

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 441
Dallas, TX 75242

Classification Appeal Decision
Under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code

Appellant: [appellant]

Agency classification: Computer Assistant
GS-335-6

Organization: Security Division
U. S. Army Garrison/Information
Technology Business Center
[installation]
Department of the Army
[location]

OPM decision: Computer Assistant
GS-335-6

OPM decision number: C-0335-06-06

Bonnie J. Brandon
Classification Appeals Officer

December 27, 2002

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]

[name]

President, Laborer's International Union of
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Introduction

On August 21, 2002, the Dallas Oversight Division of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted a position classification appeal from [appellant] who is employed as a Computer Assistant, GS-335-6, in the Security Division, U. S. Army Garrison/Information Technology Business Center, [installation], Department of the Army, in [location]. We received her agency's administrative report on September 12, 2002. The appellant requested that her position be classified as Information System Security Specialist or Information Technology Specialist, GS-2210-7. This appeal was accepted and decided under the provisions of section 5112 of title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.).

To help decide the appeal, an OPM representative conducted telephone interviews with the appellant on September 30, 2002, and her immediate supervisor on October 2, 2002. In deciding this appeal, we fully considered the interview findings and all information of record provided by the appellant and the agency.

General issues

The appellant makes various statements about the agency's response to her position review requests. Additionally, the appellant states that her duties are the same as those of another employee in her office whose position is at a higher grade and is classified in the GS-2210 series. By law, we must classify positions solely by comparing the appellant's current duties and responsibilities to OPM position classification standards and guidelines (5 U.S.C. 5106, 5107, and 5112). Since comparison to the standards is the exclusive method for classifying positions, we cannot compare the appellant's current duties to other positions as a basis for deciding an appeal. We have considered the appellant's statements only insofar as they are relevant to making that comparison.

Like OPM, the appellant's agency must classify positions based on comparison to OPM standards and guidelines. However, the agency has primary responsibility for ensuring its positions are classified consistently with OPM appeal decisions. If the appellant considers her position so similar to another that they both warrant the same classification, she may pursue the matter by writing to her human resources office or the agency's personnel headquarters, as appropriate. In doing so, she should specify the precise organizational location, classification, duties, and responsibilities of the position in question. If the positions are found to be basically the same as the appellant's position, the agency must correct the classification of the other position to be consistent with this appeal decision. Otherwise, the agency should explain to the appellant the differences between her position and the other one.

Finally, the appellant describes two jobs for which she volunteered. The *Introduction to the Position Classification Standards* states that duties that are not regular and recurring cannot affect the grade of a position. It further states that such duties should be reevaluated if they become a regular part of a position by extending over a long period of time (for example, several months) and it is reasonable to assume that the duties will continue to recur. Since there is no evidence that the appellant performs work such as supporting mail systems during emergency operations or disaster recovery plan development on a continuing basis, we cannot consider those duties in determining the grade of her position.

Position information

The appellant is assigned to position description (PD) number [number]. The immediate supervisor has certified that the PD is accurate. The appellant disputed the accuracy of her PD and attempted to resolve the issue with her agency. With the appeal to us, the appellant provides a statement that the duties described in her current PD are essentially accurate, but she does not concur with the standard used or wording indicating that she assists others. She includes a proposed PD that she believes better reflects her duties and responsibilities; i.e., based on the GS-2210 series. When appellants have been unable to resolve the issue of PD accuracy within their agency, we base our appeal decision on the actual duties and responsibilities assigned by management and performed by the appellants. Therefore, we have considered the appellant's proposed PD and statements only insofar as they are relevant to her actual work.

The appellant works in the Security Division of the Information Technology Business Center. The division is responsible for the installation's information systems security, working through Information Systems Security Officers (ISSOs) appointed by supported organizations. The division also ensures that users, system administrators, and ISSOs are trained in information systems security. The division consists of three GS-11 and one GS-9 Information Technology Specialist positions, the appellant, and the supervisor, a GS-12 Information Technology Specialist.

The assigned personnel core document, dated July 31, 2001, indicates the appellant serves as the System Administrator/Information Assurance Security Officer (IASO) for the Certification Authority Workstation (CAW) for the Defense Message System (DMS). A memorandum dated July 18, 2001, appoints the appellant as the Alternate System Administrator with the Primary Administrator responsibilities assigned to the GS-2210-9 position in the organization. The supervisor explains that with each system, they designate a primary and an alternate administrator with the ranking individual designated as primary. In this case, the administrator duties are a minor part of the primary administrator's work. However, the appellant spends 50 percent of her time on these duties, performing backups, archiving, and routine maintenance procedures. The appellant performs certificate management, database management, and network configuration as well as hardware and software administration. She also maintains Internet Protocol addresses, routers, and firewalls; manages account passwords and privileges, archives, and audit logs; assists in security investigations; and establishes and maintains user accounts and host configurations, to include setting required parameters.

