

U.S. Office of Personnel Management  
Office of Merit Systems Oversight and Effectiveness  
Classification Appeals and ELSA 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's name]  
**Agency classification:** Computer Assistant, GS-335-9  
**Organization:** [appellant's activity]  
[name of] Air Force Base, [state]  
**OPM decision:** Computer Assistant, GS-335-9  
**OPM decision number:** C-0335-09-01

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

7/24/98  
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]

Civilian Personnel Officer  
[address of servicing personnel office]

Director of Civilian Personnel  
HQ USAF/DPCC  
1040 Air Force Pentagon  
Washington DC 20330-1040

Director, Civilian Personnel Operations  
U.S. Department of the Air Force  
AFPC/DPC  
550 C Street West  
Randolph Air Force Base, TX 78150-4759

Chief, Classification Branch  
Field Advisory Services Division  
Defense Civilian Personnel Management  
Service  
1400 Key Boulevard, Suite B-200  
Arlington, VA 22209-5144

## **Introduction**

The Dallas Oversight Division of the Office of Personnel Management received an appeal on April 29, 1998, from [appellant's name]. Her position is currently classified as Computer Assistant, GS-335-09. The position had formerly been classified as a Computer Specialist, GS-334-09. A request was made to review the position for upgrade. The result of that review was that the position should be classified as a Computer Assistant, GS-335-10. The appellant then filed an appeal of that decision with the Defense Civilian Personnel Management Service who determined the position was properly classified as Computer Assistant, GS-335-09. The appellant believes the position should be classified as a Computer Specialist GS-334 at the 11 or 12 grade level. The position is assigned to the [appellant's activity] located at [name of] Air Force Base in [city and state]. We have accepted and decided this appeal under the provisions of section 5112 of title 5, United States Code.

## **Position information**

The record indicates that the primary purpose of the position is to supervise and manage all aspects of the information systems used by the [activity]. The [appellant's activity] consists of the appellant and the two military staff sergeants assigned. The unit supports approximately 250 personal computers and related equipment for the medical group's staff of about 385 persons. The medical group is connected by a local area network (LAN), is part of the base local and wide area networks (WAN), and has access to several Defense-wide medical information systems. These include the Composite Health Care System, a satellite system off a mainframe located at [an Army installation] and also connected to the hospital at the [an Air Force installation]; Ambulatory Data Collection System that tracks patient encounter data for workload and costing information; Expense Assignment System used to monitor workload, manpower, and expenses for the Medical Expense Performance Reporting System; Defense Medical Logistics Standard System, a logistics ordering system; Centralized Credentials and Quality Assurance System, a data base containing information on credentialed physicians; and Third Party Outpatient Collections, to bill and collect payment for services to military members from private insurance companies.

The appellant is responsible for providing advice to the [major organization] Commander and his staff on the capabilities, needs, and problems of the automated systems. She monitors the operation of the network systems to assure hardware and software are functioning properly and uses established techniques to identify and resolve network related problems. She acts as the project officer for the installation of new systems, providing coordination to assure that the equipment and facilities are in place to support the systems, and provides customer assistance and training for the Department of Defense (DOD) medical systems as well as other software used for word processing, presentations, e-mail, etc. She reviews user requests for additional computer equipment and software, gathers information, prioritizes requests, and makes recommendations to the supervisor for approval by the Communications Squadron. The appellant maintains a computer security program assuring requirements for system access are met, primarily to preserve sensitive information covered by the Privacy Act. She provides or arranges training for those persons designated as computer systems security officers within the medical group, maintains the inventory of computer equipment assigned to the group, and assures that accreditation and certification packages are prepared in accordance with Wing and Air Force requirements.

A more complete description of the duties and responsibilities is contained in the position description and other official documents in the appeal record. The appellant and her supervisor have certified as to the accuracy of the position description of record, [number]. The position description is adequate for classification purposes.

### **Series and title determination**

The GS-334 Computer Specialist 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. This comprehensive knowledge of computer requirements and techniques is used to analyze and design the subject matter processes to be automated; select or designate the equipment to be used; or develop and design data processing systems.

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

We have very carefully reviewed all of the information in the written appeal record; OPM position classification standards for the GS-334 Computer Specialist, GS-335 Computer Clerk and Assistant, and GS-332 Computer Operation occupations; and the General Schedule Supervisory Guide. In addition, we conducted telephone interviews with the appellant and her supervisor concerning the duties and responsibilities of the position. Based on that review of information, we find the appellant's duties fall within the work covered by the GS-335 Computer Clerk and Assistant Series. While the appellant works with data systems and monitors the operation of those systems, she is not responsible for the design or maintenance of those systems, as expected of the GS-334 Computer Specialist. The medical information systems were designed and are maintained by various DOD components who determine appropriate updates, the contractors to be involved, interface needs, etc. The appellant's work with these systems involves monitoring operation and providing the initial troubleshooting of operating problems, providing input and making recommendations to resolve local operating situations/problems through the Communications Squadron or the DOD agency, and providing coordination for the teams who do the actual on-site installation of new or updated systems and equipment.

