

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



Dallas Oversight Division
1100 Commerce Street, Room 4C22
Dallas, TX 75242-9968

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

Appellant: [appellant's name]

Agency classification: Secretary (Typing)
GS-0318-05

Organization: Environmental Management Service
Veterans Affairs Medical Center
Department of Veterans Affairs
[city and state]

OPM decision: Secretary (Office Automation)
GS-0318-05

OPM decision number: C-0318-05-09

/s/ Bonnie J. Brandon

Bonnie J. Brandon
Classification Appeals Officer

December 4, 2000

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).

Since this decision changes the title of the appealed position, it is to be effective no later than the beginning of the fourth pay period after the date of this decision (5 CFR 511.702). The servicing personnel office must submit a compliance report containing the corrected position description and a Standard Form 50 showing the personnel action taken. The report must be submitted within 30 days from the effective date of the personnel action.

Decision sent to:

Appellant:

[appellant's name]
[appellant's address]

Agency:

Acting Chief
Human Resources Management Service
VA Medical Center
Department of Veterans Affairs
[facility address]

Deputy Assistant Secretary for Human
Resources Management
Department of Veterans Affairs
Washington, DC 20420

Introduction

On July 14, 2000, 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 Environmental Management Service, Veterans Affairs Medical Center, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), in [city and state]. The agency had classified the position as Secretary (Typing), GS-318-05. The appellant believes the position should be a Program Support Clerk, GS-303-6, and appealed to the VA Headquarters. Although the VA Headquarters decided the appellant's position is properly classified as Secretary (Office Automation), GS-318-05, the appellant's official position description (PD) shows the current title as *Secretary* with no parenthetical addition while the most recent Standard Form (SF) 50 shows the position's title as *Secretary (Typing)*. The appeal was accepted and decided under the provisions of section 5112 of title 5, United States Code.

In reaching our classification decision, we considered written information submitted by the appellant and her agency and information obtained during telephone interviews with the appellant and her supervisor. As required by law, we classified the position based upon the duties, responsibilities, and qualification requirements as compared to the criteria specified in the appropriate OPM classification standards and guidelines (sections 5106, 5107, and 5112 of title 5, United States Code).

Position information

The appellant provides clerical and administrative support to the Chief of the Environmental Management Service (EMS) and his staff. She is responsible for receiving telephone calls and visitors; compiling, assembling, and preparing memorandums, correspondence, and reports; updating policy and procedure manuals; and collecting and maintaining data and information used in EMS reports and in administrative and program-related decisions made by her supervisor. The appellant's duties also include typing drafts in final form ensuring accuracy of grammar, spelling, and punctuation; maintaining calendars for the EMS Chief and staff; making travel arrangements for the Chief and staff; maintaining equipment inventory; preparing purchase requisitions for office supplies and EMS equipment; training EMS staff in the use of computer software; and resolving routine administrative issues identified by supervisors and employees.

The appellant provides administrative support to the EMS Chief in his responsibility for personnel management of EMS employees such as preparing requests for personnel actions and providing advice and assistance to employees in the areas of training, performance evaluation, timekeeping, and awards. She also provides support to the Chief in his responsibilities for preparing and managing the EMS budget such as tracking and maintaining an accurate account of expenditures for three separate fund control points.

The appellant receives direction from the EMS Chief who assigns work and provides general instructions. The appellant plans and carries out her own assignments independently, referring only unusual problems to her supervisor. The appellant's work is reviewed by the supervisor for compliance with policy and procedures.

The appellant certified to the accuracy of the duties described in her current PD, [PD number], dated May 24, 2000. The appellant's supervisor certified that this PD accurately reflects the duties performed by the appellant. We find the PD and supplemental documentation is adequate for position classification purposes.

Series, title, and standard determination

The GS-318 Secretary Series includes positions that assist one individual, and in some cases the subordinate staff of the individual, by performing general office work auxiliary to the work of the organization. A position must be the principal clerical or administrative support position in the office to be included in this series. The duties require knowledge of clerical and administrative procedures and requirements, various office skills, and the ability to apply such skills in a way that increases the effectiveness of others. The typical secretary position requires a general knowledge of the substantive work of the organization under the jurisdiction of the persons assisted. The appellant is knowledgeable about the functions of the EMS and acts as the principal clerical and administrative support person for the Chief and staff of the Service. Accordingly, her position fits within the GS-318 Secretary Series.

