

**OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT**  
**MERIT SYSTEMS OVERSIGHT AND EFFECTIVENESS**  
**DALLAS OVERSIGHT DIVISION**  
**CLASSIFICATION APPEAL DECISION**

Under section 5112(b) of title 5, United States Code

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**Appellant:** [appellant]

**Position:** Office Automation Assistant, GS-326-6  
Position Number: 02860

**Organization:** Division of Support Services  
[installation] City District  
[installation] State Office  
Bureau of Land Management  
[installation city state]

**Decision:** Computer Assistant, GS-335-6

**OPM decision number:** C-0335-06-01

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**Approved by:**

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

9/30/96  
Date

## **INTRODUCTION**

The position is assigned to the Division of Support Services, District Office, State Office, Bureau of Land Management, in the Department of the Interior. The agency has classified the position as Office Automation Assistant, GS-326-6. The appellant believes that the duties performed warrant the position being upgraded to a Computer Assistant, GS-335-7. After receiving an unfavorable classification appeal decision from her agency, the appellant filed an appeal with this office under the provisions of chapter 51 of title 5, United States Code.

This is the final administrative decision of the Government, subject to discretionary review only under the conditions and time limits specified in sections 511.605 and 511.613 of the Code of Federal Regulations.

## **POSITION INFORMATION**

The District Office consists of the Office of the District Manager, the Support Services and Resource Services Divisions, the Resource Areas, and Renewable and Non-Renewable Resource Staffs. The appellant works in the Support Services Division which includes one computer specialist, one budget analyst, one range technician, one safety technician, one support services specialist, one computer assistant, one accounting technician, one supply technician, and one mail and file clerk in addition to the appellant's position. The appellant basically works independently, but in support of the District's wide area (WAN) and local area networks (LAN). She is responsible for data input, data management, software application development, and general maintenance and enhancement of her district's information systems.

## **SERIES AND TITLE DETERMINATION**

The GS-326 series, Office Automation Clerical and Assistance Series, includes positions where the primary duties are to perform office automation work such as word processing. Positions in this series require knowledge of general office automation software, practices, and procedures; competitive level proficiency in typing; and ability to apply these knowledges and skills in the performance of general office support work. The GS-335 series, Computer Clerk and Assistant, covers positions involving performance of data processing support and services functions for users of computer systems including such work as receiving, maintaining, and issuing data storage media for computer operations; collecting and sequentially staging input media with associated program instructions for processing; scheduling the use of computer time for program processing; collecting, maintaining, and distributing program and systems documentation; collecting raw information, preparing flowcharts, and coding in program languages;

or other support functions. This work requires knowledge of external data processing sequences, controls, procedures, or user or programming languages.

The appellant's position includes a minimal amount of word processing and other office automation clerical duties, as evidenced by her position description which indicates less than 20 percent of her assignments include these types of tasks. More than 80 percent of the appellant's duties are related to support of automated data processing (ADP) applications, hardware operations, systems development and analysis, coding/testing/debugging, and maintenance of the district's computer systems. During the desk audit, the appellant demonstrated these duties by establishing a mock user in the system, manipulating the data necessary to establish linkages between the UNIX system and nonsystem software for that user, and removing the mock user from the authorized system users list. The appellant provided samples of testing and debugging sequences for an application on which she had been working. These duties more aptly are described in the GS-335 series.

In addition, the State Office computer specialist indicated he worked with the appellant often on various computer problems, primarily in a support role. The computer specialist related that the appellant was responsible for trying to identify, test, and debug computer "glitches" on her own and, if she was unable to locate or correct the situation, then he would become involved. The computer specialist noted that the appellant's position was similar to his own position in many ways, but mainly in regard to acting as systems administrator. The appellant is the systems administrator for the [installation] District Office and, in that capacity, also supports the [Resource Areas] offices.

The intent of the appealed position is to provide support and assistance to the District Office in the design, operation, and maintenance of automated systems and to other employees of the District who use automated data processing systems applications and products. The agency has classified the position as Office Automation Assistant, GS-326. The appellant believes her position should be a Computer Assistant, GS-335. We find that the position is properly classified to the GS-335 series.

The title of the position is determined by the grade level assigned. The title Computer Clerk is established for nonsupervisory positions in grades GS-1 through GS-4. The title Computer Assistant is established for nonsupervisory positions at GS-5 and above.