As indicated in the GS-335 standard, some computer assistants at full performance levels perform duties much like those assigned to entry and trainee level computer specialists. Such support work typically requires knowledge of the scope, contents, and purposes of program documentation. Duties may also require a working knowledge of programming languages. Some work may require knowledge of system hardware such as the number and kind of devices, operating speeds, amount

of core and other equipment characteristics. This knowledge may also be supplemented by knowledge of internal software routines. We find this situation in reviewing the work of the appellant's position. The position is properly covered by the GS-335 Computer Clerk and Assistant Series.

We do not find the position meets the criteria for coverage by the General Schedule Supervisory Guide. Coverage under the Guide requires supervisory responsibilities that require the accomplishment of work through combined technical and administrative direction of others; constitute a major duty occupying at least 25 percent of the position's time; and meet at least the lowest level of Factor 3. The appellant is responsible for overseeing the work of two military service members, E-5's, assigned. Although she estimates approximately 30 percent of her time involves supervisory responsibilities for these employees, the duty statements for these positions reflect work usually performed with a reasonable degree of independence from supervision, e.g., training functional managers, assisting users, troubleshooting and repair of hardware, etc. We find it unlikely that the appellant would be required to spend more than 25 percent of her time performing the kind of supervisory responsibilities required, e.g., preparing work plans and schedules, developing performance standards and evaluating performance, resolving complaints and disciplinary problems, etc. We concur with the agency's determination that the position is not appropriately covered under the General Schedule Supervisory Guide. In accordance with titling instructions, Computer Assistant is the proper title.

### **Grade determination**

As the position is allocated to the GS-335 series, the position classification standard for that series is to be used in determining the grade level of the position. The GS-335 standard uses the Factor Evaluation system (FES), which employs nine factors. Under the FES, each factor level description in a standard describes the minimum characteristics needed to receive credit for the described level. Therefore, if a position fails to meet the criteria in a factor level description in any significant aspects, it must be credited at a lower level. Conversely, the position may exceed those criteria in some aspects and still not be credited at a higher level. Position factors that exceed or fall short of the described factor levels are compared to the Primary Standard which serves as the framework for each FES standard. Our evaluation with respect to the nine FES factors follows.

#### *Factor 1, Knowledge required by the position*

This factor measures the nature and extent of information or facts which the worker 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 these knowledges. To be used as a basis for selecting a level under this factor, a knowledge must be required and applied.

At the 1-5 level, employees carry out limited specialized projects and assignments using knowledge of fundamental data processing methods, practices, and techniques in work involving development, test, implementation, and modification of computer programs and operating procedures. In addition,

the employee uses knowledge of data content and output options for a variety of program applications processed on multi-program operating systems. Employees use knowledge of time sharing, remote job entry, batch and demand processing for work such as allocating core or writing new program documentation and operating procedures. Knowledges at this level are used as the bases for analysis and decision making in several functional settings.

In addition to the knowledge described at Level 1-5, employees at Level 1-6 use extensive knowledge of at least one multi, and typically several single, processor computer systems. They monitor processing work flow and diagnose and resolve error and problem conditions involving many program interrelationships and interlocking computer systems. This work requires extensive knowledge of computer equipment, internal computer processes, applications and utility programs, and magnetic media. It requires a knowledge of a wide range of analytical and diagnostic methods, procedures, and principles. Knowledge is required of some elements of programming, systems analysis, and equipment operations. These knowledges are used to identify the nature and source of problems occurring during processing and to plan and implement solutions. Employees use these knowledges to advise specialists in setting up run instructions and developing effective operating methods. Work at this level commonly involves taking action to order and interpret system dumps, order and implement back-up recovery procedures to replace faulty tapes or disks, reallocating equipment usage to work around equipment malfunctions, etc.

The record indicates the appellant's position requires knowledge of a wide range of computer techniques, requirements, sources, and procedures. Extensive knowledge is needed of the current system software that is supported at the clinic, including the operating systems and application software packages. Extensive knowledge and troubleshooting skills are needed to support the information systems equipment located in the clinic. This includes minicomputers, microcomputers, scanners, laser and color printers, modems, terminals, and system file servers. Telecommunication, LAN, and WAN skills are also needed to support systems using those services. The appellant uses those knowledges to identify the source of failures in computer system operations and take action to correct the problem and restore operations. This knowledge of the equipment and the system requirements is used to provide the coordination when new or updated systems are deployed and to provide recommendations on purchase of new equipment. We find this fully meets the 1-6 level, the highest level described. The duties of the position do not require the more comprehensive, intensive knowledges in order to develop new methods, approaches, or procedures, as required at the 1-7 level of the Primary Standard. Systems development and modification work is performed by the responsible DOD agency. 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, and the review of completed work.

