

**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., Room 972
Atlanta, GA 30303**

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

Appellant:	[Appellant]
Agency classification:	Secretary (Stenography/OA) GS-318-6
Organization:	U.S. Army Engineer District [Location]
OPM decision:	Secretary (Stenography/OA) GS-318-7
OPM decision number:	C-0318-07-01

Kathy W. Day
Classification Appeals Officer

8/4/99

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 grade 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, as permitted by 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]

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Introduction

On April 1, 1999, the Atlanta Oversight Division, Office of Personnel Management (OPM), accepted an appeal for the position of Secretary (Stenography/Office Automation), GS-318-6, Construction Division; U.S. Army Engineer District, [location]. The appellant believes her position should be classified at the GS-7 level.

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

The appellant believes that the increase in her responsibilities because of additional duties warrants an increase in the grade. She performs secretarial duties for the Chief and Deputy of the Construction Division and the Chief of the Quality Assurance Branch. She also states that her position description compares to several others graded at the GS-7 level that are accessible on the Corps of Engineers' website.

Issues such as volume of work are not considered in determining the grade level of a position. Also, by law, OPM must make classification determinations solely by comparing the current duties and responsibilities of the position to OPM standards and guidelines (5 U.S.C. 5106, 5107, 5112). Since comparison to standards, not other positions, is the intended and exclusive method for classifying positions, we may not consider the classification of other positions as a basis for deciding an appeal.

Position information

The appellant serves as the principal secretary and personal assistant to the Chief and Deputy of the Construction Division and the Chief of the Quality Assurance Branch. There are 17 field offices reporting to the Division. She provides a broad range of secretarial, clerical/administrative, and management support duties including:

- Responding in person, in writing or via telephone, to a wide variety of questions concerning general management and operational policies and factual information in support of the Construction Division;
- Maintaining a complete calendar for the Chief and Deputy of the Construction Division and the Chief of the Quality Assurance Branch, scheduling appointments without prior approval or consultation based on personal knowledge of their priorities, workload and commitments, and using her own initiative to reschedule appointments as needed;

- Receiving and screening visitors and telephone calls to the Chief's office, ascertaining the nature of the contact and directing the caller or visitor to the other staff members as appropriate;
- Receiving and screening incoming correspondence to determine if it requires the Chief's attention or can be forwarded directly to the appropriate staff member;
- Managing the Chief's assignment tracking system to ensure assignment deadlines are monitored and adhered to by the staff, organizing and setting priorities for assignments so that the Chief's deadlines are consistently met, and making necessary workload adjustments or modifying priorities to meet unexpected situations;
- Composing correspondence of a nontechnical nature based on knowledge of the office's policies and activities;
- Serving as liaison between the district field support staff to ensure that regional clerical and administrative practices and procedures are communicated to and followed by the staff and advising and instructing field staff on general policies and procedures, including recommending solutions to problems and providing training as necessary;
- Reviewing documents and correspondence for conformance with regulations, grammar, format, etc.;
- Making arrangements for conferences and meetings including time, space, and staff and making travel arrangements for the District Director;
- Maintaining computerized compliance tracking systems such as the CCASS System, Income System, and the incentive award budget for the use in monitoring status, producing reports, and locating requested materials;
- Using a personal computer and a variety of software to accomplish work assignments;
- Meeting the ISO 9000 Quality Standards program requirements by making sure everyone is in compliance with established document and data control guidelines;
- Ensuring that the TAPES are completed in a timely manner for the GS-13 through 15 employees; and
- Taking and transcribing dictation, and filing.

The appellant receives direction from the Supervisory Civil Engineer who assigns work and provides general instructions. The appellant plans and carries out her own assignments

independently, referring only unusual problems to the supervisor. Work is reviewed by the supervisor for conformance to policy and adequacy in handling situations.

Standards referenced

Secretary Series, GS-318, January 1979.

Office Automation Grade Evaluation Guide, November 1990.

Typing and Stenography Grade Evaluation Guide, November 1990.

Series determination

The appellant does not contest the title or occupational series of her position. The appellant's position is properly included in the Secretary Series, GS-318, which covers positions that assist one individual, and in some cases the subordinate staff of that individual, by performing general office work auxiliary to the work of the organization. Positions in the GS-318 series are the principal office clerical or administrative support position in the office, operating independently of any other such position in the office. The duties of positions in this series require a knowledge of clerical and administrative procedures, various office skills, and the ability to apply those skills to increase the effectiveness of others. Although the positions may acquire knowledge of the work of the organization, technical or professional knowledge of a specialized subject-matter area is not required. The appellant, as the principal clerical support to her supervisor, performs office clerical and administrative work requiring knowledge of office practices and procedures. The work frees her supervisor to concentrate on the primary work of the organization.

