

INTERPRETIVE GUIDANCE FOR THE INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY MANAGEMENT SERIES, GS-2210

COVERAGE OF THE INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY MANAGEMENT SERIES, GS-2210

Introduction/Background

Issuance of the Job Family Standard for Administrative Work in the Information Technology Group, GS-2200, satisfies a great need. Because of the explosion in automation, nowhere can one go in the world of work without encountering the impact of computers. Many Americans now use term *Information Technology (IT)* liberally. The term has different meanings for different people.

The following discussion provides guidance on our use of the term within the context of position classification, as this process is governed by chapter 51 of title 5, United States Code. More specifically, we will explain coverage of the *Information Technology Management Series, GS-2210*. In essence, we will explain what Information Technology Specialist positions are and what they are not.

As agencies encounter issues that need further clarification, we will update this guidance, as necessary.

Series Definition for Information Technology Management, GS-2210

We use the following definition for the Information Technology Management Series, GS-2210, in the job family standard (JFS):

“This series covers two-grade interval administrative positions that manage, supervise, lead, administer, develop, deliver, and support information technology (IT) systems and services. This series covers only those positions for which the paramount requirement is knowledge of IT principles, concepts, and methods; e.g., data storage, software applications, and networking.

Information technology refers to systems and services used in the automated acquisition, storage, manipulation, management, movement, control, display, switching, interchange, transmission, assurance, or reception of information. Information technology includes computers, network components, peripheral equipment, software, firmware, services, and related sources.”

Notice the difference between this two-paragraph series definition and the following series definition from the now-superseded Computer Specialist, GS-0334 position classification standard:

“The work in this series 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. Positions are included in this series when the primary need is knowledge of information processing methodology/technology, computer capabilities, and processing techniques.”

Initially setting aside the modern, updated terminology in the GS-2210 definition, the appropriate starting point for comparison is the most important or paramount knowledge necessary to perform the primary duty of a position. (Note the detailed explanation in the JFS series definition about the *paramount knowledge requirement*.) The GS-2210 series definition shows knowledge of IT principles, concepts, and methods (e.g., data storage, software applications, and networking) to be of utmost importance for coverage under this series. Similarly, the GS-0334 series definition said the primary need was knowledge of information processing methodology/technology, computer capabilities, and processing techniques. This simple comparison illustrates the primary coverage of the new GS-2210 series. That is, this new series clearly covers the work previously covered by the now-cancelled GS-0334 series.

Two-Grade Interval versus One-Grade Interval

Another look at the GS-2210 series definition shows what else we did to help users understand series coverage. Note the following key phrase:

“...covers two-grade interval administrative positions...”.

By incorporating this phrase we intended to show what GS-2210 work is by, in essence, saying what it is not. The “two-grade interval” part of the phrase eliminates support-type work, as we explain in detail in the section of the JFS titled **DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN SPECIALIST WORK AND ASSISTANT WORK**. This section title reflects a truth – that some one-grade interval work is IT work. However, keeping in mind the specific context of how we are using that term in this discussion, one-grade interval IT work is not covered by the GS-2210 series. Two of the most common types of one-grade interval work that might be mistaken for GS-2210 work are covered by the following series:

- Computer Clerk and Assistant Series, GS-0335; and
- Computer Operation Series, GS-0332.

The JFS explains the differences between these types of work and the two-grade interval GS-2210 work. For example, confusion often arises about the differences between higher-level one-grade interval work and entry-level two-grade interval work. To clarify this, we contrast developmental positions with a clear progression to higher grade levels based on progressively more difficult assignments with support positions established to augment the work of specialists. We also mention these differences and others in the **EXCLUSIONS** portion of the JFS.

Administrative versus Professional

The other part of the phrase we added to the series definition – “*administrative positions*” – also is of particular significance in explaining GS-2210 coverage to users. GS-2210 work is not “*professional*,” as that term is defined and used within the position classification system:

“*Professional* work requires knowledge in a field of science or learning characteristically acquired through education or training equivalent to a bachelor's or higher degree with major study in or pertinent to the specialized field, as distinguished from general education.”

The most common *professional* (using the above definition) IT occupations are the Computer Science Series, GS-1550, and the Computer Engineering Series, GS-0854. In the **EXCLUSIONS** portion of the JFS, note the word “*professional*” in references to these two series. Of significance as distinguishing points in these two references are:

- the requirement for professional knowledge of fundamentals and principles of computer engineering in the GS-0854 description; and
- the requirement for professional knowledge of theoretical foundations of computer science in the GS-1550 description.

Neither of these kinds of knowledge is required to perform GS-2210 work.

We readily acknowledge that many employees who do GS-2210 work have completed bachelor's degree level coursework in a variety of computer-related topics. However, the key points in distinguishing between professional and administrative IT technology work are **the work itself** and **the paramount knowledge required** to do the work. GS-2210 work is administrative in nature. It meets the “position classification context” explanation of administrative work:

“*Administrative* work involves the exercise of analytical ability, judgment, discretion, and personal responsibility, and the application of a substantial body of knowledge of principles, concepts, and practices applicable to one or more fields of administration or management. While these positions do not **require** specialized education, they do involve the type of skills (analytical, research, writing, judgment) typically gained through a college level education, or through progressively responsible experience.”

Information Technology versus Telecommunications

Perhaps the most common *administrative* occupation that resembles GS-2210 work is the Telecommunications Series, GS-0391. We point out, in the **EXCLUSIONS** portion of the JFS, that telecommunications work **primarily** requires knowledge of:

- the operational and performance characteristics of telecommunications equipment;
- the relationships among component parts of telecommunications systems; and
- telecommunications equipment interoperability and compatibility characteristics.

Such work typically requires "...a general knowledge of IT concepts that is secondary to the paramount knowledge requirements..." listed above.

