



UNITED STATES OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT
Washington, DC 20415

Human Capital Leadership
and Merit System
Accountability Division

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

Appellant: [appellant's name]

Agency classification: Computer Assistant
GS-335-5

Organization: [a city] Area Office
[a city] District Office
Office of Field Programs
Equal Employment Opportunity
Commission
[city and state]

OPM decision: Computer Assistant
GS-335-5

OPM decision number: C-0335-05-01

/s/ Robert D. Hendler

Robert D. Hendler
Classification and Pay Claims
Program Manager
Center for Merit System Accountability

March 30, 2007

Date

As provided in section 511.612 of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations (5 CFR), 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 reminded of its responsibility under 5 CFR 511.612 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]

[attorney's name and address]

Joann C. Riggs
Assistant Director, Office of Human Resources
Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
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Introduction

The Dallas Field Services Group of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted a classification appeal on September 29, 2006, from [appellant's name] whose position is currently classified as Computer Assistant, GS-335-5. The appellant, through her attorney, requested her position be classified as Information Technology (IT) Specialist, GS-2210-9, or be returned to the Computer Assistant, GS-335-9, position she held before the agency downgraded the position. The position is assigned to the [a city] Area Office of the [a city] District Office, Office of Field Programs, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), at [city and state]. We received the agency's complete administrative report on November 17, 2006. We have accepted and decided this appeal under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.).

Background

The appeal record provides the following chronology:

- February 21, 2002, the Office of Human Resources (OHR), through the Office of Field Programs, announced that GS-2210 positions at the GS-7 and 9 level were supportable in the field and provided criteria whereby incumbents in GS-335 positions, at the GS-7 and 9 could be converted to GS-2210-7/9.
- March 29, 2002, appellant's request for conversion to GS-2210-9 from GS-335-9, supported by her immediate supervisor was submitted.
- September 10, 2002, conversion was denied by the Office of Information Technology (OIT) and OHR.
- October 19, 2004, an on-site desk audit of the position was conducted.
- November 1, 2005, an OHR memorandum states that the desk audit the appellant requested would result in a downgrade to GS-335-5 and a new position description (PD) would be provided.
- October 19, 2005, a GS-335-5 position was classified.
- November 13, 2005, the appellant was assigned to the new GS-335-5 PD.
- April 27, 2006, the appellant, through her attorney, appealed to OPM through EEOC.
- June 29, 2006, a contractor provided EEOC a classification advisory stating that their review found the position properly classified as GS-335-5.
- July 17, 2006, OHR adopted the contractor's findings as the results of classification appeal.

- September 18, 2006, the appellant appealed to OPM through her attorney.

General issues

The appellant asks that we consider a number of issues in deciding our appeal that we cannot consider. She states that all but one or two individuals in the field had their positions converted from GS-335-9 to GS-2210-9 positions using the criteria that EEOC created. She asks that we apply these criteria to her position. She asks that we return her to her previous GS-335-9 position if her position cannot be classified as GS-2210-9. The appellant also discusses her performance while assigned to the GS-335-9 PD. Lastly, she notes that her work is similar to higher-graded positions, some in smaller offices, throughout EEOC.

By law OPM must classify positions solely by comparing their current duties and responsibilities to OPM standards and guidelines (5 U.S.C. 5106, 5107, and 5112). Therefore, we can not use EEOC internal classification guidance in deciding this appeal. Agency management (5 U.S.C. 7106(a)) determines the types of positions required to perform each subordinate organization's mission. These decisions are neither appealable nor reviewable under the provisions of 5 U.S.C. 5112. Therefore, OPM has no authority to direct an agency to move an appellant from one position to another. In addition, quality of work cannot be considered in determining the grade of a position (*The Classifier's Handbook*, chapter 5). Since comparison to standards is the exclusive method for classifying positions, we cannot compare the appellant's position to others that may or may not have been properly classified as a basis for deciding her appeal.

We note one of the contract classifiers explained the differences between the appellant's position and that of a GS-2210-9 in the [a city] District Office; however, this comparison was not the basis for determining the appellant's series and grade. The contractor did compare the duties the appellant performs to OPM standards to determine the series and grade.

Like OPM, the appellant's agency must classify positions based on comparison to OPM standards and guidelines. However, the agency also has primary responsibility for ensuring that its positions are classified consistently with OPM appeal decisions. The appellant may formally pursue this matter by writing to her agency headquarters' human resources office and specify the precise organizational location, series, title, grade, duties, and responsibilities of the positions in question. They should explain to the appellant the differences between her position and the others, or grade those positions in accordance with this appeal decision. The agency is reminded of their responsibility under 5 CFR 511.612 to review their own classification decisions for identical or related position to insure consistency with the OPM certificate.

