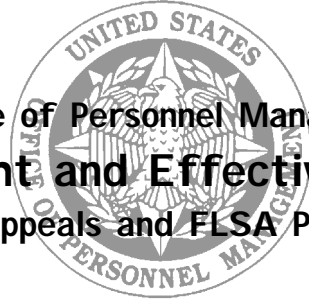


U.S. Office of Personnel Management
Office of Merit Systems Oversight and Effectiveness
Classification Appeals and FLSA Programs



Philadelphia Oversight Division
600 Arch Street, Room 3400
Philadelphia, PA 19106-1596

Classification Appeal Decision
Under Section 5346 of Title 5, United States Code

Appellant: [appellant's name]

Agency classification: Carpenter
WG-4607-9

Organization: Carpenter Shop
Maintenance and Repair Section
Engineering Service
VA Medical Center
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
[location]

OPM decision: Carpenter
WG-4607-9

OPM decision number: C-4607-09-02

Robert D. Hendler
Classification Appeals Officer

/s/ 1/25/99
Date

As provided in section S7-8 of the Operating Manual, Federal Wage System, this decision constitutes a certificate that is mandatory and binding on all administrative, certifying, payroll, disbursing, and accounting officials of the government. There is no right of further appeal. This decision is subject to discretionary review only under conditions specified in section 532.705(f) of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations (address provided in appendix 4, section H).

Decision sent to:

[appellant's name]
Engineering Service
VA Medical Center
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
[location]

[name]
Business Office Manager
VA Medical Center
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
[location]

Mr. Ronald E. Cowles
Deputy Assistant Secretary for Personnel and
Labor Relations
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Washington, DC 20420

Introduction

On November 19, 1998, the Philadelphia Oversight Division of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted a job grading appeal from [appellant's name]. He occupies a job currently graded as Carpenter, WG-4607-9. The appellant believes his job should be evaluated as a Wood Crafter, WG-4605-10. He works in the Carpenter Shop, Maintenance and Repair Section, Engineering Service, Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center, [location]. We have accepted and decided his appeal under section 5346 of title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.).

General issues

In his September 9, 1998, appeal letter to his agency, the appellant said that his job was improperly downgraded from Wood Crafter, WG-4605-10 to Carpenter, WG-4607-9. The record shows the appellant does not disagree with the accuracy of his official job description (JD) (Job Number 5261-A), but claims that the duties and responsibilities he performs have not been evaluated correctly. In particular, he stressed his responsibility for making "complex furniture items for home, office, and medical areas," and making "special items for disabled people." This work includes designing the items in consultation with the user, interpreting plans and discussing changes with customers, frequently using patterns or templates to assure accuracy, using several different types of material for work products, and modifying machines to achieve the proper contours on special wood and plastic items. The appellant said he received little supervision, and worked directly with the customer or end user.

Underlying the appellant's rationale is that he continues to perform the same work that was evaluated as Wood Crafter, WG-4605-10 in 1991 by the VA Medical Center human resources office, and reclassification as Carpenter, WG-4607-9 on June 26, 1998, by that office was inappropriate.

By law, we must grade jobs solely by comparing their current duties and responsibilities to OPM job grading standards (JGS's) and guidelines (5 U.S.C. 5346) and instructions. Other methods of evaluation, such as comparison to other jobs that may or may not have been graded correctly, are not authorized for use in grading a job. The job grading appeal process is a de novo review that includes a determination as to the duties and responsibilities assigned by management and performed by the appellant, and constitutes the proper application of JGS's to those duties and responsibilities. The high level of talent and productivity stressed by the appellant and his supervisors deal with how well work is performed, and are issues covered by the performance management and awards programs.

We have evaluated the work assigned by management and performed by the appellant according to established job grading requirements. In reaching our decision, we carefully reviewed the information provided by both the appellant and his agency, including the appellant's JD of record. In addition, we conducted a telephone audit with the appellant on December 16, 1998, and a follow-up audit on January 14, 1999, to discuss additional pictures of work examples and work order information provided by the appellant at our request. We conducted telephone interviews on January 14, 1999, with the appellant's immediate supervisor, [supervisor's name], and his second level supervisor, [supervisor's name]. We find the JD of record contains the major duties and responsibilities assigned by management and performed by the appellant and is hereby incorporated by reference into this

decision. As discussed in this decision, the JD requires correction concerning the nature of furniture and cabinet fabrication and repair work performed.