In addition, the appellant develops and maintains small computer programs and databases in support of the installation's Army Information Systems Security Program. She develops and maintains separate computer databases on password control and personnel clearance access levels and coordinates background investigations for network electronic mail and dial-up network account access. She tests computer programs to ensure proper execution; makes backups of databases and restores data if required; and develops queries to run against the databases based on criteria provided by security personnel. She also participates in ensuring security and awareness training; prepares spreadsheets, charts, and reports; and provides technical advice and customer support on the Terminal Server Access Controller System.

She works with installation organizational IASOs to implement Information Security System (ISS) measures for Automated Information Systems (AIS), groups of AIS, and networks supported by the installation. The appellant prepares local ISS policy documents based on input and guidance from the division chief. She develops and maintains electronic copies of security plans and accreditation documents based on input from IASOs. She also reports computer virus incidents to higher headquarters.

Series, title, and standard determination

The appellant disagrees with her agency's assignment of her position to the GS-335 series, which covers one-grade interval positions involving performance or supervision of data processing support and service functions for users of digital computer systems. Employees in this occupation support or assist other employees who design, operate, or use automatic data processing systems applications and products by performing work in one or a mix of functional areas. The standard identifies one of the functional areas as providing direct support to computer specialist positions. Such support work typically requires knowledge of the scope, contents, and purposes of program documentation. The 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, and the amount of core and other equipment characteristics. This knowledge may also be supplemented by knowledge of internal software routines.

The appellant believes the work she performs meets the criteria in the GS-2210 series as described in the GS-2200 Job Family Standard (JFS). The GS-2210 series is a two-grade interval series for positions with responsibility to plan, design, develop, acquire, document, test, implement, integrate, maintain, or modify computer systems. Security work in the GS-2210 series focuses on planning, analyzing, and developing information systems security programs, policies, procedures, and tools. Systems administration work emphasizes planning the installation, testing, operation, troubleshooting, and maintenance of hardware and software systems. This work exceeds the level of work assigned to and performed by the appellant. The appellant's work is also limited in scope by the fact that the National Security Agency (NSA), through echelons above the installation, has responsibility for establishing systems, hardware and software requirements, and making decisions on the need for system upgrades and/or software migrations.

In distinguishing between specialist and assistant work, the GS-2200 JFS notes that specialist positions are established as developmental jobs with clear progression to higher grade levels as the specialist receives progressively more difficult assignments. The assignments require the application of a broad knowledge of information technology principles, concepts, and methods; a high degree of analytical ability; skill in problem solving; skill in communicating effectively, both orally and in writing; and an understanding of the interrelationships between the different information technology (IT) specialties. We found no evidence that management's intent in establishing the appellant's position was to make it a developmental position with clear progression to a higher graded specialist position.

Assistant positions support the work of specialists, requiring the application of established methods and procedures, and practical knowledge, as opposed to conceptual knowledge, of the techniques and guidelines pertinent to the assignment area. The appellant's position supports and augments the

work of several specialists in the network security function. Another indication of assistant work is the use of established methods and procedures. The appellant operates with such guidance and if she encounters a technical problem that cannot be resolved by applying and/or making minor modifications to standard operating procedures and guidelines, she seeks assistance from the supervisor. We find the appellant's duties fall within the work covered by the GS-335 Computer Clerk and Assistant Series and is properly classified using that standard. The appropriate title for non-supervisory positions in grades GS-5 and above is *Computer Assistant*. We used the GS-335 standard to determine the grade of the appellant's position.

Grade determination

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.

Each factor level has a corresponding point value. The total points assigned are converted to a grade by use of the grade conversion chart in the standard. Our evaluation with respect to the nine factors follows.

Factor 1, Knowledge required by the position

This factor measures the nature and extent of information or facts which the employee must understand to do acceptable work and the nature and extent of the skills needed to apply those knowledges. To be used as a basis for selecting a level under this factor, a knowledge must be required and applied.

The appellant's position meets Level 1-4 where employees perform a wide range of duties including preparing, advising, assisting, coding, and procedure related problem solving using a knowledge of computer procedures and processing methods. Consistent with positions at this level, the appellant advises, assists, and solves problems requiring knowledge of automation concepts, methodologies, systems, and technology (to include commercial-off-the-shelf software), microcomputers and minicomputers, standard Army information systems, operating systems, certificate management, programming techniques, databases, the functionality of locally developed software, and the interrelationships of computer hardware, software, and information systems in a multiprocessing operational environment. She uses this knowledge in order to help IASOs implement ISS measures.

