

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



Atlanta Oversight Division  
75 Spring Street, SW., Suite 972  
Atlanta, GA 30303-3109

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

**Appellant:** [appellants' names]

**Agency classification:** Electrical Engineering Technician  
GS-802-9

**Organization:** Specific Work Planning Branch  
Facility Planning Division  
Facility Management Department  
Navy Public Works Center  
[city, state]

**OPM decision:** Electrical Engineering Technician  
GS-802-9

**OPM decision number:** C-0802-09-10

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Kathy W. Day  
Classification Appeals Officer  
2/13/98

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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:**

[appellants' representative]

[name]

Director, Human Resources Office

Naval Base

[address]

Mr. William Duffy

Chief, Classification Branch

Field Advisory Services Division

Defense Civilian Personnel Management

Service

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## **Introduction**

On July 8, 1997, the Atlanta Oversight Division, Office of Personnel Management (OPM), accepted an appeal for the position of Electrical Engineering Technician, GS-802-9, in various organizational locations, Navy Public Works Center, [city, state]. The appellants are requesting that their position be changed to Electrical Engineering Technician, GS-802-11.

The appeal has been accepted and processed under section 5112(b) of title 5, United States Code. This is the final administrative decision on the classification of the position subject to discretionary review only under the limited conditions and time outlined in part 511, subpart F, of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations.

## **General Issues**

These appellants are part of a group appeal from engineering technicians at the Navy Public Works Center who perform work in various specializations. Information furnished with the group appeal compares their GS-9 positions with other engineering technician positions at the same location whom they believe are performing the equivalent work or below but are classified at a higher grade. Copies of position descriptions were provided for two Mechanical Engineering Technician, GS-802-11, positions; one Electrical Engineering Technician, GS-802-11, position; and one Electronics Engineering Technician, GS-856-11, position. Although the GS-11 position descriptions are certified by a management official, none have a classification certification or a position description number on the Optional Form 8. A certification by a management official certifies the accuracy of the position description which represents the official record of the duties and responsibilities assigned to a position. However, a classification certification indicates the position description has been placed in its proper class, title and grade in accordance with the OPM classification standards and guidelines by a person delegated classification authority. Since the GS-11 position descriptions lack a classification certification, the duties and responsibilities are not an official record of duties and responsibilities, have not been properly classified, and are neither reviewable nor appealable under the classification appeal process. Additionally, by law, we must classify positions solely by comparing their current duties and responsibilities to OPM standards and guidelines (5 U.S.C. 5106, 5107, and 5112). Since comparison to standards is the exclusive method for classifying positions, we cannot compare the appellants' position to others as a basis for deciding their appeal.

In reaching our classification decision, we have carefully reviewed all information furnished by the appellants, the appellants' representative, and the agency, including information obtained from telephone interviews with the appellants and their supervisor.

## **Position Information**

The appellants are assigned to Position Numbers 7L019, 7L142, 7Y019, 7V164, and 7J177. The difference in position numbers stems from the differing organizational locations of the positions.

These differences do not affect the major duties and responsibilities performed by the appellants; therefore, all five position descriptions will be addressed by this decision. The appellants, their supervisors, and agency have certified to the accuracy of the position descriptions.

The appellants' primary assignment is electrical engineering technician work. They analyze project requests and determine the scope of proposals to ensure the needs of the customer are addressed. Based on site visits and discussions with the customer, the appellants determine the condition of the projects, scope of the work, time frames, and unusual circumstances that may be encountered during work on assigned projects and recommend the most cost efficient method of construction. They prepare design sketches, cost estimates, detailed job plans, and material requirements involved in the maintenance, repair, new construction, and rehabilitation of real property systems including investigation of accepted maintenance and repair standards. Their work involves electrical communication, power and distribution systems (overhead and underground), and components such as telephone, telegraph, radar, air raid, fire and security alarms, public address, radio, intercommunication, and antenna systems; electric power generation equipment; and electric power and light distribution. In addition, the appellants must have a knowledge of structural principles and may occasionally get involved in civil and mechanical engineering work.

The appellants receive direction from their supervisor (either an Acting Supervisory Engineering Technician, GS-802-12; a Supervisory Engineering Technician, GS-802-11; a Supervisory Production Controller, GS-1152-11; or a Supervisory Production Controller, GS-1152-12), who assigns work identifying major objectives and providing background information and guidance. Unusual problems are discussed by the appellants and the supervisor. The appellants determine the technical requirements of the job plans, construction plans, methods, components/materials, and cost estimates. The supervisor provides minimal technical assistance and completed work is reviewed for quality, timeliness, and adherence with instructions, guidelines, and policy.

