

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: Computer Specialist
GS-334-11

Organization: [appellant's activity]
U.S. Geological Survey
Department of the Interior
[city, state]

OPM decision: Computer Specialist
GS-334-11

OPM decision number: C-0334-11-09

/s/ Bonnie J. Brandon

Bonnie J. Brandon
Classification Appeals Officer

December 29, 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).

Decision sent to:

Appellant:

[appellant's name and address]

[appellant's designated representative]

Agency:

[servicing personnel office]

Director of Personnel
U.S. Department of the Interior
Mail Stop 5221
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Introduction

The Dallas Oversight Division of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted a classification appeal from [the appellant] on June 14, 2000. [The appellant] is assigned to the [appellant's activity] of the U.S. Geological Survey, Department of the Interior, in [geographic location]. His position has been classified by the agency as Computer Specialist, GS-344-11. The appellant believes that the agency has not properly evaluated his duties as a project leader for the webmaster project and his position should be classified at the GS-12 grade level. This appeal was accepted and decided under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code.

In making our decision, we carefully considered all of the information contained in the written record. This includes information provided by the appellant, his designated representative, and the agency personnel office. The record information was supplemented by telephone interviews with the appellant and his supervisor.

Position information

The [appellant's activity] serves the district and subdistrict offices within the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS). The [appellant's activity] is responsible for management of production samples, acquisition and dissemination of water quality data, and storage of that data in national data bases. The appellant is one of approximately 15 employees and contractors assigned to the [appellant's immediate organization] that is responsible for the development and implementation of the data systems and providing support for the software and hardware systems used throughout the [appellant's activity].

The appellant's position description was updated after he filed his appeal with OPM. Briefly, it discusses major duties such as configuring, installing, and maintaining software systems required by [the appellant's activity] operations; documenting and evaluating the configuration in terms of current and future needs; providing consultation, trouble shooting, guidance, and repair of problems with programming systems including world wide web applications; resolving access failures; developing software to monitor, maintain, and manipulate scientific and management data bases; and assisting in the operation of the data base and data communications network. The duties may include assignment to special projects, with responsibility to plan, document, and coordinate such projects and participation in national level computer studies. Although the employee believes the title of webmaster should be more specifically cited in his position description, he does agree that the knowledge required and other factor descriptions are accurate and that the general duty statements are accurate. It is the agency's current policy to define duties of a position in general terms while using more specific work assignments in the individual employee performance plan. The appellant's official position description is adequate for classification purposes.

Series, standard, and title determination

The employee does not question the series of his position. As defined in the GS-344 standard, the work includes responsibility for analyzing, managing, supervising, or performing work necessary to plan, design, develop, acquire, document, test, implement, integrate, maintain, or modify systems for solving problems or accomplishing work processes by using computers. Such work is included in this series when the primary need is knowledge of information processing methodology/technology, computer capabilities, and processing techniques. The appellant's position is properly included in the GS-334 series. There are OPM draft qualification and classification standards in the comment stage of development. One provision of the draft standard gives agencies the option of using parenthetical titles immediately or waiting until the new Information Technology Job Family Classification Standard is issued. The agency has opted not to use the parenthetical titles until the new standard is issued. The current GS-334 standard prescribes the title *Computer Specialist* for all nonsupervisory positions. That title is appropriate for the appellant's position.

Grade determination

The position classification standard for the GS-334 Computer Specialist Series is written in Factor Evaluation System format (FES) and uses nine factors for the evaluation of positions. 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 aspect, 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.

The appellant primarily questions three factors in the evaluation of his position: Factor 3, Guidelines; Factor 4, Complexity; and Factor 5, Scope and effect. We concur with the agency's evaluation of Factors 1, 2, and 6 through 9. Therefore, we discuss those factors very briefly, while discussing Factors 3, 4, and 5 in more depth.

Factor 1, Knowledge required by the position

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

At Level 1-7, employees use knowledge of a wide range of computer techniques, requirements, methods, sources, and procedures. It requires knowledge of system software and systems development life cycles to track the use and status of resources for system design projects through the development, modification, maintenance, and evaluation of a standard program management system. Employees use skill in applying agency policies and knowledge of technical data processing standards to evaluate alternative approaches to the solution of problems. They use knowledge and skill to modify and adapt precedent solutions to unique or specialized requirements.

At Level 1-8, employees use mastery of a specialty area or comprehensive knowledge of Federal ADP policy, in addition to the 1-7 level knowledge. At Level 1-8, the employee functions as a technical authority in either a specialty area or as a general data processing expert covering a wide range of technology and applications. This knowledge is used in performing a key role in very difficult assignments such as planning advanced system projects or leading task forces for resolving critical problems in existing systems. Other assignments characteristic of this level are advising top ADP and user management on new developments and advanced techniques, developing 5- to 10-year ADP forecasts and recommendations, and evaluating overall plans for major ADP projects.

