant has responsibility for independently performing computer programming and data processing support to be utilized locally and throughout the [health services operation]. The appellant performs data base queries of Military Health Services Systems (MHSS) in support of the [health services organization] by importing data via standard information technology methods including, but not limited to, creating ASCII files, writing applications/ programs, loading spreadsheets, or relational data bases. The appellant is responsible for determining how to write data retrieval run streams in various languages and operating systems including, but not limited to DOS, Windows NT, UNIX, Informix, Access, Excel, and dBase, over such mediums as Ethernet and the Internet using various communication protocols (TCP/IP, FTP, and Telenet).

The appellant serves as a team member on small scale or new projects and participates in analyzing, coding, and implementing programming changes. The appellant aids other programmers specializing in analyzing and maintaining various clinical and financial applications used by the Region. The appellant actively participates with networked computer applications involving MHSS (both clinical and financial data) in support of [the health services organization], U.S. Army Medical Command, Health Affairs, and other Department of the Army headquarters administrative units. The appellant performs feasibility studies in order to develop/select methods for downloading MHSS data into any given platform to meet user requirements. Using customer input, the appellant gathers facts about the nature of work involved in the user's application area, the work flow, the processing actions and the work products. The appellant then determines the most effective method for retrieving data and presents data to the end user in formats that are the most usable. The appellant performs modifications of computer system programs. This includes using appropriate system or data base language along with documentation of the modification. The appellant provides consultation and instruction to functional area users on data base and file

accessing techniques, search strategies, processing and space utilization efficiencies, data base security procedures, and backup, recovery, and testing techniques.

Series, title, and standard determination

The agency has determined that the appellant's position is classified properly to the Computer Specialist Series, GS-334, and the appellant has not disagreed. The appellant's position is properly assigned to the GS-334 series. Based on the titling practices contained in the GS-334 standard, the appellant's position is properly titled as *Computer Specialist*. The appellant's position is evaluated by application of the criteria in the GS-334 standard.

Grade level determination

The GS-334 standard is written in the Factor Evaluation System (FES) format. Under FES, positions are placed in a grade on the basis of their duties, responsibilities, and the qualifications required as evaluated in terms of nine factors common to nonsupervisory General Schedule positions.

A point value is assigned to each factor based on a comparison of the position's duties with the factor-level descriptions in the standard. The factor point values mark the lower end of the ranges for the indicated factor levels. For a position factor 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 in the standard, the point value for the next lower factor level must be assigned, unless the deficiency is balanced by an equally important aspect which meets a higher level. The total points assigned are converted to a grade by use of the grade conversion table in the standard.

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 FES.

Factor 1, Knowledge required by the position

This factor measures the nature and extent of information or facts that a worker must understand to do acceptable work, such as the steps, procedures, practices, rules, policies, theories, principles, and concepts, and the nature and extent of the skills needed to apply this knowledge.

At Level 1-6, employees use knowledge of established computer techniques and requirements to perform such assignments as developing individual programs, test plans, or reports within an approved framework or facilitating user interface and access to computer systems by giving training on using generalized software. At this level, an applications oriented assignment normally entails knowledge of the technical characteristics of an operating mode (e.g., remote job entry terminals, end user systems) and system software rules pertinent to the assigned areas. This level also includes knowledge of the work process to be accomplished or equipment to be controlled

by computer. Such knowledge is used to carry out assignments where the objectives to be reached are clearly identified and are realizable by straightforward adaptation of precedents and established practices. The information provided typically specifies basic requirements. This includes, for an applications project, what the operating mode is to be; what kinds of equipment or system software will be required; which programming language is appropriate; and what inputs, outputs, and overall processing logic are involved.

Two illustrations provided in the standard of work at this level are as follows:

- a computer specialist who monitors subject-matter personal computer systems, performs minor adjustments and maintenance, provides user training, develops office applications through off-the-shelf software, serves as a point of contact between the servicing ADP organization and the subject-matter organization, and performs standardized disk recovery operations; or
- a computer specialist who trains users to use generalized software, including operating system commands and procedures to communicate with system software and obtain system status information; system utilities to display or print files; software for ad hoc information retrieval and report generation; and communications hardware and software to access remote computer facilities; and develops user guides and handbooks on how to make effective use of application systems developed for their support.