Title determination

The GS-318 standard states that nonsupervisory positions in the GS-318 series are titled *Secretary*. Since the position also requires stenographic and office automation skills, that requirement is reflected in the parenthetical title *Stenography/Office Automation (OA)*.

Grade level determination

SECRETARIAL DUTIES

The GS-318 standard is written in the Factor Evaluation System (FES) format, using nine factors for evaluation. A point value is assigned to each factor based on a comparison of the position's duties with the factor-level descriptions in the standard. The factor point values mark the lower end of the ranges for the indicated factor levels. For a position factor to warrant a given point value, it must be fully equivalent to the overall intent of the selected factor-level description. If the position fails in any significant aspect to meet a particular factor-level description in the standard, the point value for the next lower factor level must be assigned, unless the deficiency is balanced by an equally important aspect which meets a higher level. The total points assigned are converted to a grade by use of the grade conversion table in the standard.

Under FES, positions which significantly exceed the highest factor level or fail to meet the lowest factor level described in a classification standard must be evaluated by reference to the Primary Standard, contained in Appendix 3 of the Introduction to the Position Classification Standards. The Primary Standard is the "standard-for-standards" for FES.

The appellant disagrees with the agency's present evaluation of factors 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6. We have reviewed the agency's evaluation of factors 5, 7, 8, and 9 and agree with their findings. Therefore, our evaluation will address only those factors contested by the appellant.

Factor 1 - Knowledge Required by the Position:

This factor measures the nature and extent of information or facts that a worker must understand to do acceptable work, such as the steps, procedures, practices, rules, policies, principles, and concepts and the nature and extent of the skills needed to apply this knowledge. This factor is measured in terms of the type of knowledge required to perform the work and the work situation in which the position functions. A work situation refers to the complexity of the organization served (i.e., the immediate office in which the secretary works and any subordinate offices) which affects the extent of office rules, procedures, operations, and priorities the secretary must apply to maintain a proper and smooth flow of work within the organization and between organizations. The agency credited Level 1-4. The appellant believes Level 1-5 should be credited.

Knowledge Type:

At Knowledge Type III, positions require knowledge of the duties, priorities, commitments, policies, and program goals of the staff sufficient to perform nonroutine assignments such as independently noting and following up on commitments made at meetings, shifting clerical workloads in subordinate offices, or locating and summarizing information from files and records when this requires recognizing which information is relevant. At this level, the secretary is fully responsible for coordinating the work of the office with the work of other offices, and for recognizing the need for such coordination in various circumstances.

The appellant performs a number of different administrative and clerical functions, including some nonroutine assignments similar to those described for Knowledge Type III, such as maintaining the supervisor's calendar, independently handling administrative actions, and coordinating administrative matters with the supervisor and other organizations. The appellant is knowledgeable of the Chief's views on specific matters sufficient to relay information or provide instructions on what the Chief wants to accomplish.

At Knowledge Type IV, in addition to the knowledge and skills required at lower levels, the employee must have a basic foundation of administrative concepts, principles, and practices sufficient to independently perform such duties as eliminating conflict and duplication in extensive office procedures; determining when new procedures are needed; systematically studying and evaluating new office machines; 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.

Knowledge Type IV is not met. Although a few of the appellant's duties approach this level, the full intent is not met. The appellant works in an office where there is little, if any, opportunity for the independent performance of duties found at this level. While she may recommend solutions to some of the procedural problems she notes during her reviews, she does not routinely conduct systematic studies specifically for the purpose of restructuring activities of other offices or analyzing office equipment and determining what should be purchased, etc. The appellant's work primarily serves to coordinate the work within the office and with the field offices and to ensure that established and accepted policies and procedures are followed.

Knowledge Type III is credited.

Work Situation:

Work Situation refers to the complexity of the organization served (i.e., the immediate office in which the secretary works and any subordinate offices) which affects the extent of office rules, procedures, operations, and priorities the secretary must apply.

At Work Situation B, the staff is divided into subordinate segments which may be further subdivided, work direction is through intermediate supervisors, and the subordinate groups differ in function and administrative requirements in such a way that demands are placed on the secretary that are significantly greater than those described at Work Situation A. In this situation, there is a system of formal internal procedures and administrative controls and a formal production or process reporting system.

