

U.S. Office of Personnel Management
Office of Merit Systems Oversight and Effectiveness
Classification Appeals and FLSA 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: Budget Technician
GS-561-5

Organization: [appellant's organization]
Veterans Administration Medical Center
Department of Veterans Affairs
[city, state]

OPM decision: Procurement Technician
GS-1106-5

OPM decision number: C-1106-05-02

/s/ Bonnie J. Brandon

Bonnie J. Brandon
Classification Appeals Officer

October 6, 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 classification of the appealed position, it is to be effective no later than the beginning of the fourth pay period after the date of this decision (5 CFR 511.702). The servicing personnel office must submit a compliance report containing the corrected position description and a Standard Form 50 showing the personnel action taken. The report must be submitted within 30 workdays from the effective date of the personnel action.

Decision sent to:

Appellant:

[appellant's name and address]

[name of appellant's designated
representative and address]

Agency:

Acting Chief, Human Resources
Management Service
VA Medical Center
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Deputy Assistant Secretary for
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Introduction

On July 21, 2000, the Dallas Oversight Division of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management accepted a classification appeal from [the appellant]. The appellant's position is currently classified as a Budget Technician, GS-561-5. The position is assigned to [the appellant's organization], Veterans Administration Medical Center (VAMC), Department of Veterans Affairs, [city, state]. The appellant believes that her position should be classified at the GS-6 level either as a Budget Technician or Purchasing Agent. We accepted and decided this appeal under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.).

To help decide the appeal, an Oversight Division representative interviewed by telephone the appellant and her current supervisor.

General issues

The appellant compares her position to several other positions that she states are designated as higher-grade Purchasing Agent positions in the VAMC's research, surgery, and laboratory areas. By law, we must classify positions solely by comparing their current duties and responsibilities to OPM standards and guidelines (5 U.S.C. 5106, 5107, and 5112). Since comparison to standards is the exclusive method for classifying positions, we cannot compare the appellant's position to others as a basis for deciding her appeal.

The appellant indicates that one reason her position is graded improperly is because she filed an EEO complaint with her agency. If the appellant believes an agency official may have committed a prohibited personnel practice, as defined in 5 U.S.C. 2302(b), she may pursue the issue with the U.S. Office of Special Counsel.

Because the appellant believes she has been performing higher level duties for more than two years, she believes she should receive back pay retroactive to September 1998. However, the U.S. Comptroller General states that an "...employee is entitled only to the salary of the position to which he is actually appointed, regardless of the duties performed. When an employee performs the duties of a higher grade level, no entitlement to the salary of the higher grade exists until such time as the individual is actually promoted.... Consequently, backpay is not available as a remedy for misassignments to higher level duties or improper classifications" (CG decision B-232695, December 15, 1989). Therefore, the appellant is not entitled to back pay.

Position information

[The appellant's organization] is a component of [a Service Line]. It provides and maintains a modern, reliable, and efficient physical facility, utility systems, and equipment so that the medical environment safely supports all phases of care. The organization is composed of maintenance and repair trade shops such as carpentry, air conditioning, mechanical/plumbing, and electrical.

The Acquisition and Materials Management Office manages the purchasing program at the VAMC. That office makes all large purchases (over \$2,500) and contracts, but each service line

makes small purchases using a purchase credit card. The VAMC purchases are documented and funds are obligated through use of the Integrated Funds Distribution, Control Point Activity, Accounting, and Procurement System (IFCAP).

The appellant performs two major duties. She spends approximately 70 to 80 percent of her time clerically processing requests for purchases that are initiated by [her organization's] shop supervisors. For approximately 20 to 30 percent of her time, the appellant provides limited budget clerical support that helps her supervisor plan and administer [the organization's] budget. The appellant's immediate supervisor, a GS-[series]-13 [title], directs the organization and manages its budget.

The appellant and her supervisor indicate, in writing, that the appellant's official position description of record, [position description number], accurately depicts the appellant's actual duties and responsibilities. However, during our interviews with the appellant and her supervisor, they disclosed that the appellant's budget clerical support work actually is less encompassing than is depicted in the official position description of record. The supervisor indicated that she plans to use the appellant in the future to provide budget clerical support duties as they are described in the position description. Both the appellant and her supervisor also stated that two duties are no longer performed or are inadequately described. First, the appellant does not perform information receptionist duties on a regular, recurring basis. She does not "screen calls and visitors to the Director, Manager, and [service line] subject matter experts, or refer staff and forward only those calls or visitors requiring their attention." Second, the appellant is not required to be a qualified typist. She does not "type a variety of extensive technical reports, agenda, correspondence, studies and surveys from rough draft." The appellant's position description should be revised to more accurately reflect her actual work situation. Work that is not required or performed on a regular, recurring basis should not be included.

To fully understand the appellant's role in clerically processing small purchases (under \$2,500), the entire purchasing process in [the appellant's organization] needs to be understood. The purchasing process begins when shop supervisors or foremen initiate their rough draft requests for purchase of goods and services. The shop supervisors or foremen usually provide a detailed description of the goods or services to be purchased. They also usually specify the appropriate vendor(s) to be used, unless the vendor is the one regularly used for such purchases. The shop supervisors then forward their draft purchase requests to the appellant's supervisor who reviews the requests for propriety and necessity, assures that funds are available to defray the costs, and forwards the approved requests to the appellant for processing.