Comparable to positions at Level 1-4, the appellant uses knowledge of SCO UNIX and PC-based languages in order to troubleshoot and maintain the CAW and to install upgrade hardware/software and patches. She must know DMS requirements relating to certification, registration, and directory management necessary to ensure the CAW system's compatibility, interoperability, and interface with the overall architecture. Overall, the knowledge required for the appellant's position is consistent with Level 1-4.

At Level 1-5, 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, employees use knowledge of data content and output options for a variety of program applications processed on multiprogram operating systems. Employees use knowledge of time-sharing, remote job entry, and batch and demand processing for work such as allocating core or writing new program documentation and operating procedures. Knowledge at this level is used as the basis for analysis and decision making in several functional settings.

Level 1-5 is not met. Although the appellant's duties and responsibilities require an understanding of locally used PC-based programming and database languages and tools, word processing, spreadsheets, utility software, and Windows and SCO UNIX based systems, the work does not require the in-depth knowledge of systems and programs indicative of Level 1-5. She puts together standard operating procedures for day-to-day use of the CAW, but she does not write new program documentation and operating procedures. Further, she does not manipulate databases to perform a variety of functions. The appeal record contains no indications that the appellant's regular and recurring work requires Level 1-5 knowledge to develop, test, implement, or modify computer programs and operating procedures.

We assign Level 1-4 (550 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.

The appellant's position meets and does not exceed Level 2-3, the highest level described in the standard. At this level, the supervisor provides directions 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 (programmers, operators, functional users) without supervisory review. The employee independently deviates from instructions to provide for situations such as changing priorities or other changes based on past experience and flexibility within processing specifications. The employee commonly adapts or develops new work procedures and instructions for application by self and others. The employee seeks supervisory assistance and discusses problems related to the work when processing requests appear to exceed system capacity or could have adverse effect on other processing requirements. Completed work is reviewed for conformity to deadlines and accepted practices. Work methods are not normally reviewed unless a recurring common pattern of problems develops.

The appellant's supervisor sets overall objectives for the organization and priorities for new work. The appellant independently identifies the work that must be done and plans and carries out the steps required to accomplish the work. Completed work is typically passed on to division personnel without technical review by the supervisor. She uses her own initiative to coordinate work requirements with users within and outside the organization. The supervisor is kept informed of progress of the appellant's work and any problems she has encountered. The appellant confers with the supervisor on security, technical, and operational issues. Supervisory review of work is in terms

of timeliness and effectiveness in achieving desired results. The appellant refers any problems not covered by the supervisor's instructions or guidelines to the supervisor for a decision. The appellant's position meets and does not exceed Level 2-3.

We assign Level 2-3 (275 points).

Factor 3, Guidelines

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

At Level 3-3, the highest level described in the standard, 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 adding new forms of input, allowing for flexible scheduling, adjusting to new or conflicting requirements, or to adapt to new hardware/software capacity.

Level 3-3 is not met. The appellant's duties do not routinely involve working with new requirements or new applications for which only general guidelines are available. Guidelines are available for all areas of her work and do not require that she use a high level of judgment in interpreting, adapting, and applying the guidance to determine their appropriateness. The responsibility for adjusting or modifying guidelines to fit new requirements or developing new methods for accomplishing the work rests with the appellant's supervisor. The standard operating procedures and software instructions the appellant prepares are informational materials focused on avoiding or resolving common hardware/software problems with the CAW.

At Level 3-2, guidelines are in the form of terminal and other equipment manuals, program run books or run sheets, flow charts, master schedules, and others that are detailed as to what is to be done. Selection of an appropriate guideline is usually clear. However, the guidelines may provide for judgmental deviations in the work processed, such as alternative methods for coding, applying system control language, or performing a retrieval through a terminal. Digression from guidelines which has not been established by experience and precedent actions is referred to the supervisor.

Level 3-2 is met. Similar to Level 3-2, guidance available to the appellant consists of NSA, Army and internal policies, directives, regulations, and procedural guidelines. The problems that the appellant troubleshoots and resolves on a recurring basis require considerable reliance on established procedures and previous experience. The employee uses judgment in selecting and applying the most appropriate guidelines. Significant deviations or situations to which the existing guidelines cannot be applied are referred to the supervisor for guidance.

We assign Level 3-2 (125 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.

The appellant's position is comparable to Level 4-2 where employees perform a few different although related tasks, using specified procedures and methods. Consistent with this level, the appellant decides what needs to be done, identifies and carries out methods and variations within established procedures, and makes other similar decisions to perform such work. For example, after receiving the criteria from security personnel, the appellant is responsible for designing queries to ascertain the appropriate level of access to the DMS required for the requestor. Comparable to Level 4-2 assistants, the appellant selects and applies established procedures and methods to perform work that meets security policies and regulations.

