

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]

Agency classification: Clerk
GS-303-5

Organization: [installation]
Natural Resources Conservation Service
U. S. Department of Agriculture
[city, state]

OPM decision: GS-303-5
(Title at the discretion of the agency,
with the parenthetical title of Office
Automation)

OPM decision number: C-0303-05-11

/s/ Bonnie J. Brandon

Bonnie J. Brandon
Classification Appeals Officer

December 7, 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 (5CFR 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]
[appellant's address]

Agency:

[HR official's name]
Regional Human Resources Specialist
[geographic location] Regional Office
National Resources Conservation Service
[address]

Director
Office of Human Resources Management
U.S. Department of Agriculture
J. L. Whitten Building, Room 402W
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Introduction

On August 25, 2000, the Dallas Oversight Division of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management accepted a classification appeal from [appellant]. The appellant's position is currently classified as Clerk, GS-303-5. The appellant is requesting that her position be classified as Clerk, GS-303-6. The position is assigned to the [installation], Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, [city and state]. We have accepted and decided her appeal under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code.

To help decide the appeal, an Oversight Division representative interviewed the appellant and her immediate supervisor. The appellant and her supervisor certify that the appellant's position description number [number] is current and accurate.

Position information

The appellant performs clerical and administrative support duties for the [installation] which is comprised of approximately 70 employees located at 22 duty stations. The appellant is under the immediate supervision of the Administrative Coordinator, GS-303-7, who reports directly to the Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations.

The appellant makes small purchases with a Government credit card. She purchases a variety of services, equipment, and supplies within her overall \$25,000 purchasing authority, ensuring each transaction does not exceed the allowed \$2,500 limitation. Through use of the automated Purchasing Card Management System, the appellant reviews the accuracy of the expenses charged to the Government credit card, enters appropriate budgetary information, and approves each transaction. The appellant and her supervisor estimate that the appellant spends approximately 20 to 40 percent of her time on duties associated with purchasing goods and services and approving credit card bills.

The appellant spends approximately 40 percent of her time preparing and submitting travel authorizations and travel vouchers for staff within the [installation]. She enters transactions in the [state] Allowance Holder Program for all expenses charged to local allocations. These transactions include travel costs, overtime payments, supplies and equipment purchases, incentive awards, etc. The appellant spends the remaining time performing a variety of general clerical duties, such as: receiving and distributing incoming and outgoing mail; maintaining files; preparing requests for personnel actions; serving as office receptionist; reviewing, entering, and electronically transmitting time and attendance records; typing correspondence and various reports; tracking receipt of information from offices in response to requests for information for various reports; and performing duties related to the acquisition and sale of vehicles assigned to the [installation].

Series and title determination

The agency placed the position in the Miscellaneous Clerk and Assistant Series, GS-303, and the appellant does not disagree with this determination.

The Miscellaneous Clerk and Assistant Series, GS-303, includes positions which perform or supervise clerical, assistant, or technician work for which no other series is appropriate. The work requires a knowledge of the procedures and techniques involved in carrying out the work of an organization and involves application of procedures and practices within the frame work of established guidelines. The basic work processes associated with the appellant's assignments are clerical in nature. The appellant performs a number of support functions requiring a knowledge of administrative procedures, instructions, regulations, and directives as they relate to her employing organization. We find the appellant's position is properly allocated to the GS-303 series.

The GS-303 series does not specify titles. Therefore the agency may designate an appropriate title by following the guidance in the *Introduction to the Position Classification Standards*. Although the requirement is not currently reflected in the position description, the appellant's supervisor indicated that the position requires a qualified typist. The position requires use of office automation equipment and software. Therefore, the parenthetical designator *Office Automation* (or the abbreviation *OA*) should be added to the title.

Grade determination

The appellant's paramount responsibilities include two distinct functional areas: (1) administrative and clerical work; and (3) office automation work. The administrative and clerical duties are covered by the Miscellaneous Clerk and Assistant Series, GS-303, which directs that positions classified to this series be evaluated by the Grade Level Guide for Clerical and Assistance Work. The office automation duties are evaluated by the Office Automation Grade Evaluation Guide. To ensure the duties associated with making small purchases with the Government credit card do not impact the grade, those duties will be evaluated against the Purchasing Series standard, GS-1105.

