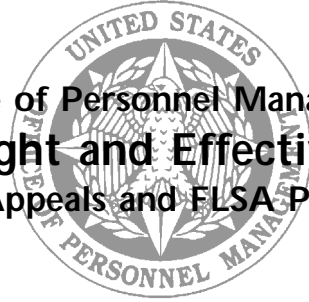


U.S. Office of Personnel Management
Office of Merit Systems Oversight and Effectiveness
Classification Appeals and FLSA Programs



Dallas Oversight Division
1100 Commerce Street, Room 4C22
Dallas, TX 75242

Classification Appeal Decision
Under Section 5112 of Title 5, United States Code

Appellant: [appellant's name]

Agency classification: Public Information Assistant
GS-303-6

Organization: Minerals Management Service
Department of the Interior
[geographic location]

OPM decision: GS-303-6
title at agency discretion

OPM decision number: C-0303-06-03

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

2/24/00
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:

[servicing personnel office]

Director of Personnel
U.S. Department of the Interior
Mail Stop 5221
1849 C Street, NW.
Washington, DC 20240

Introduction

On November 1, 1999, the Dallas Oversight Division of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted an appeal from [the appellant]. The appealed position is assigned to the [appellant's activity], Minerals Management Service, Department of the Interior, [geographic location]. The agency has classified the position as Public Information Assistant, GS-303-6. The appellant believes his position should be classified as Public Information Assistant, GS-303-7, and has filed an appeal with this office under the provisions of section 5112 of title 5, United States Code.

The appellant believes that the agency's evaluation of his position does not adequately reflect the scope and complexity of his current responsibilities. He states that he is performing more complex work, with a significant amount being higher level duties. The appellant is assigned to position description [number], as amended. The appellant, his supervisor, and the agency have certified to the accuracy of this position description.

Position information

The appellant is one of four Public Information Assistants who report to the GS-303-8 Public Information Supervisor in the [appellant's activity]. The appellant provides information and assistance to representatives of the oil related industry and the general public involving a broad range of inquiries. His responses are based on regulatory requirements and related administrative practices and policies. The appellant's duties include responding to customer inquiries by searching through multiple manual and digital data management systems. He informs customers of the availability and format of a wide range of public information and handles inquiries relating to leasing, production, wells, pipelines, and geologic, environmental, and platform activities. He works with a wide variety of subject matter and computer applications and many facets of information from all regional offices. The appellant must understand the basic leasing and operations activities in order to explain processes and availability of information from each regional office. He receives and evaluates written requests for public information, determining completeness of request and availability of data in accordance with [Region] Operating Regulations.

Series, title, and guide determination

The agency placed the position in the Miscellaneous Clerk and Assistant Series, GS-303. The appellant does not contest the occupational series determination. The GS-303 series includes positions the duties of which are to perform or supervise clerical, assistant, or technician work for which no other series is appropriate. The work requires knowledge of the procedures and techniques involved in carrying out the work of an organization and involves application of procedures and practices within the framework of established guidelines. The basic work processes associated with the appellant's assignments are clerical in nature. The appellant performs a number of support functions requiring knowledge of information management and

clerical and administrative procedures, instructions, regulations, and directives as they relate to his employing organization. The appellant's position is properly placed in the GS-303 series.

The GS-303 series does not specify titles. Therefore, the agency may designate an appropriate title by following the guidance in the *Introduction to the Position Classification Standards*.

Positions classified in the GS-303 series are graded by application of the Grade Level Guide for Clerical and Assistance Work, unless another one-grade interval guide or standard contains more appropriate grade level criteria for evaluating the work. Because of the mixed nature of the appellant's work, the position is best graded by means of the Grade Level Guide for Clerical and Assistance Work.

Grade determination

The Guide describes evaluation criteria in terms of two narrative factors: *Nature of assignment* and *Level of responsibility*. These two factors are placed in context with the definition of the grade level as spelled out in law and with illustrative work examples at each grade. The highest level of work described in the Guide is GS-7.

Nature of assignment

This factor addresses the knowledge requirements and the complexity of the work.

At the GS-6 level, work typically entails processing a wide variety of transactions for more than one type of assigned activity or functional specialization. Assignments are subject to different sets of rules, regulations, and procedures. The work requires comprehensive knowledge of rules, regulations, and other guidelines relating to completing assignments in the program area assigned. This knowledge is usually attained through extensive, increasingly difficult, and practical experience and training in the subject-matter field. The work also requires ability to interpret and apply regulatory procedural requirements to process unusually difficult and complicated transactions.

The appellant's assignments compare favorably with work typical of the GS-6 grade level. The appellant responds to requests received through the Internet that pertain to offshore operations and to problems that customers may have in formatting the data that are available on the Minerals Management Service's (MMS) public information Internet site. He independently questions the customers to ascertain their explicit needs, assists them in identifying and focusing on their desired results, and directs Internet users to specific information on the MMS website, e.g., lease sale information, deepwater drilling, digital files. The appellant identifies the different information systems and the specific items within each report within the systems in order to provide accurate and comprehensive assistance to the customer. Each situation requires a different approach because of the diversity of information systems and the need to review each customer's goals. Further, the appellant performs multiple computer functions necessary to respond to customer

needs and provides limited advice and guidance to other employees. The appellant also performs basic office functions necessary to maintain a self-service operation, such as maintenance of data management systems, both manual and digital. Overall, the appellant's assignments parallel the difficulty of assignments described at the GS-6 level for the variety and complexity of transactions and the knowledge and ability required to respond to customers' requests.