## **GRADE LEVEL DETERMINATION**

The position is graded by reference to the grade-level criteria in the classification standard for the Computer Clerk and Assistant series, GS-335. The standard uses the Factor Evaluation System (FES) method which places positions in grades by comparing their duties, responsibilities, and qualification requirements with 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 and/or the benchmark job descriptions in the standard. The factor point values mark the lower end of the ranges for the indicated 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.

The following is our evaluation of the position in terms of the criteria.

### **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 (e.g., steps, procedures, practices, rules, policies, theories, principles, and concepts) 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.

The appealed position requires the appellant to be knowledgeable of computer systems technology in such areas as program analysis, resource data analysis, and equipment selection and utilization. The employee must be able to orient and train other District and Resource Area personnel in the use of computer systems hardware, software, and general operations of ADP systems and applications. The position requires the appellant to be involved in the full range of automation activities to maintain systems, including analysis, design, coding, testing, debugging, and documenting the programs or applications used. The position requires substantive knowledge of hardware, software, and data bases in order for the employee to provide technical support and assistance to the District's LAN users.

The appellant performs a range of duties including advising, assisting, coding, and procedure related problem solving using knowledge of data processing rules,

operating procedures, and processing methods. These include advising and assisting users in learning and/or operating shelf software, assisting in the development of applications from shelf software, serving as the system administrator of the network including taking corrective actions, assisting users by doing troubleshooting of systems problems that arise, and conducting training for District Office personnel. The appellant uses UNIX control language for coding and modification of programs and applications and is knowledgeable of systems hardware, software, and program capabilities. Most recently, she helped conduct training in GroupWise, WordPerfect, AIX Term Window UNIX Commands, and Internet use. This demonstrated knowledge and skill meets Level 1-4.

The appellant's position does not meet Level 1-5 of the standard which requires knowledge and use of time sharing, batch and demand processing in work such as allocating core, assigning input/output channels, and describing scheduling conventions. Use of knowledge at this level is the basis for analysis and decision making in several functional settings such as in accepting, rejecting, or modifying work requests in developing new or projected schedules, or maintaining, interpreting, or writing portions of program and operational manuals for programming, scheduling, and production control functions.

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 employee's responsibilities, and the review of completed work. Controls are exercised by the supervisor in the way assignments are made, instructions are given to the employee, priorities and deadlines are set, and objectives and boundaries are defined. Responsibility of the employee depends on the extent to which the employee is expected to develop the sequence and timing of various aspects of the work, to modify or recommend modification of instructions, and to participate in establishing priorities and defining objectives. The degree of review of completed work depends upon the nature and extent of the review (e.g., close and detailed review of each phase of the assignment, detailed review of the finished assignment, spot-check of finished work for accuracy, or review only for adherence to policy).

The appellant's supervisor provides minimal supervision. Work assignments are derived through problems that arise or through the normal course of planning and carrying out the work to be done or through inquiries received from the system users. The supervisor is kept informed of progress, and completed work is reviewed from the standpoint of meeting expected results. For example, if the

system is operational, there should be relatively few questions of achievement in this area.

At Level 2-2, the supervisor provides instructions for non-recurring work assignments, deviations from normal schedules, or new procedures. Within established procedures, the employee independently performs recurring work assignments, making adjustments or deviations in work methods based on experience and precedent actions. Unfamiliar situations or deviations from established practices are referred to the supervisor or computer specialist for resolution. Completed work is reviewed on the basis of system reports, customer comments, or specialist or operator notification of problems during processing. Review is to determine that the employee has used proper procedures and methods and that work is completed within established timeframes.

At Level 2-3, 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 to users without supervisory review. This level enables the employee to adapt or develop new work procedures and instructions for applications by self and others. Level 2-3 also describes a position that independently deviates from instructions to provide unspecified dependencies, higher or lower priorities, extended run time, additional core, and other changes based on past experience and flexibility within processing specifications. Supervisory assistance is sought and problems discussed when conflicts arise that are out of the ordinary or beyond the knowledge or skill of the employee. Examples include processing requests exceeding system capacity or dealing with excessive levels of priority. Completed work is reviewed for conformity to deadlines and accepted practices on the basis of end of shift reports, operator log notes, and responses from technical and functional users. Work methods are not normally reviewed unless a recurring, common pattern of problems develops.

The appellant's position meets Level 2-2 in that the supervisor provides general direction on workload assignments. The appellant usually completes her recurring work independently, receiving occasional assistance from the supervisor or computer specialist on more difficult or new requirements. The supervisor may review an assignment after it is completed if the assignment is unusual or more difficult in nature. However, most of the appellant's completed work is reviewed on the basis of feedback from the system users.