### **Standards Determination**

Engineering Technician Series, GS-802, June 1969.

### **Series Determination**

The agency placed the position in the Engineering Technician Series, GS-802. The appellants do not contest the occupational series nor the title of their position.

The GS-802 series includes technical positions that require primarily application of a practical knowledge of (a) the methods and techniques of engineering or architecture; and (b) the construction, application, properties, operation, and limitations of engineering systems, processes, structures, machinery, devices, and materials. The positions do not require professional knowledges and abilities for full performance and, therefore, do not require training equivalent in type and scope to that represented by the completion of a professional curriculum leading to a bachelor's degree in engineering or architecture. The work is properly placed in the GS-802 series.

## **Title Determination**

The title Electrical Engineering Technician applies to positions that perform work concerned with systems, plants, equipment, and materials for the generation, transmission, conversion, distribution, control, measurement, or utilization of electrical energy. Included in this specialization are positions that involve the design of electronic installations where the work does not require knowledge of electronics to the extent characteristic of the Electronics Technician Series, GS-856. Since the majority of the appellants' work involves preparing job plans, cost estimates, and construction plans for maintenance, repair, new construction, and rehabilitation of real property systems including electrical communication, power and distribution systems (overhead and underground), and components; electric power generation equipment; and electric power and light distribution, the positions are properly titled Electrical Engineering Technician.

## **Grade Determination**

The grading criteria in the GS-802 standard is written in the narrative format. Grade levels are discussed in terms of two factors: (1) Nature of Assignment, and (2) Level of Responsibility. The position is evaluated as follows:

### *Nature of Assignment*

This factor considers the scope and difficulty of the project, and the skills and knowledge required to complete the assignment.

At the GS-9 level, engineering technicians typically perform a variety of work relating to an area of specialization that requires the application of a considerable number of different basic but established methods, procedures, and techniques. Assignments usually involve independent responsibility for planning and conduct of a block of work which is a complete conventional project of relatively limited scope, or a portion of a larger and more diverse project. Assignments require study, analysis, and consideration of several possible courses of action, techniques, general layouts, or designs, and selection of the most appropriate. This generally requires consideration of numerous precedents and some adaptation of previous plans or techniques. Often changes or deviations must be made during the progress of an assignment to incorporate additional factors requested after commencement of the project or to adjust to findings and conclusions which could not be predicted accurately in the original plans. The GS-9 assignments typically require coordination of several parts, each requiring independent analysis and solution. When phases or details of the project are performed by other groups or personnel outside the organizational unit, the technician reviews, analyzes, and integrates their work. In addition, assignments at this level require a good understanding of the effect that recommendations made or other results of the assignment may have on an item, system, or process and its end-use application.

The appellants provided a large number of samples of their most complex recent assignments. Some representative samples include:

- ▶ Renovating the Bachelor Officers Quarters. One appellant was responsible for the electrical portions of this project after an engineering firm was contracted to do drawings and specifications. He reviewed the drawings and specifications for accuracy, worked closely with the contractor and performed quality review to ensure that the work submitted was correct. Because of the size of this project, a number of other technicians, i.e. structural and civil, were also involved in this project.
- ▶ Retrofitting lights on a base in Puerto Rico. The job, in progress at the time of the interview with the appellants, involves assessing needs, preparing the job plans and specifications for upgrading the lighting at 190 buildings at the base, ensuring all work meets codes, and performing quality assurance.
- ▶ Modifying buildings from industrial to office space and partial or complete renovation of several floors in Building W5. These jobs involved coordinating work with several other technicians. The appellant assigned to each project was responsible for consulting with the customer, determining what was needed, providing a workplan and cost estimate, and identifying any systems modifications necessary.

In each case, each appellant was fully responsible for the electrical aspects of the job and, where the electrical installation was the paramount aspect of the work order, appellants had the lead on the project. The appellants believe that these assignments are unique and that they required major adaptations with little or no precedents to work from. However, it is our finding that the appellants are not creating new systems or establishing new procedures for their work. The vast majority of their work is repair by replacement, and they have the state of the art electrical engineering principles and systems information for reference. Thus, based on their experience as electrical engineering technicians, they are able to choose an appropriate means of accomplishing the work from procedures/systems that already have been developed and for which information is available. They are responsible for selecting the appropriate solutions from the body of knowledge already in place.