The knowledge required by the appellant's position is comparable to Level 1-6. A primary technical function performed by the appellant is to assist end-users in their application of standardized management information systems which include Defense Medical Information System (DMIS), Case Medical Information System (CMIS), Retrospective Case Mix Analysis System (RCMAS), and Composite Health Care System (CHCS). In providing this assistance, the appellant troubleshoots problems that users are experiencing with program applications. The appellant determines the cause of the problem (software, hardware, or user); develops and takes corrective action, if possible; or contacts the responsible system technicians at the data base center located at Fort Detrick, Maryland, or software manufacturers, such as the Microsoft or Cheyenne Corporations to obtain assistance in correcting operational problems that do not respond to established problem solving techniques. The appellant keeps users informed about modifications made to the systems and/or changes to the procedures to be followed in inputting or extracting information from the data bases. The appellant provides one-on-one training assistance to users of the systems. The appellant assures that recurring reports are downloaded, printed, and distributed as scheduled. In response to individual requests, the appellant uses a standard query language to write programs to format and retrieve ad hoc reports from the information data bases.

At Level 1-7, computer specialists use knowledge of a wide range of computer techniques, requirements, methods, sources, and procedures to accomplish a variety of assignments in an assigned application or specialty area. Included at this level is knowledge of system software and systems development life cycles (including systems documentation, design development, configuration management, cost analysis, data administration, systems integration, and testing). The work requires the ability to modify standard practices and adapt computer systems to solve

a variety of computer software problems and to adapt precedents or make significant departures from previous approaches to similar projects to provide for the specialized requirements of some projects. These knowledges and abilities are used to analyze and make recommendations on major aspects of a project, such as the system interrelationships to be considered or the operating mode, system software, and/or equipment configuration to be adopted. Characteristic of positions at this level is the performance of studies in which alternatives are set forth or devised, their costs and benefits weighed, and reports prepared in which the study methodology is outlined, alternatives discussed, and recommendations made. Typically, employees at this level develop the plans and specifications necessary for carrying out the recommendations, (e.g., for a proposed application, developing specifications which set forth inputs, outputs, the basic decision rules, and program interrelationships). Also, Level 1-7 entails modifying standard practices and adapting computer systems to solve a variety of problems, making significant departures from previous approaches in order to meet specialized requirements, and applying standard practices of related scientific disciplines.

Two illustrations provided in the standard of work at this level follow.

- A computer specialist performs studies and recommends a course of action on proposed projects such as whether it would be cost effective to modify a sizable automated record keeping system to produce various additional products and reports. The specialist considers aspects such as the success of various approaches in comparable projects at other activities, impact on ADP staff resources, advice of equipment analysts and systems programmers on topics affecting their specialties, and possible conflicts or beneficial relationships with other systems.
- A computer specialist serves as a systems monitor or operations troubleshooter when this involves devising recovery plans for system failure situations. The plans include developing and/or using utility programs to isolate causes of problems between hardware, system software, and applications programs; enhance the ability to detect damaged or lost files; optimize disk management; measure system performance; control system security; and/or extend operating system capabilities to support local requirements. In case of failures in the agency standard system, specialists at Level 1-7 make “quick fixes” in higher level language and/or job control language to restore operations, analyze problems, develop recommendations, and collaborate with design center personnel in effecting needed changes.

Level 1-7 describes a work situation where the computer specialist participates substantially in all major aspects of an automation project, including the initial system design stage where the equipment and software are selected and the system interrelationships and operating specifications are considered. Also at this level, the computer specialist develops operating specifications for remote teleprocessing or telecommunications equipment and services. The appellant operates in an applications environment as opposed to a developmental environment as envisioned at Level 1-7. The appellant’s job responsibilities are carried out at the local level organization which is a user of national medical information management systems developed elsewhere. [The appellant] does perform basic troubleshooting activities at the local level dealing with local

hardware/software problems; however, issues affecting the major systemwide programs or connectivity are referred to the data base or communications administrators for resolution. The appellant's assignments are more limited than those described at Level 1-7.

Level 1-6 is credited for 950 points.

Factor 2, Supervisory controls

This factor covers the nature and extent of direct or indirect controls exercised by the supervisor, the employee's responsibility for carrying out assignments, and how completed work is reviewed.

At Level 2-3, the supervisor defines the employee's scope of responsibilities and the objectives, priorities, and deadlines. The employee is provided assistance with unusual situations which do not have clear precedents. The employee plans and carries out the successive steps involved and handles problems or any deviations in accordance with agency standards, previous training, established practices, or system controls as appropriate in the application or specialty area. Projects typically require the employee to do some preliminary investigation to ascertain interrelationships that may affect the plan of attack. Work is reviewed for technical aspects such as efficiency of the program written in terms of machine time used, whether documentation complies with agency guidelines, or whether equipment specifications adequately set forth both ADP and procurement needs. Techniques used by the employee during the course of the assignment usually are not reviewed in detail.

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 organization's requirements, interprets policies on own initiative in terms of established 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 for feasibility, compatibility with other work, or effectiveness in meeting requirements or achieving expected results.