The appellant's position does not fully meet Level 2-3 as the majority of her assignments are recurring workload items. Little deviation in work completion is required. Neither the appellant's assignments nor the computer system require scheduling of computer run time or priority access. Although the appellant may

operate more independently than described at Level 2-2, the recurring assignments do not meet the level of responsibility indicative of Level 2-3 positions.

Level 2-2 and 125 points are credited.

### **Factor 3, Guidelines**

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

At Level 3-2, guidelines may be in the form of equipment manuals, program manuals, flowcharts, and other guidance with details of what is to be done. Selection of an appropriate guideline is usually clear. The guidelines may provide for judgmental deviations in the work processed. Digression from guidelines which has not been established by experience and precedent is referred to the supervisor.

The appellant's position exceeds Level 3-2 although guidelines are generally in the form of equipment or program manuals. Some of the appellant's work requires judgments be made in the resolution of equipment or software malfunction, especially when problems arise with the local area network or individual computer workstations. The appellant must decide what functions must be examined in order to correct the problem.

At Level 3-3, an employee works with new requirements or new applications for which only general guidance is available. Judgment is used in adjusting the most appropriate guidelines to fit new processing requirements or developing new methods for accomplishing the tasks at hand. Guidelines may require modification to provide for the addition of new forms of input, to allow for flexibility in scheduling, to adjust to new or conflicting requirements, or to adapt to a new hardware/software capability.

The appellant's position meets Level 3-3 in which the position would include working with new requirements or applications for which only general guidelines are available. For example, the appellant is working on modifications to software that will "customize" a word processing program to the UNIX system and make it more "user friendly." In this example, manipulation of the software requires applying knowledge of the system or interpretation of the application to the guidance provided with the software.

Level 3-3 and 275 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.

At the 4-3 level, the employee performs 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. The decision regarding what is to be done results from studying each assignment or processing each problem situation. The employee identifies the sequence of standard and variable procedures and methods needed to prepare and process the assignment or to resolve error conditions.

Work involving this level of complexity includes the following: In work directly supporting specialists, employees may participate in each phase of a project ranging from problem definition by the user through implementation of a program. This includes working in such phases as information collecting, analyzing, charting, designing, coding, testing, documenting, and implementing. In production control, employees work with a variety of subject matter program applications and a wide variety of output options. The employee explains system capabilities, limitations, and output variations to users; advises on the formulation of job requests based on customer description of product requirements; describes remote entry methods and language variations; and resolves problems for terminal users who encounter system related problems during remote processing.

The appellant's position meets Level 4-3 in that she assists and supports the District Office by implementing new software requirements and local area network applications, including providing one-on-one or group training to the system users. The appellant is "on call" when users require assistance with system or software related problems. She assists users in converting applications from one program to another. The appellant conducts training to explain system capabilities and assist users in determining appropriate requirements for computer applications. She is also responsible for monitoring disk space to prevent system overload and subsequent "down time" and to purge outdated or extraneous files from the system.

The appellant's position does not meet Level 4-4 which is distinguished by the variety and complexity of operating systems monitored, the nature and variety of problems encountered and resolved, and the nature of independent decisions made by the employee. At this level, the employee typically monitors the operations of several major computer systems. The diagnosis and resolution of error and problem conditions involves equipment configurations having dissimilar

operating characteristics, a wide variety of data and programs, and many different processes and methods to arrive at solutions or develop new procedures. The appellant works directly with only the UNIX system and individual microcomputer workstations associated with the local area network within the confines of established network protocol.

Level 4-3 and 150 points are credited.

### **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 the work products or services both within and outside the organization. In General Schedule occupations, effect measures such things as whether the work output facilitates the work of others, provides timely service of a personal nature, or impacts on the adequacy of research conclusions. 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.

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. Work at this level might include tape librarians who regularly perform inventorying, staging, and maintaining backup or production tapes; or, production controllers who review and amend control runstreams according to instructions, and monitor and correct control language coding errors for jobs in progress. This level may also include assistants to specialists who collect raw information, prepare flowcharts, code programs, or perform other similar kinds of work on a variety of projects. 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.

The appellant's position meets level 5-2 as she is responsible for tape library functions and maintenance performed on the local area network. The maintenance and configurations of microcomputer stations ensure against processing failures for end users. The appellant's responsibilities also include designing, coding, testing, debugging, and documenting programs or applications. At times, this involves gathering of information and flowcharting the processes involved.