Evaluation of the Administrative and Clerical Work:

The Grade Level Guide for Clerical and Assistance Work describes the general characteristics of each grade level from GS-1 through GS-7 and uses two criteria for grading purposes: *Nature of Assignment* (which includes the knowledge required and complexity of the work) and *Level of Responsibility* (which includes supervisory controls, guidelines, and contacts).

Nature of Assignment

At the GS-5, the work involves performing a full range of standard and nonstandard clerical assignments and resolving a variety of nonrecurring problems. Work includes a variety of assignments involving different and unrelated steps, processes, or methods. The employee must identify and understand the issues involved in each assignment and determine what steps and procedures are necessary and the order of their performance. Completion of each transaction typically involves selecting a course of action from a number of possibilities. The work requires extensive knowledge of an organization's rules, procedures, operations, or business practices to perform the more complex, interrelated, or one-of-a kind processing procedures.

The nature of the appellant's assignments fully meets the criteria described at the GS-5 level. Using small purchase procedures, she identifies appropriate open market sources, including minority and women-owned businesses, and uses Federal Supply Schedules to obtain a variety of office supplies; equipment such as fax machines, photocopiers, cellular telephones; and services such as utilities, equipment maintenance, vehicle repairs, movement of property to new office space, etc. She negotiates with vendors to obtain the best prices on the items purchased. Purchases are made either with a Government credit card or by issuance of convenience checks. The appellant reconciles credit card payments in the automated Purchasing Card Management System by verifying expenses charged are accurate and breaking down costs by the appropriate accounting object class code. She resolves billing discrepancies with the credit card company, either orally or in writing.

The appellant applies knowledge of the Federal travel regulations to compute allowable travel expenses and inputs travel costs into automated systems to generate travel vouchers and payments. The appellant tracks all expenses in a spreadsheet she developed and she enters transactions in the [state] Allowance Holder Program for all expenses charged to local allocations. These transactions include travel costs, overtime payments, supplies and equipment purchases, incentive awards, etc. The appellant is responsible for accepting the delivery of new vehicles purchased by the State Office from local dealerships. She ensures the vehicles contain the options purchased, obtains state inspections, and keeps a record of the vehicle assignments. The appellant assists with the sale of vehicles by posting flyers in public locations, accepts and records closed bids, contacts highest bidders, prepares bills of sales, and removes vehicles from the property list.

The appellant performs a variety of clerical and administrative duties such as completing requests for personnel actions; referring telephone callers and visitors to appropriate staff members; and personally providing general information to callers, such as providing an appropriate pamphlet to those requesting soil surveys; opening and distributing incoming mail to the appropriate offices or staff members; and preparing outgoing mail, including obtaining postage for the postal meter. Using a spreadsheet she developed, she tracks receipt of information from offices in response to requests for information for various reports.

Work at the GS-6 level typically entails processing a wide variety of transactions for more than one type of assigned activity or functional specialization. Assignments are subject to different sets of rules, regulations, and procedures. The issues being examined must be such that a course of action has substantive impact on the outcome of the assignment. Work requires comprehensive knowledge of rules, regulations, and other guidelines relating to completing assignments in the program area assigned. This knowledge is usually attained through extensive, increasingly difficult, and practical experience and training in the subject-matter field. The work also requires ability to interpret and apply regulatory and procedural requirements to process unusually difficult and complicated transactions.

The full intent of the GS-6 level is not met. Although the appellant uses different procedures for her work depending on the type of transaction she is processing, her duties do not involve the wide variety of substantive, unusually complicated transactions intended to credit this level. Her transactions tend to be repetitive in terms of regulations and procedures to be applied and problems handled. For example, the appellant prepares requests for personnel actions, inputs

expense data into automated systems, tracks information received from other offices, and ensures the acquisition and sale of vehicles are processed in accordance with procedures. The estimation of travel expenses and preparation of travel vouchers involves computing lodging and per diem expenses, airline costs, etc, associated with short-term travel of staff to temporary duty stations. She is not responsible for applying a knowledge of the more difficult Federal travel regulations, such as those applicable to household relocations. Although her purchasing work requires her to locate vendors for various services, appropriate sources are generally identifiable through her research of the Internet, local telephone books, etc.