Job information

The record shows the appellant is one of two employees on identical additional JD's. The JD states the appellant's "woodcrafter" work includes: (1) constructing and repairing furniture, cabinetry, orthopedic devices and decorative woodwork; (2) making and repairing high grade wooden items such as cornices, moldings and millwork used in the early 1900's to match the existing items that have intricate, precise and many fancy features and details; and (3) making furniture to fit into nonstandard areas requiring "intricate, precise, contoured surfaces with inlays and complex joints . . . [including] desks, computer work stations, tables, etc." This work also includes repairing "late 1800, early 1900 decorative woodwork" used on columns, steps, entrances, and cornices.

In his letter of September 30, 1998, in support of the appellant's agency level appeal, the second level supervisor stated the facility has more than 50 buildings, and is a registered historic site with buildings dating to 1877. The appellant must maintain "ornate facades, columns, cornice and detailed interior woodwork." This work requires "the ability to set up or create templates and patterns using creative techniques and specialized tools" and using jigs and fixtures "when using multihead cutters to duplicate moldings." The supervisor said the computer work stations with built-in desks, drawers, and cabinetry fabricated by the appellant involved maximizing available space by fitting them into nonstandard areas "with configurations that require intricate and precise measurement." The appellant performs this work "With nothing more than sketches or verbal description from the end user."

The record shows that the appellant periodically matches wall panel components and molding by milling and/or hand finishing in limited areas of the facility. He has rebuilt portions of external Doric-style wood columns by laminating lumber together and subsequently rounding and shaping the section. Using multihead cutters and other equipment, he mills external molding and trim to match those on Victorian buildings at the VA Medical Center and, working from templates drawn from existing lumber, fabricates replacement lumber for canopies, overhangs, and similar external wooden structures and components. The appellant has used similar techniques to repair the chapel's panel door.

Our fact-finding revealed that furniture fabricated by the appellant preponderantly consists of office desks, bookcases, cabinets and equivalent items. Some have raised oak panels on doors and drawers typical of commercial ready-made office furniture. Most are fabricated from plywood or equivalent wood substitutes, and are covered with wood grained or plainer plastic laminate. Typically, they are smoothed to eliminate sharp edges and may be trimmed with oak molding. These items are custom-fit by carefully measuring, and may require scribing or creating templates so that the items will fit properly. The appellant has constructed cabinets to match ready-made kitchen cabinets and milled matching crown molding, fabricated plywood backs to chapel seats shaped as desired by the upholsterer, crafted communion cup holders to blend in with the backs of the chapel seats, and fabricated brochure holders that were doweled and glued together. Veneer work is limited, typically

involving matching a small piece of veneered particle board from a similar board. The special items he has fabricated for disabled people are typified by making up a plexiglass tray for a wheel chair by heating, bending, and then cutting the tray to shape.

Occupation, title, and standards determination

The agency has allocated the appellant's job as Carpenter, WG-4607, while the appellee states that it should be allocated as Wood Crafter, WG-4605.

The Wood Crafter, WG-4605 JGS covers making and repairing high-grade wooden items such as fine cabinetry and furniture. This involves shaping and contouring surfaces; precise, intricate joining and decorating (such as inlays, scroll work, and friezes); skilled use of the full range of woodworking tools, machines, and techniques; and application of extensive knowledge of the appearance, durability, strength, and machining characteristics of a wide range of wood and wood substitutes.

In contrast, the Carpenter, WG-4607 JGS covers constructing, maintaining, altering, and repairing buildings and other structures, partitions, panels, tool cabinets, book cases, work benches and similar items, and constructing and repairing frames, floors, walls, and shelves, and installing windows, doors, and completed or ready-made cabinetry. This includes constructing, altering, or repairing furniture which does not require complex shaping and contouring of surfaces, intricate joining and decorating, and extensive knowledge of a wide range of wood and wood substitutes. The work requires knowledge of construction and repair techniques; the type, grade, and working characteristics of wood and wood substitute materials such as strength and application; and skill and accuracy in operating hand and power tools and equipment.

The record shows that the appellant works with a substantial range of wood and wood substitute items. The furniture and cabinetry that he fabricates and repairs, however, are not high grade wooden items within the meaning of the Wood Crafter, WG-4605 JGS. Items fabricated and repaired covered by that occupation have intricate, precise and fancy features and details such as curved and contoured surfaces, marquetry, book-matched panels, scroll-work, friezes, inlays and complex joints. Examples of such work include crafting period reproduction furniture or repairing reproduction and original furniture, carefully matching woods and veneers; turning and fluting legs and other complex components; using traditional hand crafting techniques and complex machining techniques to meet exacting finish and appearance requirements.