The appellants are given the assignments and time frame for completion by the supervisor. Once a project is assigned, they are essentially on their own and do not receive assistance from the supervisor in coming up with the completed assignment or in meeting with customers, vendors, or shop personnel involved in the project unless problems arise. The supervisor meets with them informally on a daily basis and receives an update on the status of each appellant's work on a weekly basis. In the event the appellants need technical assistance, they generally consult with an engineer or another technician. They investigate the job site, consult with the customer, and ultimately provide a workplan, a cost estimate, and requisition material. Once approved by the customer, the work is assigned to the appropriate work center and the appellants are responsible for providing quality assurance on the project to the workers onsite and meeting with the customer to resolve any job-related problems or concerns. Available guidance includes the National Electrical and Local Code Book, Engineering Handbook, Architectural Graphic Standards, RS Mean cost estimating, NAVFAC design manuals, military handbooks, technical bulletins and magazines, and files of previous similar projects when applicable [these files may be available from the Base Civil Engineer (BCE) or the

customer]. All projects must conform to the National Electrical Code and any applicable local codes. The estimates prepared by the appellants are based on historical data from other jobs, when available, and estimations based on Engineer Performance Standards (EPS) and the Estimator system. The EPS is used to assist in estimating jobs by identifying tasks and man-hours to accomplish the work; and the automated Estimator system is used to determine labor hours, materials, and other cost factors. The work requires the use and application of established engineering principles, methods, and techniques. In addition, where guidelines are inappropriate, impractical, or incomplete, the appellants have access to other technicians, the BCE staff, the Engineering Division and/or the manufacturer for assistance. These assignments are comparable to the GS-9 level.

At the GS-11 level, engineering technicians perform work of broad scope and complexity that requires application of (1) demonstrated ability to interpret, select, adapt, and apply many guidelines, precedents, and engineering principles and practices related to the area of specialization; and (2) some knowledge of related scientific and engineering fields. GS-11 technicians plan and accomplish complete projects or studies of a conventional nature requiring independent adaptation of a general fund of background data and information, and interpretation and use of precedents. They are typically confronted with a variety of complex problems in which considerable judgment is needed to make sound engineering compromises and decisions. Other related interests must often be considered, entailing frequent coordination with personnel in the fields concerned. There is a continuing requirement for contact work. Initiative, resourcefulness, and sound judgment are needed in planning and coordinating phases of assignments and in selecting which of several sound alternatives is to be used in arriving at acceptable engineering compromises. Ingenuity and creative thinking are required in devising ways of accomplishing objectives, and in adapting existing equipment or current techniques to new uses.

By comparison, technicians at lower levels receive assignments which are usually segments or phases of the type independently carried out at grade GS-11 or which involve less complex systems and facilities requiring design adaptation. GS-9 technicians apply standard engineering methods and techniques whereas GS-11 technicians are typically required to be creative in devising ways to accomplish the work. Assignments typically found at the GS-11 level include: (1) Develops cost estimates for competitive bidding for a variety of multiple-use construction projects. Determines (a) construction operations and methods involved and the time required to complete each phase or feature, (b) various types and capacities of construction equipment required and cost of operation and maintenance, (c) material types and quantities, and (d) overhead, tax, and other costs; or, (2) Prepares designs and specifications for various utility systems such as heating, plumbing, air conditioning, ventilating, pumping, gas supply, and pneumatic control systems. Assignments characteristically involve utility systems for office buildings, pumping stations, and flood control facilities, where the complexity or nonconventional nature of the buildings and facilities entails design problems requiring considerable adaptation of precedents or design of features for which precedents are not directly applicable. Performs technical review of contractor-prepared designs and specifications for such systems.

The GS-11 level is not met. Larger and more complex projects generally go to the Engineering Division and/or are contracted to Engineering or Architectural firms to supply drawings and specifications. The appellants assignments deal primarily with the electrical aspects of conventional construction projects, design features, drawings and contract specifications for portions or complete buildings or facilities. While the buildings being worked on are typically older, there are established national, local, industrial, and manufacturer codes, specifications, and, in some cases, files of previous work available to the appellants in order to accomplish their portions of the projects. The appellants do not develop new procedures/systems as is envisioned at this level.