The appellant's position requires a knowledge of Unix and NT operating systems and various web server software operating on those systems; Hypertext Mark-up Language, JavaScript, Common Gateway Interface, and Perl scripting languages; and Microsoft FrontPage to develop web pages on Windows NT systems. The duties require knowledge of data base, statistical, and graphics packages; relational data base methodology; and systems analysis design techniques and computer hardware. The appellant's most recent project assignments include taking the lead in the testing, evaluation, and remediation of computers and scientific instruments for Y2K compliance and serving as project leader for the development of an updated Internet web system for the laboratory. We agree that this factor is properly credited at the 1-7 level. The duties of the position do not require the level of knowledge to perform assignments characteristic of the 1-8 level. Level 1-7 is credited for 1250 points.

Factor 2, Supervisory controls

This factor is designed to measure three aspects: how the work is assigned, the employee's responsibility for carrying out the work, and how the work is reviewed.

At Level 2-4, the supervisor sets the overall objectives and, in consultation with the employee, determines timeframes and possible shifts in staff or other resources required. The employee, having developed expertise in the assignment, independently plans and carries out projects and analyses; interprets policies, procedures, and regulations in conformance with established mission objectives; integrates and coordinates the work of others; and resolves most conflicts that arise. The supervisor is informed about progress, potentially controversial matters, or far-reaching implications. Completed work is reviewed in terms of feasibility, compatibility with other work, or effectiveness in meeting requirements or achieving results.

The appellant plans and organizes assigned projects, coordinates efforts of team members, and provides advice when problems arise. He speaks for the group in coordinating projects with others. The approach is cleared with the supervisor and completed work is reviewed for effectiveness in meeting user requirements, completeness of documentation, and accuracy. The supervisor sets the overall objectives and priorities. While the appellant may work on projects with considerable independence, technical guidance is available and the work is subject to technical review. The position does not operate with only administrative direction as typical at the 2-5 level of the standard. Level 2-4 is credited for 450 points.

Factor 3, Guidelines

This factor measures the nature of the guidelines used and the judgment needed to apply those guidelines.

At Level 3-3, handbooks, manuals, models, and plans are available but are not completely applicable or have gaps in significant areas. The employee is required to adapt guides and precedents for the assigned project or gather information to supplement gaps. Judgment is required in relating precedents to specific situations and established guidelines often must be interpreted.

Level 3-4 of the standard describes policies and precedents that provide guidance that is general in nature with little specificity regarding the approach to be followed. Typical constraints are imposed by the need for compatibility with existing systems or processes. Performance of the assigned work usually requires deviating from traditional methods or researching trends and patterns to develop improvements or formulate criteria. Employees use initiative and resourcefulness in researching and implementing state-of-the-art techniques and technologies in order to develop new and improved methods to cope with particular projects. At this level, employees demonstrate initiative and resourcefulness in assigned projects that encompass unprecedented design efforts, intergrating the work of others as a team or project leader, or predicting future environments or the impact on future processing.

The guidelines available for the appellant's position include the agency's ADP standards and policies; precedent system configurations and designs; and handbooks, regulations, and directives for users. Judgment is required to make recommendations for selection of software and adapting existing systems to new requirements. The appellant is often required to contact manufacturers and other users to assist in resolving problems with hardware, software, and compatibility problems. We find this factor most comparable to the 3-3 level. The appellant's position does not fully Level 3-4 where an out-of-the-ordinary work situation requires the specialist to apply exceptional resourcefulness and initiative to cope with complex problems that cannot be solved by applying standard or accepted ADP practices. Although the appellant adapts guides and precedents and may be required to gather considerable information to supplement gaps in the guidelines, the continuous need to seek solutions outside of standard ADP practices and to develop new and improved methods, as depicted at Level 3-4, is not met. Level 3-3 is credited for 275 points.

Factor 4, Complexity

This factor is measured by the nature of the assignment, the degree of difficulty required in identifying what needs to be done, and the originality involved in performing the work.

At Level 4-4, assignments consist of projects, studies, or evaluations characterized by the need for substantial problem analysis. Typically, the project is concerned with several stages in an

automation project or assignments in a specialty area that require a variety of techniques and methods to evaluate alternatives. Decisions involve assessing situations complicated by conflicting or insufficient data to determine applicability of established methods. Different technical approaches often must be tested and projections made. Consideration must often be given to probable areas of future changes in systems design, equipment layout, or comparable aspects that will facilitate subsequent modifications. The work requires consideration of considerable data. This level of work is typified by developing programming specifications for major modifications to existing systems or new systems where precedents exist at the same general scale. Computer software or system software evaluation and modification concern items available from vendors that are already in use in Government or private ADP operations.