The work situation of the appellant's position meets that described at level B. The Construction Division consists of a Contract Administration Branch that has an office engineering section and a claims section, and a Quality Assurance Branch that has a construction management section and a technical support section. The appellant is responsible for assisting the chief and the construction staff with administrative support and maintaining the tracking system on assignments for 17 field contracting offices. She monitors and verifies that assignments are on track and deadlines will be met. The appellant is also responsible for assuring that clerical processes and procedures are properly implemented throughout the District.

At Work Situation C, in addition to the conditions described at Work Situation B, staffs of organizations are augmented by various staff specialists in such fields as personnel, management analysis, and administration. The organization is typically divided into three or more subordinate levels, with several organizations at each level. In addition, such organizations typically have one of the following (or equivalent) conditions which increase the knowledge required by the work:

1. The program is interlocked on a direct and continuing basis with the programs of other departments, agencies, or organizations, requiring constant attention to extensive formal clearances and procedural controls.
2. The program is directly affected by conditions outside the organization which vary widely in nature and intensity, and which frequently require organizational, procedural, or program adjustments in the supervisor's organization.
3. There is active and extensive public interest or participation in the program which results in the supervisor spending a substantial portion of the time in personal contacts such as those with citizens groups, professional societies, the media, educational groups, officials of State or local governments, or community leaders.

The Construction Division does not meet the conditions described for Work Situation C. Work Situation C would best compare to a headquarters level with several subdivided divisions.

Work Situation B is credited for this subfactor.

The combination of Knowledge Type III and Work Situation B equates to Level 1-4 for 550 points.

Factor 2 - Supervisory Controls:

This factor covers the nature and extent of direct or indirect controls exercised by the supervisor, the employee's responsibility for carrying out assignments, and how completed work is reviewed. The agency credited Level 2-3. The appellant believes Level 2-4 should be credited.

At Level 2-3, the supervisor defines the overall objectives and priorities of the work of the office and assists with special assignments. The secretary plans and carries out the work of the office and handles problems and deviations in accordance with established instructions. The methods used are almost never reviewed in detail, and completed work is reviewed for adequacy, appropriateness, and conformance to established policy.

Similar to Level 2-3, the appellant functions under very general instructions from the supervisor. Because the supervisor spends a lot of time out of the office, the appellant works with a great degree of independence and she provides guidance while he is out. The appellant understands the organization and the programs and is very aware of the supervisor's viewpoints when it comes to her assignments. The appellant plans and carries out the work, resolves most conflicts which arise, coordinates work with other staff, and interprets policy in terms of established objectives. The written aspects of the work are reviewed for overall effectiveness in meeting requirements.

At Level 2-4, the supervisor and employee together determine the deadlines and the work to be done, and the employee handles a wide variety of situations and conflicts; such as, informing the staff of commitments made by the supervisor and arranging for the staff to implement them; or the secretary may decide to arrange for a subordinate to represent the organization at a conference. This level is most likely found in organizations of such size and scope that many complex office problems arise which cannot be brought to the supervisor's attention.

The full intent of Level 2-4 is not met. While 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 is credited for 275 points.

Factor 3 - Guidelines:

This factor covers the nature of guidelines used, and the judgment needed to apply them. The agency credited Level 3-2. The appellant believes Level 3-3 should be credited and we agree.

At Level 3-2, the guidelines include dictionaries, style manuals, agency instructions, and operating policies. The secretary locates and selects the appropriate guideline for application, referring situations where the guidelines cannot be applied or significant deviations are required to the supervisor. The secretary may also determine which established alternative to use.

The appellant meets and exceeds Level 3-2.

At Level 3-3, the highest level described in the standard, 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 employee 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 best compares to the nature of guidelines and judgment needed by the appellant to perform her work. The appellant's assignments vary in the availability of guidelines. Many of the appellant's assignments are guided by unwritten policies. The appellant is expected to know and understand the Chief's position on a variety of issues and to exercise initiative in applying written guidelines based on his position and preferences in a given situation and to establish her own priorities based on this knowledge. She also ensures that the staff in the field offices are applying the guidelines in an acceptable manner. She recommends new procedures to meet changes in agency requirements based on her knowledge of policies and priorities.

Level 3-3 is credited for 275 points

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 agency credited Level 4-2. The appellant believes Level 4-3 should be credited and we agree.

At Level 4-2, the work consists of duties that involve various related steps, processes, or methods. Secretaries at this level perform the full range of procedural duties in support of the office, and decisions regarding what needs to be done involve various choices requiring the secretary to recognize the existence of and differences among clearly recognizable situations. The actions to be taken or responses to be made differ in such things as the sources of information, the kinds of transactions or entries, or other readily verifiable differences. Decisions at this level are based on a knowledge of the procedural requirements of the work coupled with an awareness of the specific functions and staff assignments of the office.