Work characteristic of the GS-7 grade level consists of specialized duties with continuing responsibility for projects, questions, or problems that arise within an area of a program or functional specialty. Assignments consist of a series of related actions or decisions prior to final completion, and the decisions or recommendations are based on the development and evaluation of information from various sources. The work involves identifying and studying factors or conditions and determining their interrelationships as appropriate to the defined area of work. The work requires knowledge and skill to recognize the dimensions of the problems involved, collect the necessary information, establish the facts, and take or recommend action based upon application or interpretation of established guidelines. It requires practical knowledge, learned through on-the-job training and experience, to deal with the operations, regulations, principles, and peculiarities of the assigned program, function, or activity.

The nature of the appellant's assignments does not meet the increasingly difficult transactions and the broader program aspects described at the GS-7 level where the employee has continuing responsibility for projects. The appellant's assignments are more repetitive in terms of regulations and procedures to be applied and problems to be handled. His work does not typically involve studying factors or conditions, determining their interrelationships, and recommending action based on an interpretation of established guidelines. In contrast to the GS-7 level, the appellant's assignments do not require him to possess specialized knowledge of a program or functional specialty. Overall, the appellant does not perform a range of clerical or technical work that requires a comprehensive knowledge of special and complex subjects as required at the GS-7 level.

This factor is properly evaluated at the GS-6 level.

Level of responsibility

This factor addresses aspects of the work such as supervisory controls, guidelines, and contacts.

At the GS-6 level, the supervisor assists with precedent assignments by providing an interpretation of policy or the concepts and theories of the work. Completed work is evaluated for appropriateness and effectiveness. Assistants work under a framework of numerous and varied guidelines, but these are often not completely applicable to the assignment or have gaps in specificity. Employees at this level use judgment in interpreting and adapting guidelines and base their decisions and recommendations on facts and conventional interpretations of guidelines rather than on theory or opinion. Contacts with others are to provide, receive, or develop information

in order to identify problems, needs, or issues, and/or to coordinate work efforts or resolve problems.

The appellant's level of responsibility is typical of the GS-6 level. The appellant acts on his own initiative within previously defined parameters to resolve administrative problems. He performs his assigned duties independently, including contact and coordination with customers to identify products sought and explain information sources. Similar to the GS-6 level, the appellant discusses with the supervisor methods, techniques, and problems identified and consults with the supervisor in selecting the correct part of the most appropriate guideline to apply to each of a large variety of actions, e.g., the accuracy of electronic mail inquiries, application of new decisions and rulings in general terms, the quality of service to be provided, the general sequence and priority of work processes. As at the GS-6 level, the appellant's work is governed by varied and numerous guidelines (such as various local policies and directives, historical, and current guidance relating to public release of data). Judgment and initiative are required in interpreting the guidelines, in developing detailed steps, and in adapting previous requests to most efficiently accomplish similar projects. The appellant's contacts are with oil industry representatives; attorneys; survey, pipeline, and platform servicing companies; other government agencies; employees within the agency; and the public for the purpose of explaining what information is available from MMS, the format for retrieval of the information, and the cost that may be involved for providing the product. Although the appellant's external contacts are broader than those described in the Guide at the GS-6 level, the purpose of these contacts does not exceed the GS-6 level.

At the GS-7 level, the supervisor makes assignments by defining objectives, priorities, and deadlines. Employees work independently, using a general understanding of the expected outcomes and the scope of the assignments, and draw upon experience in resolving the more difficult situations that arise. Completed work is evaluated for appropriateness and conformance to policy. Guides, such as regulations, policy statements, and precedent cases, tend to be general and descriptive of intent, and they do not specifically cover all aspects of the assignment. Guidelines apply less to specific actions and more to the operational characteristics and procedural requirements of the program or function. Employees must use significant judgment and interpretation to apply the guides to specific cases and adapt or improvise procedures to accommodate unusual or one-of-a-kind situations. Even though the personal contacts for GS-7 employees are often the same as those for GS-6 employees, the GS-7 employees serve as a central point of contact to provide authoritative explanations of requirements, regulations, and procedures, and to resolve operational problems or disagreements affecting assigned areas.

The appellant's level of responsibility meets, but does not exceed, the GS-6 grade level criteria of the Guide. For example, the appellant's position does not regularly involve situations where specific guidelines do not apply. Although the appellant works independently to complete work assignments and has the latitude to determine the priority of tasks and identify needs, the guides he uses are more specific and directly applicable than those described at the GS-7 level. Unlike employees at the GS-7 level, the appellant does not serve as the *central* point of contact to provide

authoritative explanations of requirements and regulations or to resolve operational problems or conflicts. Rather, the responsibility for providing such explanations and resolving operational problems rests with the Public Information Specialist. Therefore, this factor is evaluated at the GS-6 level.

Decision

The appellant's work equates to the GS-6 grade level in both *Nature of assignment* and *Level of responsibility*. Consequently, the appellant's position is properly covered by the Miscellaneous Clerk and Assistant Series, GS-303, graded at GS-4, and titled at the agency's discretion.