At the 2-3 level, the supervisor provides direction on objectives and priorities for new work, deadlines, and deadline changes for new and established work. The employee identifies the work to be done, plans and carries out the steps required, and submits completed work to users without

supervisory review. The employee independently deviates from instructions to provide for such situations as changing priorities and commonly adapts or develops new work procedures and instructions. The employee will seek supervisory assistance and discuss problems such as when processing requests appear to exceed system capacity or could adversely effect other requirements. Completed work is reviewed for conformity to deadlines, and accepted practices and work methods are not normally reviewed.

The appellant's supervisor indicated that she is basically responsible for the day-to-day work of the unit. The appellant plans and carries out the work, interpreting procedures and regulations, and developing local instructions. Much of the work is generated by hardware and software malfunctions and requests for assistance from users. The appellant identifies the nature of the problems, i.e., hardware or software, and attempts to resolve them using established procedures. If she is unable to resolve the problem, she is able to contact the base Communications Squadron or the contractors responsible for managing the medical systems for assistance and will work with them by telephone. The appellant indicates that, on most project assignments, the priorities and deadlines are primarily determined outside the organization by the contractor or DOD agency responsible for the work. She keeps the supervisor informed on the progress of work projects and potential problems or controversial matters. Other projects, such as recommendations for purchase of new equipment and/or software, must be reviewed and approved through the chain of command and the Communications Squadron. Overall, we find the supervisory controls most comparable to the 2-3 level, the highest described in the standard. We do not find that the appellant's position fully meets the criteria for 2-4 of the primary standard, e.g., developing deadlines, projects, and work to be done in consultation with the supervisor. While the problem solving work is reviewed only in terms of results, other work is reviewed more in accordance with the 2-3 level, for technical soundness, appropriateness, and conformity to policy and requirements. Level 2-3 and 275 points are credited.

### *Factor 3, Guidelines*

This factor covers the nature of guidelines used in doing the work and the judgment that is needed to apply them.

At Level 3-3, the employee works with new requirements or new applications for which only general guidelines are available. The employee uses judgment in adjusting the most appropriate guidelines to fit new processing requirements or develops new methods for accomplishing the work. Guidelines may require modification to provide for such things as new requirements or adapting to new hardware/software capacity. This is the highest level described in the standard.

The appellant has available the appropriate Air Force and base policies, procedures, and instructions. While technical guidelines are available on the operation of the equipment and systems, judgment must be used in resolving operating problems and integrating new equipment and software into the existing systems. We find this most comparable to the 3-3 level, the highest described in the standard. By comparison, Level 3-4 of the Primary Standard indicates that administrative policies and procedures are applicable but stated in general terms. Guidelines for performing the work are scarce

or of limited use. It also indicates the employee deviates from traditional methods or researches trends and patterns to develop new methods, criteria, or proposed new policies. While the appellant must adapt guides and precedents, we do not find she is expected to develop new criteria or policies. She has developed instructions such as processes for requesting new equipment and for security procedures to protect sensitive information protected by the Privacy Act. However, these are local procedures based on existing agency policy and instructions rather than those typical of the 3-4 level. 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 in identifying what needs to be done; and the difficulty and originality involved in performing the work.

At Level 4-3, 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, identifying the sequence of procedures and methods needed to process the request or resolve error conditions. Actions to be taken differ according to the equipment or program system and how the job is to be processed.

The 4-4 level is distinguished from 4-3 by: (1) the variety and complexity of operating systems monitored; (2) the nature and variety of problems encountered and resolved; and (3) the nature of independent decisions made by the employee. The employee typically monitors the operations of several major computer systems. Programs run are a mix of independent and interdependent applications. Employees at this level perform problem solving duties involving a wide range of problem or error conditions in equipment, program data, and processing methods and procedures. Diagnosis and resolution of error and problem conditions involve equipment configurations having different operating characteristics, a wide variety of data and programs, and many different processes and methods to arrive at solutions or develop new procedures. Decisions include assessing unusual circumstances or conditions, developing variations in approach to fit specific problems, or dealing with incomplete or insufficient data. The employee makes decisions and devises solutions based on program, equipment, and systems knowledge.