GS-10 level assignments are not specifically described in the standard. The appellants' assignments do not in any way regularly exceed those described at the GS-9 level. Therefore, their assignments cannot properly be classified at the GS-10 level.

GS-9 is assigned for Nature of Assignment.

#### *Level of Responsibility*

This factor considers the nature and purpose of person-to-person work relationships, and the supervision received in terms of intensity of review of work and of guidance received during the course of the work cycle.

At the GS-9 level, the supervisor provides information on any related work being performed, and furnishes general instruction as to the scope of objectives, time limitations, priorities, and similar aspects. The supervisor is available for consultation and advice where significant deviations from standard engineering practices must be made. The supervisor observes the work for progress and for coordination with work performed by other employees or other sections and for adherence to completion and cost schedules. Standard methods employed are seldom reviewed, but review is made for adequacy and for conformance with established policies, precedents and sound engineering concepts and usage. Personal work contacts typically are more frequent and demanding and are primarily to resolve mutual problems and coordinate the work with that of personnel in related activities. Some contacts are made with using agencies for whom work is done and with contractors and architecture-engineer firms. The contacts are made to clear up doubtful points, to advise as to discrepancies found in meeting contract terms, to consider recommendations for acceptable substitutes, and to promote adherence to agency standards and concepts of good engineering. Contacts outside the agency are generally arranged under supervisory guidance.

The GS-9 level is met. The appellants' work is assigned by the supervisor by trade, e.g., electrical, and time frames and priorities are discussed. From this point, they are expected to carry out the project with minimal supervisory involvement. The appellants set up appointments; review the job; determine the requirements for sketches or drawings; prepare the sketches and drawings; prepare the job plan, funding estimates, and scoping estimate for minor or specific jobs; determine and requisition material needed for the job/project; track material receipt; meet with shop supervisors to review job; provide technical assistance; write change orders as needed; provide quality assurance; coordinate



with contractors, vendors, shops, and Engineering Division as needed; and meet with customer to discuss any problems. Contacts are with the customers, facility managers, project managers, shop supervisors and tradespeople/mechanics, engineers, and vendors. Meetings are conducted with the contacts as needed, generally, without supervisory involvement, although the supervisor may sit in on meetings to assist in resolving problems.

At the GS-11 level, technicians have considerable freedom in planning work and carrying out assignments. The supervisor makes assignments in terms of the major objectives, providing background information and advice on specific unusual problems which are anticipated or on matters requiring coordination with other groups. Unusual or controversial problems, or policy questions arising in the course of a project, may be discussed with the supervisor, but technical supervisory assistance is infrequently sought or required. The supervisor is usually informally advised regarding progress, but there is little review during progress of typical assignments. Completed work in the form of recommendations, plans, designs, reports, or correspondence is reviewed for general adequacy, conformity to purpose of the assignment, and sound engineering judgment. Contacts in the course of their work are with the same groups of individuals at lower grade levels and the purpose of the contacts is similar. Because of the increased scope of GS-11 assignments, these contacts tend to become more extensive than at lower levels. Contacts with contractors and other personnel regarding complex engineering and administrative problems are carried out without close supervision. However, the technician generally discusses with the supervisor the approach to be taken.

Although the appellants work independently under general supervision, the intent of the GS-11 level is not met. They may recommend a course of action, but they seek technical advice on unusual problems and policy issues. The GS-11 level of responsibility assumes that the employee is performing assignments equivalent to the GS-11 level and would, therefore, have responsibility for adapting a general font of knowledge and interpreting precedents to handle complex assignments requiring the exercise of considerable judgment. In comparison, the appellants are responsible for applying conventional engineering practices, techniques, and knowledge of the codes, specifications, and regulations to their projects. They exercise some judgment in determining the applicability of the specifications, codes, and engineering principles applicable to the specific project, but consult with the supervisor on difficult problems or unusual situations. This level of responsibility does not fully meet the intent of the GS-11 level.

The GS-10 level is not specifically described in the standard. To be appropriately classified at the GS-10 level, the technician's Level of Responsibility would have to regularly and clearly exceed the level described at grade GS-9. The appellants' positions do not regularly require them to perform at a level that exceeds the GS-9 level.

GS-9 is assigned for Level of Responsibility.

### *Summary*

Both factors are evaluated at the GS-9 level.

**Decision**

These positions are properly classified as Electrical Engineering Technician, GS-802-9.