Position information

The [a city] Area Office staff includes approximately 20 employees and consists primarily of investigators, a small attorney staff, a mediator, a program analyst, and two support positions in addition to the appellant's position. The office is headed by a Supervisory Investigator, GS-1810-14, who serves as the appellant's supervisor. The purpose of the appellant's position is to operate and monitor personal computers, printers, network servers, and related peripheral equipment and software in support of the area office and other offices as needed.

The appellant's major duties include assessing and troubleshooting user problems related to equipment and LAN connectivity, log-ins, user configurations, and minor software issues. She installs printers and software for work stations and connects printers to the network. The appellant retrieves standardized reports from the Integrated Mission System (IMS) data base relating to case inventory, status, cause findings, and other reports as required. She tracks requests for equipment maintenance and ensures maintenance is performed. She maintains an equipment inventory and assists with routine staff training in computer applications. The appellant previously had to maintain and update daily and monthly tape backups for the system and IMS database, however the tape process has recently been changed to an online process with OIT.

The supervisor estimates the appellant spends approximately half of her time working with the IMS; e.g., retrieving standardized reports, performing backup procedures, and managing user accounts and setting permission levels. Thirty percent of her time involves installing new equipment and software upgrades, monitoring Groupwise user accounts, resetting passwords, monitoring file space, and ensuring that Symantec anti-virus programs are kept updated and run. The remaining time is spent in customer support, responding to user problems with MS Office, Corel, Groupwise, etc.

The appellant is currently assigned to PD number [number]. The supervisor, in a memorandum, dated October 30, 2006, certified to the accuracy of the duties described in the PD. The appellant did not dispute the accuracy during the telephone audit, but stated that she believes the title, series, and grade are incorrect.

A PD is the official record of the major duties and responsibilities assigned to a position by a responsible management official, i.e., a person with authority to assign work to a position. A position is the duties and responsibilities that make up the work performed by an employee. Classification appeal regulations permit OPM to investigate or audit a position and decide an appeal on the basis of the duties assigned by management and performed by the employee. We classify a real operating position and not simply the PD.

To help decide this appeal, we conducted a telephone audit with the appellant on January 10, 2007, a telephone interview with the supervisor on January 11, 2007, and a telephone interview with the head of the agency's Office of Information Technology (OIT). In reaching our classification decision, we carefully considered all of the information from these interviews, as well as the written information furnished by the appellant's attorney and her agency, including the PD of record. We find this PD does contain the major duties and responsibilities assigned to and performed by the appellant and we hereby incorporate it by reference into this decision.

Series, title, and standard determination

The appellant disagrees with the 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 GS-335 position classification standard (PCS) 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 Position Classification Standard (JFS) for Administrative Work in the Information Technology Group. 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. This series covers only those positions where the paramount requirement is knowledge of IT principles, concepts, and methods, e.g., data storage, software applications, networking. For instance, network services work in the GS-2210 series focuses on planning, analysis, design, development, testing, quality assurance, installation, implementation, integration, maintenance and/or management of networked systems. Data management focuses on planning, developing, implementing and administering database systems. Customer support focuses on the planning and delivery of customer support services including installation, configuration, troubleshooting, customer assistance and/or training in response to customer requirements.

In distinguishing between specialist and assistant work, the GS-2200 JFS notes that specialist positions may be established as developmental jobs with clear progression to higher grade levels as the specialist receives progressively more difficult assignments. These 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 IT specialties. The record does not show 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.

Additionally, the JFS specifically excludes from the GS-2210 series positions with functions such as monitoring the operation of small networked systems; adding network users; updating passwords; installing or assisting users in installing commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) software programs; configuring hardware and software according to instructions; running scheduled backups; troubleshooting minor problems; and responding to less complex user questions. This level of support work is assigned to the GS-335 series and closely matches the work assigned to and performed by the appellant.

Assistant positions support the work of specialists and require the application of established methods and procedures, and a practical knowledge of IT systems, as opposed to the regular and recurring application of knowledge of IT principles, concepts, and methods required for the GS-2210. The appellant's position supports and augments the work of specialists in the data management, network, and customer support functions. 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 OIT help desk. 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 PCS. The appropriate title for non-supervisory positions in grade GS-5 and above is Computer Assistant.

Grade determination

The GS-335 PCS 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.

At Level 1-3, work requires knowledge of standardized data processing rules, operations, and procedures enabling employees to resolve common or recurring problems or to perform standardized variations in work methods. Some employees use knowledge of computer equipment characteristics and constraints, e.g., number and kind of devices, operating speeds, memory sizes, to provide support to users.