GS-5 is credited for this factor.

Level of Responsibility

At the GS-5 level, the supervisor assigns work by defining objectives, priorities, and deadlines and provides guidance on assignments which do not have clear precedents. The employee works in accordance with accepted practices and completed work is evaluated for technical soundness, appropriateness, and effectiveness in meeting goals. Extensive guides in the form of instructions, manuals, regulations, and precedents apply to the work. The number and similarity of guidelines and work situations require the employee to use judgment in locating and selecting the most appropriate guidelines for application and adapting them according to circumstances of the specific case or transaction. A number of procedural problems may arise which also require interpretation and adaptation of established guides. Often, the employee must determine which of several alternative guidelines to use. If existing guidelines cannot be applied, the employee refers the matter to the supervisor. Contacts are with a variety of persons within and outside the agency for the purpose of receiving or providing information relating to the work or for the purpose of resolving problems in connection with recurring responsibilities.

The GS-5 level is met. The appellant independently carries out her assignments. She uses judgment to determine the appropriate course of action to take when performing her duties. The work requires her to select from a number of available guidelines and procedures. Contacts are with employees within the installation and the State Office, vendors, credit card company employees, and the general public. Contacts are made for the purpose of receiving and providing information, coordinating efforts, explaining to vendors the types of services and equipment needed and negotiating prices, and resolving problems associated with credit card billing statements.

At the GS-6 level, the supervisor reviews completed work for conformance with policy and requirements. The clerical employee is recognized as an authority on processing transactions or completing assignments within a complicated framework of established procedures and guidelines, often when there are no clear precedents. This recognition typically extends beyond the immediate office or work unit to the overall organization or, in some cases, outside the organization. The employee is regarded as an expert source of information on regulatory requirements for the various transactions and is frequently called upon to provide accurate information rapidly on short notice. Guidelines for the work are numerous and varied, making it difficult for the employee to choose the most appropriate instruction and decide how the various transactions are to be completed. Guidelines often do not apply directly, requiring the employee

to make adaptations to cover new and unusual work situations. This may involve deviating from established procedures to process transactions which cannot be completed through regular channels or involve actions where guidelines are conflicting or unusable. Contacts are with employees in the agency, in other agencies, or with management or users or providers of agency services. The employee provides information, explains the application of regulations, or resolves problems relating to the assignment.

The GS-6 level is not fully met. Although the appellant works independently and decides the steps needed to accomplish her duties, the supervisor is available to assist in resolving unusual problems relating to the credit card bills and she approves purchases in order to ensure the costs are within budget limitations. The guidelines and procedures applied by the appellant include Federal travel regulations and automated systems manuals, small purchase procedures and regulations, and internal agency procedures manuals. These guidelines are relatively straightforward, and the appellant is not normally required to make adaptations to cover new and unusual work situations. The examples the appellant cited of new assignments for which she has had to devise new procedures, such as setting up mail slots and labeling boxes to facilitate mail distribution to 52 offices and determining the need to keep copies of travel vouchers before mailing them to the State Office, are not of a type intended for credit at this level since they did not present unusual work situations. Although the appellant has provided training to other support staff on the automated travel voucher program and has been asked to provide assistance to other offices on files maintenance, her work is not of such a nature that she is recognized as an authority on processing complicated transactions.

GS-5 is credited for this factor.

Since both factors are credited at GS-5, the overall evaluation of the clerical and administrative support functions is GS-5.