As described at the 4-4 level, the appellant's problem solving duties involve a wide range of problems or error conditions. She is responsible for monitoring a variety of systems. The medical systems, some of which have interrelated data, use different operating systems. The networked systems serve several different buildings. Modified or new systems must be able to interface with the local facility and the capabilities or limitations of the base LAN/WAN systems. Physical relocations and reconfigurations may also create problems that the appellant is involved in resolving. We find the appellant's position meets the 4-4 level. The appellant did not question credit at the 4-4 level for this factor. Level 4-4 is credited for 225 points.



### *Factor 5, Scope and effect*

This factor covers the relationship between the nature of the work and the effect of the work products or services both within and outside the organization.

The 5-3 level is distinguished from the 5-2 by the addition of requirements for solving problems and answering technical questions about control, scheduling, and/or direct support functions. The problems encountered are conventional to data processing although solutions are not always covered by established procedures. Results of the work affect the efficiency of processing services and adequacy of products used in subsequent activities. One of the examples provided describes 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.

The medical information systems help facilitate the work of the patient care facilities and provide management information regarding workload, costs, etc. The appellant provides assistance to local users of those systems and the base LAN/WAN systems in the event of system problems, provides training for new users and for new or updated systems, and coordinates and assists in the installation of new or revised systems. The unit is responsible for support of networked minicomputers, microcomputers, terminals, file servers, network communication devices, printers, etc., located in several different buildings. The appellant provides advice and assistance to users on operating problems and provides or arranges for training on various systems and applications. She reviews requests from managers for additional equipment and software and makes recommendations to higher levels based on compatibility with present systems, costs, and effectiveness in meeting the organization's needs. These services affect the computer operations of the medical group, as typical of Level 5-3. The appellant's work is not of the scope typical of Level 5-4 of the Primary Standard, i.e., affecting a wide range of agency activities, major activities or industrial concerns, or the operations of other agencies. Level 5-3 is credited for 150 points.

### *Factor 6, Personal contacts*

This factor considers face-to-face and telephone contacts with persons not in the supervisory chain.

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

The appellant's primary contacts are with employees within the unit, users within the [appellant's major organization], computer and other staff members from the base, counterparts at other medical facilities within the region and the DOD agencies with responsibility for the various medical systems, and vendors and contractors responsible for repair and installation of equipment. This is most comparable to the 6-2 level of the standard. The appellant's primary contacts are more routine and

the role and authority of each party is defined, unlike contacts at the 6-3 level of the Primary Standard. Level 6-2 is credited for 25 points.

*Factor 7, Purpose of contacts*

This factor deals with the purpose of the contacts selected in Factor 6.

At Level 7-2, the purpose of contacts is to plan or coordinate changes in scheduling requirements or priorities due to problems; to participate with users in planning and coordinating new or modified requirements; or to plan user participation, methodology, and deadlines for new projects.

The appellant's contacts are for the purpose of coordinating work, solving problems, or providing advice to managers on the automated systems, computer equipment, software, etc. This is comparable to the 7-2 level of the standard, the highest level described. The Primary Standard at the 7-2 level describes the purpose of contacts as planning, coordinating, or advising on work efforts or to resolve operating problems by influencing or motivating individuals or groups who are working toward mutual goals and have basically cooperating attitudes. At the 7-3 level the purpose is to motivate, interrogate, or control persons or groups. These persons maybe fearful, skeptical, uncooperative, or dangerous. Contacts with this purpose are not found in the appellant's position. 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 and the physical exertion involved in the work.

At the 8-2 level, the position requires extended periods of standing, walking, stretching, bending, stooping, or carrying loads of paper, tapes, or cards that may weigh as much as 45 pounds.

The record indicates that the appellant's work requires moderate physical activity, lifting up to 30 pounds, and periodically crawling into confined spaces. This is comparable to the 8-2 level and is not questioned by the appellant. 20 points are credited.

*Factor 9, Work environment*

This factor covers the risks and discomforts in the physical surroundings and the safety precautions needed.

At the 9-1 level, work involves common risks or discomforts, requiring normal safety precautions typical of offices, meeting rooms, etc. The work area is adequately lighted, heated, and ventilated.

The appellant works primarily in an office environment; however, some equipment may be in small or poorly lighted areas such as communications closets, mechanical rooms, etc. This would not fully meet the requirements for the 9-2 level, i.e., work environment involves moderate risks or discomforts that require special safety precautions and may require use of protective clothing, etc. Level 9-1 is credited for 5 points.

### *Summary*

A total of 1975 points has been credited. Using the grade conversion table of the standard, 1975 points fall within the grade point range for the GS-9 grade level (1855 - 2100 points).

### **Decision**

The position is properly classified as Computer Assistant, GS-335-9.