Level 1-4 requires knowledge of an extensive body of rules, procedures or operations that require extended training and experience to perform a wide variety of interrelated or nonstandard procedural assignments and resolve a wide range of problems. Work at this level requires knowledge of one or more of the following: at least one programming language; system control language; system hardware, software, and program capabilities for multi-programming systems operating in more than two partitions; terminology, codes, abbreviations, and graphics for preparing systems documentation or programs; program data contents and methods for defining and retrieving non-standard data and report. This knowledge is used to assist programmers and other users.

Comparable to positions at Level 1-3, the appellant uses knowledge of standardized information processing rules, operations, and procedures to resolve common or recurring problems in the operation of computers, printers, and other peripheral equipment in use at the Area Office. She sets up and links equipment for users and installs standard COTS software approved by the OIT, following their instructions. She must have knowledge of the IMS sufficient to enter data and

retrieve standard reports and troubleshoot routine problems. Like at Level 1-3, the appellant uses knowledge of the characteristics and constraints of general use software products to assist in the day-to-day operations of the office's computer operations. She uses standard techniques to correct recurring equipment operation problems, perform routine operator maintenance on equipment, and assist users with problems. Overall, the knowledge required for the appellant's position is consistent with Level 1-3.

Level 1-4 is not met. The appellant's work does not involve a variety of network tasks, requiring an extensive knowledge of system procedures and operations to resolve a wide range of problems and perform a variety of assignments. The field offices are provided with PCs that are configured and imaged. The appellant is provided OIT instructions on how to set up user accounts for each employee. She is granted administrative access to install new headquarters approved software, as needed. System backups, software upgrades, and anti-virus scans are done through the network. The appellant retrieves standardized reports from the IMS and checks problem reports for coding errors, but the work does not require the additional knowledge of program data contents, standardized jobs within programs, and methods for defining and retrieving non-standard data and reports as required at Level 1-4.

Level 1-3 is assigned for 350 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 Level 2-2, the supervisor gives instructions for non-recurring work assignments, deviations from normal schedules, or new procedures. Within established procedures the employee independently performs recurring work making adjustments to accommodate deviations in work methods based on experience and precedent actions. Unfamiliar situations or deviations from established practices are referred to the supervisor or computer specialist for resolution. Completed work is reviewed on the basis of system reports, customer comments, specialist, or operator notification of problems during processing. Review is to determine that the employee has used proper procedures and methods, and that the work is completed within established deadlines.

At Level 2-3, 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 (programmers, operators, functional users) without supervisory review. They independently deviate from instructions to provide for unspecified dependencies, lower or higher priorities, extended run time, additional core and 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. They seek supervisory assistance and discuss problems related to the work when processing requests appear to exceed system capacity (I/O requirements, excessive core, throughput time) or could have adverse effect on other processing requirements (excessive level of priority, equally important but conflicting

requirements against the same data base or program). Completed work is reviewed for conformity to deadlines and accepted practices on the basis of end of shift reports, operator log notes, and responses from technical and functional users regarding the quality and accuracy of work products. Work methods are not normally reviewed unless a recurring, common pattern of problems develops.

The supervisory controls over the appellant's position are comparable to Level 2-2. The appellant independently performs recurring work using established procedures. Situations that are unfamiliar or deviate from established practices are referred to the supervisor or IT specialist at the OIT Help Desk for resolution. Completed work is reviewed on the basis of system reports and customer comments. The supervisor or an IT specialist gives instructions for non-recurring work assignments, and deviations from normal procedures. Level 2-3 is not met, as the work situation does not require the appellant to adapt or develop new work procedures and instructions for application by self or others on a regular and recurring basis within the meaning of the position classification system.

Level 2-2 is assigned for 125 points.

Factor 3, Guidelines

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

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 alternate methods for coding, applying system control language, or performing retrieval through a terminal. Digression from guidelines, which has not been established by experience and precedent action, is referred to the supervisor.

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 adding new forms of input, allowing for flexible as opposed to fixed scheduling, adjusting to new or conflicting requirements, or to adapting to new hardware/software capability.

The appellant's position fully meets Level 3-2. She uses guidelines such as Standard Operating Procedures, equipment manuals, manufacturers' manuals and guides, and the manufacturers' technician 1-800 hotlines. The appellant independently selects appropriate guidelines for use. Any deviations from the guides that have not been previously established by precedent actions are referred to the supervisor or computer specialist. Level 3-3 is not met. The appellant does not work with new equipment or software applications without training and specific guidelines nor does she develop new methods for accomplishing the work. These functions are reserved to higher-level IT specialists.

Level 3-2 is assigned for 125 points.

Factor 4, Complexity

This factor covers the nature, number, variety and intricacy of the tasks, 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 job order, assignment, or processing problem situation. The employee identifies the sequence of standard and variable procedures and methods needed to prepare and process the request, or to resolve error conditions. Actions to be taken differ according to the equipment or program system appropriate to satisfy the request, and whether the job is processed in batch or time sharing mode.