Evaluation of the Purchasing Work

The appellant's purchasing duties occupy approximately 20 to 40 percent of her time. To determine its impact, these responsibilities are evaluated separately. The GS-1105, Purchasing Series standard, is published in the Factor Evaluation System (FES) format. Under the FES, positions are evaluated by comparing the duties, responsibilities, and qualifications required with nine factors common to nonsupervisory General Schedule positions. A point value is assigned to each factor in accordance with the factor-level descriptions. For each factor, the full intent of the level must be met to credit the points for that level. The total points assigned for the nine factors are converted to a grade by reference to the grade conversion table in the standard. A factor-by-factor analysis of the appealed work is provided.

Factor 1, Knowledge required by the position

This factor measures the nature and extent of information or facts a worker must understand in order to do acceptable work and the nature and extent of skills needed to apply these knowledges.

The appellant's position fully meets Level 1-3, where a knowledge of standardized regulations and procedures are required to make purchases involving commercial requirements and average complexity. There is no evidence in the appeal to support the crediting of Level 1-4, which requires a broad knowledge of purchasing regulations and procedures to make purchases involving specialized and/or commercial requirements that have unstable price or product characteristics, hard-to-locate sources, or similar complicating factors.

Level 1-3 is credited for this factor and 350 points are assigned.

Factor 2, Supervisory Controls

This factor considers the nature and extent of direct or indirect controls exercised by the supervisor, the employee's responsibility, and the review of completed work.

The appellant's position meets Level 2-3, where the employee plans and carries out successive steps necessary to make purchases and independently performs tasks. The methods the appellant uses to complete assignments are not reviewed in detail. At Level 2-4, employees are responsible for resolving most conflicts that arise such as protests, claims, and terminations for convenience or default, coordinating their work with others, and interpreting policy on their own initiative to meet established objectives. Level 2-4, where the employee is also delegated considerable latitude in committing the agency to a course of action, is not met by the position.

Level 2-3 and 275 points are assigned.

Factor 3 - Guidelines

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

The guidelines described at Level 3-2 are used by the appellant. At Level 3-2, there may be minor gaps in guidelines but the employee uses judgment and initiative in resolving aspects of the work not fully covered by instructions. The appellant is responsible for determining whether services and/or equipment purchases match needs and requirements. At Level 3-3, the employee independently uses judgment to interpret guidelines, adapt procedures, decide approaches, and resolve specific problems. This includes, for example, reviewing detailed nonstandardized statements of work for adequacy, developing technical ranking factors for award determinations, or negotiating terminations for convenience or default. The appellant's purchasing duties do not involve these situations or present problems of this type for resolution.

The guidelines used and the judgment required to apply them in the appellant's position fully meet but do not exceed Level 3-2. 125 points are assigned.

Factor 4, Complexity

This factor covers the nature, number, variety, and intricacy of tasks, steps, processes, or methods in the work performed; the difficulty in identifying what needs to be done; and the difficulty and originality involved in performing the work.

The appellant's position fully meets Level 4-2. As at Level 4-2, the appellants' purchasing work involves performing a variety of related tasks using primarily simple noncompetitive purchasing methods, such as credit cards or placing orders against single award Federal Supply Schedules. The appellant makes decisions as to whether to solicit additional sources or question prices. She uses price and/or delivery as determining factors.

The appellant's position falls short of meeting Level 4-3, in which the work involves using different processes and methods to make a variety of competitive or sole source small purchases or make a variety of purchases against various established contracts and agreements such as multiple award schedules, BPA's, requirements contracts, etc. The appellant does not use different solicitation methods, ordering procedures, purchasing methods, and clauses or provisions depending on the type, quantity, dollar value, or urgency of the requirement, as described at Level 4-3.

Level 4-2 is credited and 75 points are assigned.

Factor 5, Scope and effect

This factor covers the relationship between the nature of the work and the effect of work products or services within and outside the organization.

The appellant's position fully meets Level 5-2 in which the work involves providing purchasing services that are covered by well-defined and precise procedures and regulations. The appellant clarifies what is needed and when, and selects purchasing sources from a range of available options. The appellant's work affects the smooth flow of everyday operations.