Paramount IT versus Miscellaneous

A broad category of *administrative* work that may be similar to GS-2210 work and that may pose problems in some cases is certain work now classified to the "catch-all" Miscellaneous Administration and Program Series, GS-0301:

"This series includes positions the duties of which are to perform, supervise, or manage nonprofessional, two-grade interval work for which no other series is appropriate. The work requires analytical ability, judgment, discretion, and knowledge of a substantial body of administrative or program principles, concepts, policies, and objectives."

With the release of the JFS covering the GS-2210 series, many positions that were placed in the GS-0301 series because of a perceived lack of a more appropriate series may now be properly covered by the GS-2210 series. Agencies are now faced with the task of deciding which positions are to be converted. In some cases, the decision may be "gray" at best. To select the appropriate series, you must determine the paramount knowledge; i.e., the most important subject-matter knowledge, required to perform the primary duties of the position. To determine the paramount knowledge, you must also consider the primary purpose for the position's existence, the most important qualification(s) required, recruitment sources, career progression, and the background knowledge required. Management and HR specialists must take care to apply the "**paramount knowledge requirement test**" as consistently and fairly as possible. We have referred to and explained the importance of examining the paramount knowledge requirement in this discussion, as well as throughout the JFS itself. That concept must be applied when making conversion decisions, not just for GS-0301 positions, but for all categories of positions that contain IT-related duties and responsibilities.

Workers versus Users

The final broad category of positions we will address in this discussion comprises "**IT Users,**" which we contrast to "**IT Workers,**" who are covered by the GS-2210 series. In a real sense, obviously we all are users of information technology. However, similar to the situation with telecommunications positions, IT knowledge may not be of primary importance.

In addition to those series and position types we previously mentioned, the **EXCLUSIONS** portion of the JFS lists several more series and types of work that fall into this category and should not be classified to the GS-2210 series. They include:

- Miscellaneous Clerk and Assistant, GS-0303;
- Secretary, GS-0318;
- JFS for Professional and Administrative Work in the Accounting and Budget Group, GS-0500;
- Management and Program Analysis, GS-0343;
- Security Administration, GS-0080;

- Criminal Investigating, GS-1811;
- Librarian, GS-1410;
- Technical Information Services, GS-1412;
- Visual Information, GS-1084;
- Quality Assurance, GS-1910; and
- The Federal Wage System's (blue collar) Installation and Maintenance Family, 2600.

In the JFS under the heading **DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN IT WORKERS AND IT USERS**, we provide specific advice and guidance on how to treat these and other "User" positions. Readers may not be surprised to find the "**paramount requirement test**" at the heart of this discussion.

Here are three specific types of positions that illustrate the "**paramount requirement test**" for three occupations listed in **EXCLUSIONS** in the JFS.

1. **Human Resources Specialist, GS-0201**: This series, recently updated when we issued the **Job Family Position Classification Standard for Administrative Work in the Human Resources Management Group, GS-0200**, may require application of the "**paramount requirement test**" in order to decide whether some positions should be reclassified to the GS-2210 series. Like the systems accountant situation we described below, some human resources (HR) management positions that are properly classified to GS-0201 require knowledge of information technology. We acknowledged this fact by authorizing the **(Information Systems)** parenthetical specialty title, which covers HR specialist positions that involve developing, delivering, managing, and maintaining HR information systems. Although there is a definite need for IT knowledge for such work, the **paramount** knowledge requirement is HR management, rather than information technology. The GS-0200 JFS for administrative work contains illustrations of HR Specialist (Information Systems), GS-0201, work at various levels in Appendices F1, F4, and F5.
2. **Management and Program Analysis, GS-0343**: Some positions properly classified to this series include work that requires knowledge of information technology. Examples of such work includes:
 - advising on the potential benefits/uses of automation to improve the efficiency of administrative support or program operations;
 - analyzing management information requirements to develop program or administrative supporting systems including the systems specifications, data gathering and analytical techniques, and systems evaluation methodology;
 - developing new or modified administrative program policies, regulations, goals, or objectives;
 - identifying and/or developing data required for use in the management and direction of programs; and
 - developing procedures and systems for establishing, operating, and assessing the effectiveness of administrative control systems such as those designed to prevent waste, loss, unauthorized use, or misappropriation of assets.

Although knowledge of some level of information technology would be required to perform these types of duties, the GS-0343 series definition lists the *paramount* knowledge requirements, including knowledge of:

- the substantive nature of agency programs and activities;
- agency missions, policies, and objectives;
- management principles and processes;
- and the analytical and evaluative methods and techniques for assessing program development or execution and improving organizational effectiveness and efficiency.

Consequently, for GS-0343 positions that include the types of duties listed above, the computer serves as a tool (albeit a required tool) that is used to perform the assigned duties.

3. **Systems Accountant, GS-0510**: This is a specialty within the GS-0510 series. Positions in this specialty are involved in designing, adapting, or installing financial accounting and related systems. In today's world, financial systems must be automated in order for management to keep abreast of financial conditions at any given time. Consequently, many systems accountants must have some knowledge of information technology. In the recently-issued **Job Family Position Classification Standard for Professional and Administrative Work in the Accounting and Budget Group, GS-0500**, we acknowledged this need. In addition to including a section on the **IMPACT OF AUTOMATION** in that JFS (and most others that we develop), we added several illustrations to show this situation in actual positions we found during factfinding. Note the Systems Accountant illustrations at Level 4-5 in Appendix F4, and Level 5-3 in Appendix in Appendix F5.

For Further Guidance

We believe this guidance should be helpful in resolving issues about the coverage of the Information Technology Management Series, GS-2210. Users with further questions may contact OPM, at fedclass@opm.gov.