The position classification standard for the GS-318 Secretary Series provides for the title *Secretary* while allowing for an appropriate parenthetical addition. Since the appellant routinely performs duties with various office machines including a personal computer, the position is correctly titled *Secretary (Office Automation)*.

Since the application of office automation technology is a recurrent part of the appellant's job, the grade level of these duties was evaluated in accordance with the criteria published in the Office Automation Evaluation Guide, dated November 1990. These duties were not found to exceed the GS-05 grade level. Since the office automation duties are not grade-determining, they will not be discussed further.

Grade determination

The position classification standard for the GS-318 Secretary Series (dated January 1979) was used to evaluate the grade level of the position. The standard is written in the Factor Evaluation System (FES) format, which uses nine factors. Each factor is evaluated separately and is assigned a point value consistent with factor level definitions described in the standard. The total number of points for all nine factors is converted to a grade by use of the standard's grade conversion table. Under the FES, each factor level description 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 aspect, it must be credited at the next lower level. Conversely, the position may exceed those criteria in some aspects and still not be credited at a higher level.

Our assessment of the appellant's desired grade level in the GS-318 standard also required reference to the Primary Standard, upon which all FES position classification standards are based. The FES provides for use of the Primary Standard when the level assignable to a specific

position fails to meet the lowest level, or exceeds the highest level described in the FES standard appropriately applied for grade level determination.

Factor 1, Knowledge required by the position

This factor measures the nature and extent of information or facts which the secretary must understand to do acceptable work and the nature and extent of skills needed to apply that knowledge. Along with measuring this element, Factor 1 examines the work situation itself. It considers the complexity of the organization served, which affects the extent of office rules, procedures, operation, and priorities the secretary must apply to maintain a proper and smooth flow of work within the organization.

Knowledge Type III positions require knowledge of an extensive body of rules, procedures, or operations applied to clerical assignments; knowledge of the organization and functions of the office; and knowledge of the duties, priorities, commitments, policies, and program goals of the staff sufficient to perform nonroutine assignments. Secretaries at this level are fully responsible for coordinating the work of the office with other offices and for recognizing the need for such coordination in various circumstances.

At Knowledge Type IV, in addition to the knowledges and skills required at lower levels, the employee must have a basic foundation of administrative concepts, principles, and practices sufficient to perform independently such duties as eliminating conflict and duplication in extensive office procedures; determining when new procedures are needed; and studying and recommending restructuring of clerical activities of the office and subordinate offices. This level also requires a comprehensive knowledge of the supervisor's policies and views on all significant matters affecting the organization.

The knowledge required by the appellant's position meets the intent of Knowledge Type III. To perform her assigned duties and responsibilities, the appellant must apply a thorough knowledge of EMS policies, procedures, operations, functions, and organization. She must have knowledge of VA policies and functional knowledge of the EMS in order to provide information to the EMS Chief, subordinate staff, and other organizations within the Medical Center through preparation of routine EMS reports and correspondence. The appellant must use her knowledge of office procedures to receive and refer telephone calls and visitors; order supplies and equipment; maintain control over the calendar of meetings for the Chief and other staff; record and prepare the minutes for staff meetings; process time and attendance information; and provide administrative support to the EMS Chief in the execution of personnel and budget management responsibilities.

The appellant's position does not meet Knowledge Type IV as described in the standard. The appellant works in a small organization and there is little, if any, opportunity for the independent performance of duties similar to those found at this level. There are no subordinate organizations or other clerical staff necessitating the analysis of extensive office procedures or restructuring of clerical activities as envisioned at this level.

At Work Situation A, the organization is small and of limited complexity. The supervisor directs the staff primarily through face-to-face meetings, and internal procedural and administrative controls are simple and informal. In Work Situation B, the staff is organized into subordinate segments that may in turn be further divided. The subordinate groups differ in many ways that place demands on the secretary which are significantly greater than in Work Situation A. Coordination among subordinate units is sufficiently complex to require continuous attention.

The EMS has [number] staff members and administrative controls that are simple and informal. The EMS Chief directs his staff through frequent face-to-face meetings. This is similar to organizations in Work Situation A and not B.

The combination of Knowledge Type III and Work Situation A equates to Level 1-3 and is credited at 350 points.

Factor 2, Supervisory controls

This factor measures the nature and extent of supervision exercised over the position. Controls measured by this factor include the way assignments are made, the way priorities and deadlines are set, and the way work is reviewed.