The appellant receives most assignments from his supervisor [title of the supervisor in the appellant's immediate organization] who in consultation with the appellant determines timeframes for completion. The appellant independently plans and carries out assigned projects in conformance with established mission objectives. The appellant keeps the [supervisory] informed about progress or potentially controversial matters. Although the appellant accomplishes the technical aspects of his work relatively independently, this independence must be viewed within the context of the complexity of the work assignments and the technical assistance available to the appellant. While the current immediate supervisor may not possess the technical expertise to advise the appellant on some problems or issues that arise, the technical specialists at Fort Detrick are available to assist in resolving problems and deviating from established practices. Technical specialists at various software companies are also available for assistance in correcting problems. Consequently, the appellant's position is consistent with Level 2-3. The appellant's position does not fully meet the criteria outlined at Level 2-4 where the employee has overall responsibility for

planning and carrying out a project from inception through design, development, and implementation. Further, the appellant does not interpret policies, procedures, and regulations as envisioned at Level 2-4. Because the appellant's position fails to meet fully the requirements of Level 2-4, Level 2-3 is credited.

Level 2-3 is assigned with 275 points.

Factor 3, Guidelines

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

At Level 3-3, guidelines are available but are not completely applicable or gaps exist in significant areas. The employee is required to adapt guides and precedents for application to the assigned project or gather considerable information to supplement gaps or lack of specificity to particular problems. Judgment is required in relating precedent approaches to specific situations.

The appellant's use of guidelines is comparable to Level 3-3. He assists users in operating medical information management systems. Overall guidelines on system operations are contained in manuals for manufacturer's software (Access, Excel, Windows 95/NT, e-mail and backup software) and CD-Rom based Technet (Troubleshoot-Patches and Fixes for the System). While usually applicable in most situations, these guidelines do not always provide direct guidance in resolving a specific user problem. The same lack of universal specificity is true of manufacturers' manuals and software applications guides and manuals. The appellant must rely on [the appellant's] technical knowledge and expertise to interpret and adapt these guidelines and instructions to fit the current situation or operating problem.

At Level 3-4, policies and precedents provide general guidance with little specificity regarding the approach to be followed in accomplishing the work. The assignments usually require deviating from traditional methods or researching trends or patterns to develop improved methods or formulate criteria. The employee must use initiative and resourcefulness in researching and implementing state-of-the-art techniques and technologies in order to develop new and improved methods to cope with particular projects. At this level, the projects typically encompass unprecedented design efforts, integrating the work of others as a team or project leader, or predicting future environments or the impact of future processing.

The appellant's position does not meet Level 3-4. The appellant is not involved in any activities where significant research or analysis is required or where methods and techniques are devised (e.g., the conducting of feasibility studies or system design and development). The appellant's assignment is to provide technical support to users in the accessing of information from various medical data base systems (DMIS, CMIS, RCMAS, CHCS). Guidelines governing the operations of these systems are developed by the responsible design group. The appellant may need to adapt and modify these guidelines to fit the problem situation at hand based on his past experience and knowledge of current technologies. This adaptation and modification of standard guidelines and operating procedures do not meet the scope described at Level 3-4.

Level 3-3 is credited for 275 points.

Factor 4, Complexity

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

At Level 4-3, assignments consist of various tasks or duties involving different methods or procedures. Decisions regarding methods to be used depend on the nature of the data involved. Normally, the employee must analyze plans to discern deviations or other situations that have a bearing on the choice among established techniques for carrying out the assignment. Accomplishing the assignment involves ascertaining and analyzing interrelationships (e.g., the potential effect of program changes on related programs in the system).

The complexity of the appellant's assignment fully meets Level 4-3. The appellant, functioning in a user organization, exercises technical skills in support of the operation of personal computers in a LAN environment. This includes initial hardware setup, configuration, and LAN attachments. Additionally, the appellant applies knowledge of automated medical information programs and their data base configurations to resolve user problems and to develop ad hoc reports. In selecting additional hardware to be connected to the LAN, the appellant researches readily available information sources such as manufacturers' specifications, computer magazines, and publications to make determinations as to hardware capabilities, adoptabilities/connectivity to current hardware, medical systems program needs, and LAN requirements.

Assignments at Level 4-4 consist of projects, studies, or evaluations characterized by the need for substantial problem analysis. 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. Decisions at this level involve assessing situations complicated by conflicting or insufficient data and testing of different approaches.

The complexity of the appellant's assignments does not meet Level 4-4. The appellant is not involved in designing new or modified programs. The programming that he performs is more standard in nature, (e.g., utilizes standard off-the-shelf query language to manipulate data contained in medical information management systems in order to produce various ad hoc reports). The appellant's position does not require the variety of techniques and methods typically found at this level, nor is it complicated by the conflicting and complex circumstances described.