Level 4-5 describes assignments consisting of various projects or studies characterized by the need for significant departure from established practice. Projects typically involve a number of stages including preliminary studies to the decision to automate or an unusual depth of analysis of software, equipment, or other broad specialty area. Decisions are complicated by the novel or obscure nature of problems and or special requirements for organization and coordination. The technical difficulty is exceptional, e.g., developing major items of system software or developing specifications for a major segment of a new application system where the work is unprecedented in nature or scope.

The record indicates the appellant's work involves development, evaluation, and implementation of computer systems that will interface to efficiently and effectively meet scientific and administrative needs at laboratory, district, region, and division levels. As previously indicated, the appellant's primary assignments over the past two years have involved the testing, evaluation, and remediation of the laboratory's computers and scientific instruments for Y2K compliance and being leader of a project to update the [appellant's activity's] Internet web site. On the web assignment, the appellant is responsible for evaluating alternatives and making recommendations to the supervisor and other managers. When decisions are made, e.g., the type of server and software to be used, the appellant proceeds with the assignment. We find the complexities of the position most comparable to the 4-4 level. We do not find that decisions on what needs to be done are complicated by novel or obscure problems or special requirements, as typical of the 4-5 level. This factor is credited with Level 4-4 and 225 points.

Factor 5, Scope and effect

This factor measures the purpose, breadth, and depth of the assignment and the effect of work products and services both within and outside the organization.

At Level 5-3, work involves resolving a variety of conventional problems, questions, or situations, e.g., responsibility for maintenance of a set of programs. Work affects the adequacy of such activities as field investigations, internal operations, or research conclusions. At this level, responsibilities for projects are primarily to facilitate a local operation.

At Level 5-4, work involves investigating and analyzing a variety of unusual problems, questions, or conditions; formulating projects such as those to substantially alter major systems, or establishing criteria in an area, e.g., developing programming or procurement specifications. The work affects a wide range of agency activities, activities of non-Government organizations, or functions of other agencies. Assignments at this level typically are concerned with (a) the agency's single centralized ADP operation which is linked to terminals at numerous agency sites throughout the country or (b) standard systems to be used on numerous equipment units or at numerous installation level ADP operations in the agency.

The [appellant's activity] provides technical data to scientists within USGS via the agency's Intranet. The agency has determined that technical reports and information should be available to the public via the Internet. The appellant's assignment involves updating the [appellant's activity's] present Internet server and software systems. Agency officials believe that these changes, when completed, should make use easier and provide more information for public users. They also believe that use of Front Page software will make it easier for USGS subject-matter staff to design and place information on the public web pages. We find this most comparable to the 5-3 level. The same level would be appropriately comparable to the appellant's previous Y2K assignments. Both primarily affect the ability of the [appellant's activity] to provide information and service to the USGS. We do not find that the appellant's assignments involve substantial alteration of major systems or affect a wide range of agency activities, as typical at the 5-4 level. Level 5-3 is credited for 150 points.

Factors 6 and 7, Personal contacts and Purpose of contacts

These factors are used to describe and measure the contacts required, the difficulty in communicating with those contacts, and the setting in which the contacts take place. Personal contacts are both face-to-face and by telephone.

The appellant's contacts are comparable to those discussed at Level 3, i.e., coworkers; district, regional, and headquarters level personnel; and representatives of other agencies. He also has contacts with hardware and software vendors.

The purpose of the appellant's contacts is comparable to Level b, i.e., exchanging technical information, resolving problems, coordinating work efforts, and ensuring compliance with standard ADP requirements.

Level 3b is credited for 110 points.

Factor 8, Physical demands

The appellant's work is primarily sedentary, but it does involve some lifting while installing equipment. This meets Level 8-1 of the standard. 5 points are credited.

Factor 9, Work environment

The appellant's work is generally performed in a typical office setting or in a computer room. This compares to Level 9-1 of the standard. 5 points are credited.

Summary

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

Factor	Level	Points
1. Knowledge required by the position	1-7	1250
2. Supervisory controls	2-4	450
3. Guidelines	3-3	275
4. Complexity	4-4	225
5. Scope and effect	5-3	150
6. and 7. Personal contacts and Purpose of contacts	3b	110
8. Physical demands	8-1	5
9. Work environment	9-1	<u>5</u>
Total		2470

There is a total of 2470 points credited for the nine factors. 2470 points fall within the grade point range of GS-11 (2355–2750).

Decision

The position is properly classified as Computer Specialist, GS-334-11.