At Level 2-3, the supervisor defines the overall objectives and priorities of the work in the office. The secretary plans and carries out the work of the office and handles problems and deviations in accordance with established instructions; priorities, policies, commitments, and program goals of the supervisor; and accepted practices in the occupation. At this level, completed work is evaluated for adequacy, appropriateness, and conformance to established policy.

At Level 2-4, the supervisor sets the overall objectives of the work. The secretary and the supervisor, in consultation, develop the guidelines and the work to be done. At this level, the secretary handles a variety of situations and conflicts requiring the use of initiative to determine the approach to be taken or methods to use. This level is most likely to be found in organizations of such size and scope that many complex office problems arise that cannot be brought to the attention of the supervisor. Completed work is reviewed only for overall effectiveness.

The appellant works with the independence described at Level 2-3. She handles problems and deviations without close supervision from the Service Chief. She normally establishes her own daily priorities in a manner that is consistent with program goals communicated to her periodically by her supervisor. Her work is reviewed primarily for its effectiveness.

Level 2-4 is not met because although the appellant works with considerable freedom and handles most problems, the limited size and structure of her organization preclude her from encountering the scope of complex problems envisioned at this level on a regular or recurring basis. Any unusual or complex assignments or difficulties are referred to the supervisor.

Level 2-3 (275 points) is credited for this factor.

Factor 3, Guidelines

This factor measures the nature of guidelines and the judgment needed to apply them. Guides include reference materials such as dictionaries and style manuals, agency instructions concerning correspondence, and operating procedures of the organization served.

At Level 3-2, guidelines typically include dictionaries, style manuals, agency instructions concerning correspondence, and operating policies of the supervisor or organization served. The secretary locates and selects the appropriate guidelines, references, and procedures for application to specific cases. The secretary refers to the supervisor significant proposed deviations or situations to which existing guidelines cannot be applied.

At Level 3-3, the guidelines include a large body of unwritten policies, precedents, and practices which are not completely applicable to the work or are not specific and deal with matters relating to judgment, efficiency, and relative priorities rather than procedural concerns. The secretary may apply and adapt guidelines, such as regulations or the supervisor's policies, to specific problems for which the guidelines are not clearly applicable.

Level 3-3 is not met. Although the appellant is expected to make judgments and interpret guidelines, they are usually relatively specific and can be applied without much deviation. Typical guidelines used by the appellant consist of various manuals, VA policy memorandums, and agency regulations that are readily available. She does not routinely apply a large body of unwritten policies, precedents, and practices as described at this level.

Level 3-2 (125 points) is credited.

Factor 4, Complexity

This factor measures 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 in performing the work.

At Level 4-2, the secretary's duties involve various related steps, processes, or methods and include a full range of procedural duties in support of the office. Decisions at this level involve various choices requiring the secretary to recognize the existence of and differences among clearly recognizable situations. Decisions are based on knowledge of the procedural requirements of the work coupled with an awareness of the specific functions and staff assignments of the office.

At Level 4-3, the work includes various duties involving different and unrelated processes and methods. Decisions regarding what needs to be done and how it should be done are based on the secretary's knowledge of the duties, priorities, commitments, policies, and program goals of the supervisor and staff. Decisions involve analysis of the subject, phase, or issues involved in each assignment. The chosen courses of action are selected from many alternatives.

The complexity of the appellant's position meets Level 4-2. The work involves a full range of clerical and administrative duties and responsibilities that support the EMS and Medical Center

staff. The appellant's work is comprised of various related processes and methods that require her to make decisions based on choices among recognizable situations, procedural requirements, and the functions of the EMS. These decisions involve choosing between a few alternatives that are readily identifiable.

The appellant's work does not meet the complexity of Level 4-3. While this position performs a variety of duties using different processes appropriate to each assignment, there is minimal need for the analysis of issues and subjects as described at this level. The appellant's work requires her to act in situations that are less ambiguous and to follow procedures that are more clear than those typical of Level 4-3.

This factor is credited at Level 4-2 (75 points).

Factor 5, Scope and effect

This factor measures the relationship between the nature of the work, as measured by 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, the purpose of the work is to carry out specific procedures. The work affects the accuracy and reliability of the work of others and of other work processes. Duties at this level include serving as a liaison between the supervisor and subordinates, consolidating information into reports, and making various arrangements to assist the supervisor with administrative responsibilities.

At Level 5-3, the secretary serves offices that clearly and directly affect a wide range of agency activities, operations in other agencies, or large segments of the public. Positions at this level work in the context of situations outside the organization, and the work regularly requires the secretary to modify usual office methods in ways that consistently and directly affect the organization's mission accomplishment.