The appellant meets and exceeds Level 4-2.

At Level 4-3, the highest level described in the standard, the work includes various duties involving different and unrelated processes and methods, such as preparing one-of-a-kind reports or setting up conferences. Decisions at this level regarding what needs to be done and how to accomplish them are based on the secretary's knowledge of the duties, priorities, commitments, policies, and program goals of the supervisor and staff and involve analysis of the subject, phase, or issues involved in each assignment to select a course of action from many alternatives.

Level 4-3 is met. The appellant performs a range of different and unrelated duties in support of the office. The work consists of secretarial, administrative, and clerical assignments. The appellant makes decisions on what needs to be done and how it should be done based on the program goals, priorities, and commitments of the division chief and her knowledge of the subject matter. For example, the appellant provides and assists field staff employees on administrative and personnel matters; she makes quarterly visits to the field offices to ensure that they are in compliance with the ISO 9000 Quality Standards guidelines; recommends solutions to problems she identifies; responds to inquiries personally or identifies other staff members to handle them. She is responsible for the logistics for conferences including travel accommodations, facility arrangements, equipment, handouts, and social events for the conference attendees. She schedules meetings and appointments, coordinates work with other staff, and maintains files for all contract work for the district. In addition to procedural duties such as processing travel orders, overtime approvals, leave approvals, and security clearances, the appellant maintains the incentive awards program budget, tracks performance appraisals, produces a variety of weekly, monthly/bi-monthly, quarterly, and annual reports in spread sheet format by reconciling financial and other

data, and develops and prepares reports that require determining the existence, source, and relevancy of information for the supervisor's use in meetings.

Level 4-3 is credited for 150 points.

Factor 6 - Personal Contacts:

This factor measures face-to-face contacts and telephone dialogue with persons not in the supervisory chain. The agency credited Level 6-2 for this factor. The appellant believes Level 6-3 is correct.

At Level 6-2, the highest level described in the standard, personal contacts are with employees in the same agency, but outside the immediate organization. At this level, the persons contacted are typically engaged in different functions, missions, and kinds of work.

Similar to Level 6-2, the appellant's personal contacts are primarily with other employees of the Engineer District, contractors, and the field staff.

At Level 6-3, personal contacts are with individuals or groups from outside the employing agency in a moderately unstructured setting, for example, the contacts are not established on a routine basis, requiring the secretary to identify and locate the appropriate person to contact or to apply significant skill and knowledge in determining to whom a telephone call or visitor should be directed; the purpose and extent of each contact are different; and the role and authority of each party are identified and developed during the course of the contact. Typical contacts at this level might include people in their capacities as attorneys, contractors, or representatives of professional organizations, the news media, or public action groups when the office deals with them on a variety of issues.

Level 6-3 is not met. Although the appellant has some contacts with individuals such as those described in level 6-3, those contacts are infrequent and usually result in a referral to another staff member of the District once the appellant determines the general nature of the contact.

Level 6-2 is credited for 25 points.

SUMMARY		
FACTOR	LEVEL	POINTS
1. Knowledge Required by the Position	1-4	550
2. Supervisory Controls	2-3	275
3. Guidelines	3-3	275
4. Complexity	4-3	150
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	1410

A total of 1410 points falls within the range of GS-7, 1355 to 1600 points, according to the Grade Conversion Table in the GS-318 standard.

OFFICE AUTOMATION DUTIES

The Office Automation duties are in support of the primary and grade controlling work of the position and do not impact the grade of the position. A summary evaluation of the office automation work is as follows:

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	5-1	25
6. Personal Contacts and 7. Purpose of Contacts	1a	30
8. Physical Demands	8-1	5
9. Work Environment	9-1	5
	TOTAL	890

A total of 890 points falls within the range for GS-5, 855 to 1100 points, according to the Grade Conversion Table in the Office Automation Grade Evaluation Guide.

STENOGRAPHIC DUTIES

The stenographic work is evaluated against the Typing and Stenography 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. Personal Contacts and 7. Purpose of Contacts	1a	30
8. Physical Demands	8-1	5
9. Work Environment	9-1	5
	TOTAL	740

A total of 740 points falls within the range for GS-4, 655 to 850 points, according to the Grade Conversion Table in the Guide.

Summary

The highest level of substantive work performed is evaluated at the GS-7 level. The Office Automation work is evaluated at GS-5, and the Stenographic work is evaluated at GS-4.

Decision

This position is properly classified as Secretary (Stenography/OA), GS-318-7.