Level 4-4 is distinguished from the previous level 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. At this level, the employee typically monitors the operations of several major computer systems (e.g., a multi-processor with four interconnected CPU's and two multi-program systems each operating in 5-10 partitions). Programs run on these systems are a mix of independent and interdependent applications. Specifically, 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. This diagnosis and resolution of error and problem conditions involves 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 regarding what needs to be done include assessing unusual circumstances or conditions, developing variations in approach to fit the specific problems or dealing with incomplete or conflicting data. For example, in cases of major equipment failure or excessive/unexpected amounts of input data, the employee commonly takes a series of actions affecting a number of programs. This can include transferring programs to other computer systems, removing jobs from an operating schedule, reassigning equipment allocations to work around program software or equipment deficiencies and other similar actions.

Level 4-3 is fully met as the work involves a variety of tasks with discrete methods and procedures, and the appellant is required to select appropriate procedures to complete assignments; e.g., install a new printer, backup files, create and delete GroupWise user accounts, etc. The duties do not involve the variety or more complex systems envisioned at the Level 4-4. Employees at Level 4-4 make decisions and devise solutions based on identifying the problems, planning and implementing solutions, and refining or designing operating methods or techniques. The appellant is responsible for basic troubleshooting based on routine procedures. If these do not work, she contacts the help desk. Equipment is under service contract and, in case of major problems, the OIT will swap out a server. She makes decisions on routine problems but relies on

the guidance of higher-graded computer specialists for new or complex problems. She is not required to develop new procedures for the work or make independent decisions as at Level 4-4. Level 4-3 is assigned for 150 points.

Factor 5, Scope and Effect

This factor covers the relationship between the nature of the work, i.e., the purpose, breadth, and depth of the assignment, and the effect of the 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.

Level 5-3 is distinguished from 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.

Like at Level 5-2, the appellant's work involves performing a variety of tasks according to established procedures and methods. Her work affects the accuracy, reliability, and acceptability of the computer output of customers served at the Area Office. Situations that are unfamiliar or deviate from established practices are referred to the supervisor or a computer specialist for resolution. The appellant's position does not meet Level 5-3. Unlike assistants at Level 5-3, the appellant uses standardized approaches in assisting users. The appellant does not work with problems that are not covered by established or standardized procedures. These situations are referred to her higher-level IT specialists.

Level 5-2 is assigned for 75 points.

Factor 6, Personal Contacts

This factor includes face-to-face contacts and telephone and radio dialogue with persons not in the supervisory chain. Levels described under this factor are based on what is required to make the initial contact, the difficulty of communicating with those contacted, and the setting in which the contact takes place (e.g., the degree to which the employee and those contacted recognize their relative roles and authorities).

The appellant's contacts fully meet but do not exceed Level 6-2, the highest level described in the PCS. 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 employees in the Area Office and other District Offices, and higher-grade IT Specialists and OIT staff at the headquarters. She also has occasional contact with non-agency technicians or contractors. As at Level 6-2, the appellant's contacts are structured and routine and the role of each participant is readily determined.

Level 6-2 is assigned for 25 points.

Factor 7, Purpose of Contacts

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

At Level 7-1, the purpose of the contacts is to exchange factual information about processing procedures or to explain established work methods and procedures.

At Level 7-2, the purpose of the contacts is to plan or coordinate changes in scheduling requirements or priorities due to 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.

Like at Level 7-1, the appellant's contacts are to determine problems encountered by users, arrange equipment repairs, resolve discrepancies, and coordinate information. The contacts are to provide, collect, or exchange factual information about the work processes. Level 7-2 is not met, as the appellant does not participate in planning and coordinating for new or modified equipment or new work projects. The appellant's supervisor provides guidance on setting work priorities.

Level 7-1 is assigned for 20 points.

Factor 8, Physical Demands

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.

Level 8-1 is assigned for 5 points.

Factor 9, Work Environment

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.

Level 9-1 is assigned for 5 points.

Summary

<i>Factor</i>	<i>Level</i>	<i>Points</i>
1. Knowledge required by the position	1-3	350
2. Supervisory controls	2-2	125
3. Guidelines	3-2	125
4. Complexity	4-3	150
5. Scope and effect	5-2	75
6. Personal contacts and	6-2	25
7. Purpose of contacts	7-1	20
8. Physical demands	8-1	5
9. Work environment	9-1	5
<i>Total points</i>		880

The position is credited with 880 points. In accordance with the grade conversion table in the GS-335 PCS, 880 points falls in the range (855 – 1100) for the GS-5 level.

Decision

The appellant's position is properly classified as Computer Assistant GS-335-5.