

OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT
ATLANTA OVERSIGHT DIVISION
ATLANTA, GEORGIA

CLASSIFICATION APPEAL DECISION

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

Appellant: [Appellant]

Position: Computer Specialist
GS-334-09

Organization: Management and Systems Flight
Satellite Supply Division
AFRES 94 LG/LGSP
[installation city state]

Decision: GS-334-09
(Appeal Denied)

OPM decision number: C-0334-09-02

Kathy W. Day
Classification Appeals Officer

Date 8/27/97

rd# 0334097a.at

Background

On June 17, 1997, the Atlanta Oversight Division, Office of Personnel Management, accepted an appeal for the position of Computer Specialist, GS-334-09, Management and Systems Flight, Satellite Supply Division, [installation city state]. The appellant is requesting that his position be changed to Computer Specialist, GS-334-11.

The appeal has been accepted and processed under section 5112(b) of title 5, United States Code. This is the final administrative decision on the classification of the position subject to discretionary review only under the limited conditions and time outlined in part 511, subpart F, of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations.

Sources of Information

This appeal decision is based on information from the following sources:

1. The agency's letter received June 13, 1997, forwarding the appellant's position classification appeal, and providing position and organizational information.
2. A telephone interview with servicing classifier, on July 16, 1997.
3. A telephone interview with the appellant on July 17, 1997.
4. A telephone interview with the appellant's supervisor, on July 25, 1997.

Position Information

The appellant is assigned to Position Number 8-02782. The supervisor and agency have certified to the accuracy of the position description. The appellant states the position description does not reflect all of the duties he performs.

The appellant functions as the focal point for all in-line and personal computers and related equipment assigned to the supply function. In this capacity, he administers overall activities for the Standard Base Supply System (SBSS) and the Environmental Management Information System (EMIS) and is the central point of contact with the host base for in-line computer problems. He provides programming support for interface with the Sperry 1100 computer; resolves problems associated with application programs; and, develops, writes, and implements Query Language Processor (QPL) programs. He reviews all incoming programs and related changes involving supply processing; determines the effect of new or changed programs; and, notifies personnel of new input data and format requirements. The appellant receives and reviews all new requirements for microcomputers to interface with the Sperry 1100. He identifies the type of equipment needed, appropriate software and accessories required, and ensures proper individuals are notified for requisitioning actions.

The appellant receives direction from the Supervisory Supply Systems Analyst who discusses new or changed requirements, makes special arrangements as required and expects the appellant to proceed independently within broad guidelines provided. Work is reviewed on the basis of operational effectiveness.

The appellant believes duties associated with EMIS responsibilities should be specifically detailed in the position description in order for it to be properly classified. Although the EMIS duties do not impact the grade of the appellant's position, as discussed below, they are different from his other duties and should be identified in his position description.

Standards Referenced

Computer Specialist Series, GS-334, July 1991.

Series and Title Determination

The appellant does not contest the agency determination of his series or title.

The GS-334 series includes positions with responsibility for analyzing, managing, supervising, or performing work necessary to plan, design, develop, acquire, document, test, implement, integrate, maintain, or modify systems for solving problems or accomplishing work processes by using computers. Positions are included in this series when the primary need is knowledge of information processing methodology/technology, computer capabilities, and processing techniques. The appellant provides technical expertise directly related to the implementation and management of computer information systems, including hardware, software, and processing techniques. This work is properly covered by the GS-334 series. The authorized title for nonsupervisory positions in this series is Computer Specialist. The *Introduction to the Position Classification Standards* provides guidance on using parenthetical titles to identify specialty areas. Any descriptive parenthetical designation may be added at the discretion of the agency.

The appropriate title and series for this position is Computer Specialist, GS-334.

Grade Determination

The appellant's position is evaluated by application of the criteria in the GS-334 standard. This 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. The agency credited Level 1-6. The appellant believes Level 1-7 is correct.

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 straight-forward 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 evaluates various brands of computer equipment for replacement of or addition to existing machinery. The decision has already been made as to the number of units or capacity needed and with what other equipment the new equipment must be compatible.
- 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. Such specialists develop 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 users (General Supply Specialists and Environmental Engineers) in their application of Air Force's standardized management information systems which include: SBSS, EMIS, and the Document Control Filing System. In providing this assistance, the appellant troubleshoots problems 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 design centers located at Gunter, Brooks, or Warner Robbins AFB's to obtain assistance in correcting operational problems that do not respond to established problem solving techniques. For connectivity problems, the appellant contacts the telecommunications contractor at [installation] for assistance. 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 databases. 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 databases.

When a decision is made to purchase new equipment, the appellant is responsible for conducting research to determine which piece of hardware meets current systems needs, plus expansion space, and is compatible with current hardware and telecommunications systems. The appellant develops the acquisition justification for the equipment. He forwards the equipment specifications and justification to the telecommunications contractor for compatibility review and approval. After approval by the telecommunications contractor, the appellant develops the requisition and forwards the requisition document for the purchase to the approving official. When the new equipment arrives, the appellant is responsible for setting it up, installing necessary programs and protocols, and debugging the new equipment before turning it over to the user. The appellant attempts basic maintenance/repair activities on hardware prior to contacting the vendor or sending the equipment to the Dobbins repair facility.

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 speciality 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 included at Level 1-7 are troubleshooting design and software implementation problems, providing staff advisory and planning services, user assistance/training, or evaluating services or functions within a specialty area such as computer performance measurement techniques or security procedures applicable to a particular system.