At Level 4-3, work is distinguished by the employee performing 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. At this level, assistants identify the sequence of standard and variable procedures and methods needed to prepare and process the assignment or to resolve error conditions. Unlike positions at Level 4-3, the appellant's work is relatively routine and new or unusual situations rarely occur where she would be required to apply the various methods and procedures characterized at this level. The appellant's work does not typically involve situations where there are several courses of action from which to choose. The complexity of the appellant's duties does not equate to Level 4-3.

We assign Level 4-2 (75 points).

Factor 5, Scope and effect

This factor covers the relationship between the nature of the work, e.g., the purpose, breadth, and depth of the assignment, and the effect of work products or services both within and outside the organization.

At Level 5-2, employees perform a range of duties in scheduling, production control, library, or other computer support positions according to established procedures and methods. Results of the work are complete products or complete segments of other products or work processes. An example of work at this level is an assistant who collects raw information, prepares flowcharts, codes programs, or performs other similar kinds of work on a variety of projects. At Level 5-2, the work affects the accuracy of processing by providing for data contention and other potential conflicts during processing and coding according to specifications. Reliability and acceptability are affected by completing the work within deadlines, ensuring against media and control related processing failures, and providing the requested output. Work at this level affects the availability and usefulness of the information involved.

The appellant's position does not fully meet Level 5-3. This level is distinguished from Level 5-2 by the addition of requirements for solving problems and answering technical questions about control,

scheduling, and/or direct support functions. Problems and error conditions at this level are conventional to data processing although solutions are not always covered by established or standardized procedures. Results of the work affect the efficiency of processing services and adequacy of products used in subsequent activities. Work at this level includes 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. Work at this level may also involve adjusting and rebalancing a number of single system schedules to enhance processing services by using the capacities of several computer systems. Unlike assistants at Level 5-3, the appellant uses standardized approaches in assisting users.

The appellant's position best meets Level 5-2. The purpose of the appellant's position is to collect, select, organize, and provide information in accordance with established rules, regulations, procedures, and practices. However, the appellant's work affects the way in which individuals receive information and the results of the work affect the efficiency of processing services, adequacy of products used in subsequent activities, and processing procedures and methods. For example, the appellant's work contributes to reducing or eliminating IT security vulnerabilities and complying with IT security regulations and policies. Since the appellant's position does not completely meet the intention of Level 5-3, it must be allocated at Level 5-2.

We assign Level 5-2 (75 points).

Factor 6, Personal contacts

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

The appellant's contacts fully meet and do not exceed Level 6-2, the highest level described in the standard. At Level 6-2, contacts are with employees in the agency, inside and outside of the immediate organization; the general public; or special users. The appellant has frequent and ongoing contact with IASOs, users, managers, Department of Defense personnel, and contractors. She also has occasional contact with specialists on the Army Computer Emergency Response Team (ACERT). As at Level 6-2, the appellant's contacts are structured and routine and the role of each participant is readily determined.

We assign Level 6-2 (25 points).

Factor 7, Purpose of contacts

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

The purpose of the appellant's contacts meets and does not exceed Level 7-2, the highest level described in the standard. At this level, the purpose of personal contacts is to plan or coordinate changes in scheduling requirements or priorities as the result of data or equipment related problems; to participate with users in planning and coordinating new or modified requirements when the work fits generally within system options, schedules, etc.; or to plan user participation, methodology, and deadlines for new projects. Comparable to this level, the appellant contacts IASOs to set deadlines and priorities in planning and coordinating her work and to provide technical advice, such as

identifying security issues. She contacts ACERT about security breaches. The appellant is also involved with providing training and information on security to installation personnel.

We assign Level 7-2 (50 points).

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 physical exertion involved in the work.

The physical demands placed upon the appellant do not exceed Level 8-1 where the work is primarily sedentary in nature and requires no special demands.

We assign Level 8-1 (5 points).

Factor 9, Work environment

This factor considers the risks and discomforts in the employee's physical surroundings or the nature of the work assigned and the safety and occupational health regulations required.

The appellant's work environment is best evaluated at Level 9-1 where the work is typically performed in an office environment with no unusual risk or discomfort and requires only normal safety precautions.

We assign Level 9-1 (5 points).

Summary

<i>Factor</i>	<i>Level</i>	<i>Points</i>
1. Knowledge required by the position	1-4	550
2. Supervisory controls	2-3	275
3. Guidelines	3-2	125
4. Complexity	4-2	75
5. Scope and effect	5-2	75
6. Personal contacts	6-2	25
7. Purpose of contacts	7-2	50
8. Physical demands	8-1	5
9. Work environment	9-1	5
<i>Total</i>		1,185

The appellant's position warrants 1,185 points. In accordance with the grade conversion table in the GS-335 standard, 1,185 points falls in the range (1,105 – 1,350) for the GS-6 level.

Decision

The appellant's position is properly classified as Computer Assistant GS-335-6.