In contrast, the appellant fabricates and repairs items typical of journey-level carpenters. These items include door and window frames, interior and exterior trim, workbenches, counter tops, bookcases, equipment cabinets, computer consoles, and items requiring decorative trim and molding less fancy, intricate, and precise than covered by the WG-4605 occupation. Typical of that work is using a variety of joining techniques such as miters, rabbets, dados, biscuit and mortise and tenon, and using glues and adhesives to secure wood pieces, veneers, and counter tops. Journey-level carpentry work includes more limited shaping and contouring than found in the WG-4605 occupation. Full performance level carpentry work also includes milling lumber for jobs in which close tolerance fit

and finish are important, and fully covers the milling or replacement lumber for the Victorian structures at the medical center.

Grade determination

In the Federal Wage System (FWS), grade levels of jobs are not determined by accumulation of grade levels of work performed, but by the highest grade of work that is regular and recurring as defined by established OPM job grading guidance. To be credited, a level in a JGS must be met fully.

Evaluation using the Carpenter WG-4607 JGS

The WG-4607 JGS uses four factors for grade determination: *Skill and Knowledge*, *Responsibility*, *Physical Effort*, and *Working Conditions*. Typical of many trades and crafts jobs at higher grade levels in the FWS, *Physical Effort* and *Working Conditions* are the same at all levels defined in the JGS. These two factors have grade level significance only in lower graded jobs. For example, heavier physical demands help to distinguish between Laborer, WG-3502-2 and WG-3502-3 work. They are not grade determining for WG-4607 or other skilled trades and crafts work. Therefore, we will not address them in detail.

Skill and Knowledge

The appellant's work meets the Grade 9 level, the highest level described in the JGS. At that level, carpenters apply a thorough knowledge of wood and wood substitute materials, and construction techniques, and are skilled in the operation of general and precision carpentry and woodworking equipment to produce finished products with precise fits, accurate dimensions, and acceptable appearance. They are able to interpret complex instructions, sketches, blueprints, and building codes, and measure for layouts, e.g., those required to construct footings for structural foundations and construct concrete forms and related structures, with little or no supervisory guidance. Grade 9 carpenters use advanced shop mathematics to plan, compute, and lay out more complex and exact projects with features such as arcs, tangents, and circles. They are able to determine the proper grade, size, and type of lumber or wood substitute material required for the job.

Grade 9 carpenters are skilled in setting up and operating the full range of industrial woodworking and related machinery such as routers, band and scroll saws, and drill presses, and in operating and using power and hand tools and other woodworking equipment such as portable drills, clippers, joiners, shavers, tenoners, sanders, routers, power activated nailers, combustion type saws, screw fasteners, drill presses, and table saws. They set up and adjust stationary power equipment performing routine maintenance on equipment by lubricating machines, changing and sharpening saw blades, and by adjusting drive belt tensions. Grade 9 carpenters are able to mill heavy lumber, cut bevels, rabbets, chamfers, grooves, and compound miter joints, and apply plastic laminates to wood and other surfaces on counter tops, cabinets, desk tops, and tables. The more demanding projects performed by the appellant as discussed previously, e.g., fabricating office furniture, calendar and chart holders, and repairing medical center paneling, molds and trim, involve applying the full range of skill and knowledge typical of Grade 9 carpenters, including the use of patterns and templates to

match existing items. As at this grade 9 level, the appellant's work requires setting up and operating a wide variety of wood working machines and tools, including table saws, band saws, scroll saws, radial arm saws, power miter saws, shapers, drill presses, bench sanders, planers, and joiners to accomplish this work.

Responsibility

At the grade 9 level, carpenters lay out work, determine material and equipment needs, and plan and accomplish a wide range of work sequences ranging from basic repairs to complex project segments with minimal supervision or review of work in progress. Grade 9 carpenters use initiative and judgment in accomplishing work assignments, evaluating problems and determining how or what repairs to make, and the type and grade of wood or appropriate wood substitute materials and type of tools to use. They accomplish all phases of work independently including work requiring close tolerances, precise fit, and a finished appearance, and typically initiate and complete assignments under minimal supervision. Review of work is primarily for compliance with building codes, objectives, timeliness, and quality of workmanship. Grade 9 carpenters are responsible for safely operating powered equipment and hand tools and adhering to all safety procedures.

The appellant's working directly with the end users, independently sketching and laying out projects, and independently planning and performing work sequences are typical of grade 9 level responsibility. As at the grade 9 level, the appellant determines the most appropriate materials and tools to use in order to meet close tolerances, precise fit, and finished appearance, e.g., custom fitting office furniture desk, bookcase, cabinet, shelving and counter tops into offices, and custom fitting similar items into patient, laboratory, and other work areas of the medical center. The appellant also receives the minimal supervision and oversight typical of the grade 9 level.

The *Physical Effort* and *Working Conditions* present in the appellant's work closely match those defined at both grade levels in the JGS.

Summary

Applying established FWS and grading principles, we find the appellant's job is graded properly as Carpenter, WG-4607-9.