The scope and effect of the position meet Level 5-2. The purpose of the position is to provide clerical and administrative support to the Chief and EMS staff. The appellant prepares and reviews correspondence, coordinates with various vendors outside the Medical Center, requisitions supplies, distributes mail, makes travel arrangements and completes necessary forms for travel, and serves as the timekeeper and computer liaison for the EMS. She collects various types of information used in her supervisor's decision making regarding budget planning and personnel actions. The appellant's work affects the efficiency and effectiveness of processes within the EMS and the care given to patients.

The appellant's position does not meet Level 5-3. Her work does not affect a wide range of agency activities, operations in other agencies, or a large segment of the public or business community. The appellant does not modify and devise methods and procedures that significantly affect the mission of the EMS.

Level 5-2 (75 points) is credited for this factor.

Factor 6, Personal contacts

This factor is based on what is required to make the initial contact, difficulty of communicating with those contacted, and the setting in which the contact takes place. This factor does not cover persons within the supervisory chain.

At Level 6-2, contacts include employees in the same agency but outside the immediate organization who are generally engaged in different functions, missions, and kinds of work than the secretary's immediate organization. Contacts also include members of the general public in a moderately structured setting.

At Level 6-3, contacts are with individuals or groups from outside the employing agency in moderately unstructured settings. The purpose and extent of each contact may be different, and the role and authority of each party is identified and developed during the course of the contact. These contacts are not established on a routine basis. Typical contacts at this level might include attorneys, contractors, representatives of professional organizations, news media, or public action groups.

The appellant's personal contacts meet Level 6-2. The appellant is in contact with various staff throughout the Medical Center, staff from other medical facilities, and with vendors outside of the Medical Center in a moderately structured setting. The appellant also has contact with patients and their families.

The appellant's contacts do not meet Level 6-3. The contacts do not require her to identify and develop the role and authority of each party. Her contacts are more routine and structured than contacts envisioned at Level 6-3.

Level 6-2 (25 points) is credited for this factor.

Factor 7, Purpose of contacts

The purpose of personal contacts ranges from factual exchanges of information to situations involving significant or controversial issues and differing viewpoints, goals, and objectives. The personal contacts that serve as the basis for the level selected for this factor must be the contacts that are the basis for the level selected for Factor 6.

The purpose of contacts at Level 7-2 is to plan, coordinate, or advise on work efforts or to resolve operating problems. At Level 7-3 found in the Primary Standard, the purpose of contacts is to influence, motivate, or control uncooperative persons or groups.

Comparable with Level 7-2, the appellant's personal contacts are typically made with a variety of parties in order to plan, coordinate, and carry out her office work. Since she provides principal administrative support for the EMS Chief and staff, she is frequently involved in resolving administrative problems and operating issues relevant to the EMS. The purpose of the appellant's contacts is not to motivate or influence uncooperative persons as at Level 7-3.

This factor is credited at Level 7-2 (50 points).

Factor 8, Physical demands

This factor measures the requirements and physical demands placed on the employee by the work assignment, including the agility and dexterity required and the extent of physical exertion. At Level 8-1, the work is sedentary with some walking and standing. No special physical demands are required to perform the work. At Level 8-2, as described in the Primary Standard, the work requires physical exertion.

The physical demands on the appellant meet Level 8-1. The work is primarily sedentary and may involve some walking, standing, bending, and carrying light items. The appellant's work does not require physical exertion as described at Level 8-2.

Level 8-1 (5 points) is credited for this factor.

Factor 9, Work environment

This factor measures the risks and discomforts in the employee's physical surroundings or the nature of the work assigned and the safety regulations required. The work environment at Level 9-1 includes the minimal risks and discomforts normally found in offices. Level 9-2 in the Primary Standard describes a work environment that involves moderate risks or discomforts that require special safety precautions.

The appellant's work environment meets Level 9-1. Her work occurs in a standard office environment with good lighting and ventilation. The office environment has normal discomforts and risks, but not those associated with Level 9-2.

This factor is evaluated at Level 9-1 (5 points).

Summary

In summary, we have evaluated the appellant's position as follows:

Factor	Level	Points
1. Knowledge required by the position	1-3	350
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
Total		985

The point total for the nine factors is 985. By comparison to the standard's grade conversion table, this total converts to the GS-05 grade level (point range of 855 to 1100).

Decision

The appellant's position is properly classified as Secretary (Office Automation), GS-318-05.