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

- A computer specialist who assists users in one or several subject matter fields in deciding which processes to automate; how to select equipment and software; how best to use available technology; and whether and how to network. In this type of work situation, the computer specialist reviews and selects equipment and software; assists in set-up, testing, and user training; resolves equipment and software compatibility questions; and other related functions.
- A computer specialist who 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, Level 1-7 specialists 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 by the standards for Level 1-7. The appellant’s job responsibilities are carried out in a local supply organization which is a user of national Air Force data management systems developed elsewhere. He does perform basic troubleshooting activities at the local level dealing with local hardware/software problems. Issues affecting the major system wide programs or connectivity are referred to the appropriate design centers or communications contractor 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. The agency credited level 2-3. The appellant believes Level 2-4 is correct.

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 and deviations in accordance with agency standards, previous training, established practices, or system controls. Work is reviewed for adequacy of the technical aspects, but the techniques used by the employee during the course of the assignment are not reviewed in detail.

The supervisory controls exercised over the appellant's position are more limited than those described at Level 2-3 because of his assignment as the sole computer specialist providing technical support to a group of users in a line activity. The appellant's supervisor is not a computer specialist and does not have the expertise to provide technical direction or to evaluate the technical aspects of the appellant's job assignment. The appellant is expected to independently carry out his ongoing job responsibilities on his own initiative based on his technical expertise and knowledge of organizational goals. Special project assignments are given in general terms of objectives and timeframes to be met. The appellant's supervisor expects him to exercise his technical knowledge and expertise in developing solutions to operating problems and to know which problems need referral to offsite technicians located in the design centers.

This type of supervisory control is comparable to that described at Level 2-4 in which the supervisor sets the overall objectives and, in consultation with the employee, determines timeframes. An employee at Level 2-4 independently plans and carries out projects and analyses of the organization's requirements; interprets policies, procedures, and regulations in conformance with established mission objectives; integrates and coordinates the work of others as necessary; and resolves most conflicts that arise. The employee informs the supervisor about progress, potentially controversial matters, or far-reaching implications. Completed work is reviewed from an overall standpoint in terms of feasibility, compatibility with other work, or effectiveness in meeting requirements or achieving expected results.

Level 2-4 is credited for 450 points.

Factor 3 - Guidelines:

This factor covers the nature of guidelines used, and the judgment needed to apply them. The agency credited Level 3-3 for this factor. The appellant does not contest this determination.

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 Air Force wide supply management systems. Overall guidelines on supply systems operations are contained in the Air Force's supply program manual, AFM-23-110. 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 his 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.

Level 3-4 is not met. 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 a LAN user group of Air Force wide supply systems. Guidelines governing the operations of the 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 does 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. The agency credited Level 4-3 for this factor. The appellant believes Level 4-4 is appropriate.

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 the automated supply 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, supply 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 work requires consideration of considerable data. The level of difficulty is typified by developing programming specifications for major modifications to existing systems, or new systems where precedents exist at the same general scale of operation as the new systems. Decisions at this level involve assessing situations complicated by conflicting or insufficient data and testing of different approaches.

Level 4-4 is not met. 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 the supply management information 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. The agency credited Level 5-3 for this factor. The appellant agrees with this determination.

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 meets the criteria at Level 5-3. The appellant is responsible for the care and maintenance of the LAN and its associated personal computers. Troubleshooting activities are confined to his assigned service organizations at [installation]. In exercising his technical expertise, he relies on established practices and commonly accepted

techniques for resolving user problems. Unusual problems and situations are referred to the program systems design center 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.

Level 5-4 is not met. The appellant's position does not have the scope described at this level, (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. The agency credited Level 2b for these combined factors. The appellant believes that Level 2c is appropriate for these factors.

Personal Contacts

Level 2 is assigned for this factor. At this level, contacts, in addition to those within the immediate organization, are with employees in the agency but outside the immediate organization. The appellant has regular and recurring contacts with ADP personnel at the design centers at Gunter, Robbins and Brooks AFBs in addition to the telecommunications contractor at [installation].

Although the appellant has occasional contacts with vendor representatives, the full intent of Level 3 is not met in that such contacts are not an ongoing job assignment. In addition to contacts with vendor representatives, Level 3 describes contacts with computer personnel of other agencies, representatives of professional associations, and the like. This level 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 are limited to the individual users he supports, Air Force ADP personnel who support the nationwide supply management information systems, local telecommunications experts, and his immediate organizational superiors.

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.

Level c is not met. 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 supply data management system. This requirement is established by the Air Force and is a basic requirement of the users' jobs.

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 agency credited Level 8-1. The appellant disagrees with this determination.

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.

It is recognized that, on occasion, 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. The agency credited Level 9-1, and the appellant agrees.

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	2-4	450
3. Guidelines	3-3	275
4. Complexity	4-3	150
5. Scope and Effect	5-3	150
6. Personal Contacts and 7. Purpose of Contacts	6-2 7-b	75
8. Physical Demands	8-1	5
9. Work Environment	9-1	5
	TOTAL	2060

A total of 2060 points falls with the range for a GS-09, 1855 to 2100 points, according to the Grade Conversion Table in the GS-334 standard.

Decision

This position is properly classified as Computer Specialist (parenthetical designation at the discretion of the agency), GS-334-09. This decision constitutes a classification certificate issued under the authority of section 5112(b) of title 5, United States Code. This certificate is mandatory and binding on all administrative, certifying, payroll, disbursing, and accounting officials of the Government.