The appellant's position does not meet Level 5-3. Problems and error conditions at this level are conventional to data processing although solutions are not always covered by established or standardized procedures. Work at this level would include 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, or adjusting and rebalancing a number of single system schedules to enhance processing services by using the capacities of several computer systems. The appellant's position uses standardized approaches in assisting system users. Assistance to District employees by the appellant would be less difficult than that outlined at the 5-3 level.

Level 5-2 and 75 points are credited.

### **Factor 6, Personal Contacts**

This factor includes face-to-face contacts and telephone and radio dialogue with persons not in the supervisory chain. Levels described under 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. Above the lowest level, points should be credited under this factor only for contacts which are essential for successful performance of the work and which have a demonstrable impact on the difficulty and responsibility of the work performed.

At the 6-2 level, contacts are with specialists and other recipients of data processing services who are employees of the same agency, but outside the data processing organization; employees of other agencies or non-governmental organizations who use the data processing facility; or, contractors' representatives such as vendor repair technicians or customer engineers. Contacts are structured and routine and the role of each participant is readily determined.

The appellant's position meets Level 6-2 in that her contacts include employees in other segments of the [installation] District Office, Resource Areas, and the Forest Service, who use the local area network and UNIX system. The appellant supports the computer network requirements of the [Resource Areas] offices.

Level 6-2 and 25 points are credited.

### **Factor 7, Purpose of Personal Contacts**

In General Schedule occupations, the purpose of personal contacts may range from factual exchanges of information to situations involving significant or controversial issues and differing viewpoints, goals, or objectives.

At Level 7-1, the purpose of contacts is to exchange factual information such as processing status, deadline for input submissions, tape or disk availability or condition, and similar kinds of factual information; or to explain established work methods and processes.

At Level 7-2, the purpose of contacts is to plan or coordinate changes in scheduling requirements or priorities due to 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 and schedules; or, to plan user participation, methodology, and deadlines for new projects.

The appellant's position exceeds Level 7-1 as the purpose of her contacts includes working with users in modifying requirements or applications of software, informing users of system capabilities or applications, and doing troubleshooting on system-related problems. The appellant is also responsible for training the end users through on-site demonstrations, written documentation, and one-on-one or classroom training.

Level 7-2 and 50 points are credited.

### **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 (e.g., specific agility and dexterity requirements) and the physical exertion involved in the work (e.g., climbing, lifting, pushing, balancing, stooping, kneeling, crouching, crawling, or reaching). To some extent, the frequency or intensity of physical exertion must also be considered (e.g., a job requiring prolonged standing involves more physical exertion than a job requiring intermittent standing).

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 (i.e., paper, books, reports) that require only moderate physical ability and physical stress. The appellant's position meets Level 8-1, but does not meet level 8-2 which requires extended periods of standing, walking, stretching, bending, stooping, or carrying of loads (i.e., paper, books, tapes) that may weigh as much as 45 pounds.

Although the appellant's position may at times cause her to have to carry heavier loads or be in a position requiring stooping or bending, these occasions are too rare to meet the definition of extended periods of time. The majority of the appellant's time is spent sitting at a workstation.

Level 8-1 and 5 points are credited.

## **Factor 9, Work Environment**

This factor considers the risk and discomforts in the employee's physical surroundings or the nature of the work assigned and the safety regulations required. Although the use of safety precautions can practically eliminate a certain danger or discomfort, such situations typically place additional demands upon the employee in carrying out safety regulations and techniques.

At Level 9-1, the work involves common risks or discomforts, requiring normal safety precautions typical of offices, meeting rooms, libraries, and similar areas. The work area is adequately lighted, heated, and ventilated. Employees in or adjacent to computer rooms may be within environmentally controlled areas and, although relatively cool, require only normal clothing to compensate for minor discomfort. The appellant's position meets Level 9-1.

The appellant's position does not meet Level 9-2 which involves moderate risk requiring exercise of safety precautions when operating or working around equipment with exposed moving parts such as decollators, bursters, and others. 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 any extraordinary safety precautions.

Level 9-1 and 5 points are credited.

### Summary of Factor Levels

	Factor	Level	Points
1	Knowledge Required of Position	1-4	550
2	Supervisory Controls	2-2	125
3	Guidelines	3-3	275
4	Complexity	4-3	150
5	Scope and Effect	5-2	75
6	Personal Contacts	6-2	25
7	Purpose of Contacts	7-2	50
8	Physical Demands	8-1	5
9	Work Environment	9-1	5
TOTAL POINTS			1260

### DECISION

Based on the grade conversion table contained in the GS-335 standard, 1260 points equate to a GS-6. The appellant's position is properly classified as Computer Assistant, GS-335-6.