Level 4-3 is credited for 150 points.

Factor 5, Scope and effect

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

At Level 5-3, the 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, internal operations, or research conclusions.

The scope and effect of the appellant's work fully meet the criteria at Level 5-3. The appellant is responsible for the care and maintenance of programs associated with medical information data bases on the LAN and its associated personal computers. Troubleshooting activities are confined to his assigned service organizations at [the health services organization]. In exercising [the appellant's] technical expertise, [the appellant] relies on established practices and commonly accepted techniques for resolving user problems. Unusual problems and situations are referred to hardware and software manufacturers, contractors, and administrators of various medical information management systems for resolution.

In comparison, 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. The work at this level affects a wide range of agency activities, activities of non-Government organizations, or functions of other agencies.

The appellant's position does not have the scope described at Level 5-4 (i.e., wide range of agency activities at numerous sites around the country); nor does his work affect the operations of other agencies.

Level 5-3 is credited for 150 points.

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

These factors measure the type and purpose of face-to-face contacts and telephone dialogue with persons not in the supervisory chain. The level of regular and recurring personal contacts selected under Factor 6 is to be matched with the purposes of those contacts under Factor 7, and the appropriate point value credited using the chart provided in the standard.

Personal contacts

Level 2 is assigned for this factor. At this level, contacts include those with employees in the agency but outside the immediate organization, such as user representatives or field personnel engaged in different (i.e., non-ADP) work. At Level 3, contacts, in addition to those within the agency, are with vendor representatives, computer personnel of other agencies, representatives of professional organizations, and the like. Level 3 may also include contacts with the head of the employing agency or program officials several managerial levels above the employee when such contacts occur on an ad hoc or other irregular basis.

The appellant's contacts match Level 2 in that he has regular and recurring contacts with individual PC users and with technical specialists at software companies. Level 3 is not met in that the appellant's contacts with contractor and vendor representatives, security administrators for the various medical information systems, and medical treatment facilities are on an ad hoc or other irregular basis.

Purpose of contacts

Level b is assigned for this factor. At this level, the purpose of contacts is to coordinate work efforts, solve problems, or to provide advice to managers on noncontroversial organization or program related issues. The purpose of the appellant's contacts is to provide assistance to users in resolving technical problems.

The appellant does not meet the purpose of contacts outlined at Level c. At Level c, the purpose of the contacts is to influence others to utilize particular technical methods and procedures, or to persuade others to cooperate in meeting objectives when there are problems in securing cooperation. Users seek the appellant to request his assistance in resolving operational problems. There is no need for the appellant to persuade users to follow the technical methods or procedures required by the medical information management systems.

Level 2-b is credited for 75 points.

Factor 8, Physical demands

This factor measures the requirements and physical demands placed on the employee in performing the work assignment, including the agility and dexterity required, and the extent of physical exertion.

The appellant's position is typical of Level 8-1, the highest level described in the standard. Typically, the employee sits comfortably to do the work. However, there may be some walking, standing, bending, carrying of light items, or driving an automobile. No special physical demands are required to perform the work.

Occasionally, the appellant moves, lifts, or installs personal computers or other hardware, such as printers, which may require physical exertion beyond that described at Level 8-1. However, these activities are occasional and do not occur with a frequency that fully meets the intent of Level 8-2, as described in the Primary Standard, which involves regular and recurring work which requires some physical exertion, such as long periods of standing, walking over rough, uneven, or rocky surfaces; recurring bending, crouching, stooping, stretching, reaching, or similar activities; or recurring lifting of moderately heavy items, such as typewriters and record boxes. Level 8-2 work may require specific, but common, physical characteristics and abilities, such as above average agility and dexterity.

Level 8-1 is credited for 5 points.

Factor 9, Work environment

This factor considers the risks and discomforts in the employee's physical surroundings and the safety precautions required.

Level 9-1 covers work performed in a typical office setting where no special safety precautions are required. The appellant performs his work in an office environment with no special safety requirements.

Level 9-1 is credited for 5 points.

Summary

Factor	Level	Points
1. Knowledge required by the position	1-6	950
2. Supervisory controls	2-3	275
3. Guidelines	3-3	275
4. Complexity	4-3	150
5. Scope and effect	5-3	150
6. and 7. Personal contacts and Purpose of contacts	2b	75
8. Physical demands	8-1	5
9. Work environment	9-1	5
Total		1885

A total of 1885 points falls within the range for a GS-9, 1855 to 2100 points, according to the Grade Conversion Table in the GS-334 standard.

Decision

The position is properly classified as Computer Specialist, GS-334-9.