The appealed position does not meet Level 5-3. At this level, the purpose of the work is to purchase various commercial and/or specialized requirements. The work involves resolving a variety of purchasing problems such as inadequate or restrictive specifications, lack of multiple suppliers, urgent need, and insufficient price history. The types of equipment and services the appellant purchases do not present these types of problems. The appellant's purchasing decisions do not have a direct affect on the serviced programs' ability to conduct business, as described at this level.

Level 5-2 is credited and 75 points are assigned.

Factor 6, Personal contacts, and Factor 7, Purpose of contacts

These factors include face-to-face contacts and telephone dialogue with persons not in the supervisory chain, and pertain to the reasons the contacts are made.

The appellant's contacts equate to Level 2, in which contacts are with internal agency employees outside the immediate organization. The appellant's contacts outside the agency are with commercial suppliers or personnel of other Federal agencies. The appellant does not have contacts with technical or legal representatives of firms who are negotiating substantial purchase order changes or terminations for default, or who are protesting the basis for nonselection of award, as described at Level 3. Level 2 is fully met.

The purpose of the appellant's contacts compares with Level a. At this level, the purpose of the contacts is to clarify or exchange information related to purchases, such as to obtain information on items, prices, discounts, and delivery dates. At Level b, the purpose of the contacts is to plan and coordinate actions to prevent, correct, or resolve delays or misunderstandings in the purchasing process. This includes contacting vendors to clarify requirements and negotiate issues, such as establishing adequate price reductions for deviations in product or delivery, modifying certain terms, or waiving penalties for returned items. There is no evidence that the appellant's contacts fully meet this level. Level a is assigned.

Factor 6 and Factor 7 are credited with Level 2a for 45 points, according to the chart in the standard.

Factor 8, Physical demands

This factor covers the requirements and physical demands placed on the employee by the work assignments. This includes physical characteristics and abilities and the physical exertion involved in the work.

The physical requirements involved in the appellant's duties are a match for Level 8-1. The work requires no special physical demands. It may involve some walking, standing, bending, or carrying of light items. The appellant's work does not require the physical agility needed to visit evacuation or construction sites on a regular and recurring basis, as described at Level 8-2.

Level 8-1 is assigned and 5 points are assigned.

Factor 9, Work environment

This factor considers the risks and discomforts in the employee's physical surroundings and the safety regulations required.

The work environment of the appellant's position compares to Level 9-1. The work is generally performed in an office requiring normal safety precautions against everyday risks or discomforts. 5 points are assigned.

Summary

| 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. and 7. Personal Contacts and Purpose of Contacts | 2-a | 45 |
| | | |

| Factor | Level | Points |
|---------------------|-------|------------|
| 8. Physical Demands | 8-1 | 5 |
| 9. Work Environment | 9-1 | 5 |
| TOTAL POINTS | | 955 |

A total of 955 points falls within the range for GS-5, 855-1100 points, according to the Grade Conversion Table in the GS-1105 standard.

Evaluation of the Office Automation Work

The office automation work is evaluated against the Office Automation Grade Evaluation Guide, which is also written in the FES format. These duties do not impact the grade of the position, therefore, a summary evaluation follows:

Summary

| Factor | Level | Points |
|---|-------|------------|
| 1. Knowledge Required by the Position | 1-3 | 350 |
| 2. Supervisory Controls | 2-2 | 125 |
| 3. Guidelines | 3-2 | 125 |
| 4. Complexity | 4-2 | 75 |
| 5. Scope and Effect | 5-1 | 25 |
| 6. and 7. Personal Contacts and Purpose of Contacts | 1-a | 30 |
| 8. Physical Demands | 8-1 | 5 |
| 9. Work Environment | 9-1 | 5 |
| TOTAL POINTS | | 740 |

A total of 740 points equates to GS-4, 655 to 850 grade point range, according to the Grade Conversion Table in the guide.

Summary

The administrative and clerical work equates to GS-5; the duties associated with use of the Government credit card equate to GS-5; and the office automation duties equate to GS-4.

Decision

This position is properly classified as GS-303-5, with the title at the discretion of the agency. The parenthetical title *Office Automation* is to be added to the title.