If the requests are for less than \$2,500, the appellant reviews the draft requests to assure their completeness and that the specified vendors are approved vendors in the Acquisition and Materials Management Office's purchase order system. If the vendors are not in the system, the appellant contacts the Acquisition and Materials Management Office for approval to use the specified vendors. When new vendors are approved, they are added to the VAMC approved-vendors list. There are approximately 400 approved vendors who regularly provide goods and services to the VAMC.

After assuring that the vendors are approved, the appellant contacts them by telephone and verifies the availability of the item(s), the price(s), any applicable discounts, shipping charges, and estimated delivery time. She then gives the vendor her purchase order number and uses her credit card for payment. She completes the processing of the transaction by inputting it into IFCAP and, in so doing, obligates the [organization's] expense account.

If the purchase request is for more than \$2,500, the appellant clerically processes the request after her supervisor has approved the request. The appellant assures that the request includes all required purchase information and then forwards it to the Acquisition and Materials Management Office for their handling and disposition.

The appellant tracks all purchase orders (small and large) to assure that the shops receive what they order and that the goods ordered are received on time and in satisfactory condition. She telephones vendors to resolve any problems, for example, untimely delivery and wrong or damaged items received.

Series, title, and standard determination

The appellant performs specialized clerical processing and support work in two areas: procurement and budget. For positions whose duties fall in more than one occupational group, the most appropriate series for the position depends on consideration of a number of factors. As explained in the *Introduction to the Position Classification Standards* and *The Classifier's Handbook*, a position's series is determined after considering such influences as the highest level of work performed, the paramount qualifications required, sources of recruitment and line of progression, the reason for establishing the position, organizational function, and the background knowledge required.

Because the appellant believes the GS-1105 Purchasing Series may be appropriate for her position, we examined that series as part of this evaluation but did not select it as an appropriate series for the appealed position. Purchasing agents normally solicit quotes orally or through written requests for quotations. They generally use unilateral instruments (purchase orders, calls against blanket purchase agreements, and credit card purchases) to establish contracts. Some purchasing agents use bilateral purchase orders to make purchases within small purchase dollar limitations. During the purchasing process, the purchasing agent remains in contact with the ordering office and/or with technical and supply personnel to discuss quotes that differ from the original order. Differences may involve substitution of items, delay in delivery dates, or increases in prices. They may identify sources from established lists, history files, catalogs, newspaper ads, etc., and determine whether to solicit vendors on the open market. The work requires knowledge of policies and procedures for delivery orders and small purchases, commercial supply sources, and common business practices related to sales, prices, discounts, units of measurement, deliveries, stocks, and shipments. Although the appellant makes small purchases, her position does not fully meet the criteria for the GS-1105 series. The appellant's work does not require her to have the extent of knowledge of sources of supply (required and open market), price evaluation techniques to assess price reasonableness, or solicitation of vendors that positions in the GS-1105 series typically require. Overall, the appellant's work does not meet the minimum requirements for classification in the GS-1105 series.

Procurement knowledge is the highest level knowledge required for the appellant's position. It is the most important subject matter knowledge required to do the work and therefore of prime importance when recruiting. The appealed position has no clear line of promotion to indicate its classification. The primary purpose for the appellant's position, according to the supervisor, is to clerically process all requests [in the appellant's organization] for purchase and to personally make small purchases. Consistent with positions in the GS-1106 Procurement Clerical and Technician Series, the appellant performs procurement support work that facilitates the procurement of supplies, services, and construction. She prepares, controls, and reviews procurement documents and reports; verifies or abstracts information contained in documents and reports; and contacts vendors to get status of orders, resolve problems, and expedite deliveries. Therefore, the appellant's position is best covered by the GS-1106 series and titled *Procurement Technician*.

The appellant's clerical budget support work does not exceed the GS-4 level when compared to the GS-500C Job Family Standard for Clerical and Technical Accounting and Budget Work. Consequently, the appellant's position is best graded using the GS-1106 standard.

Grade determination

The GS-1106 standard is written in the Factor Evaluation System (FES) format. Grades are determined by comparing a position's duties, responsibilities, and qualification requirements with the nine FES factors common to nonsupervisory purchasing support positions. A point value is assigned to each factor based on a comparison of the position's duties and responsibilities with the factor level descriptions in the standard. The points assigned to an individual factor level mark the lower end of the range for that factor level. To warrant a given level, the position must fully equate to the overall intent of the factor level description. If the position fails in any significant aspect to fully satisfy a particular factor level description, the point value for the next lower level must be assigned, unless the deficiency is balanced by an equally important aspect that meets a higher level. The total points assigned are converted to a grade level by use of a grade conversion table in the standard.

Factor 1, Knowledge required by the position

This factor measures the nature and extent of information or facts that an employee must understand to do acceptable work, for example, steps, procedures, practices, rules, policies, theories, principles, and concepts, and the nature and extent of the skills needed to apply this knowledge. To be used as a basis for selecting a level under this factor, a knowledge must be required and applied.

Work at Level 1-3 requires knowledge of a body of standardized procurement regulations, procedures, and operations related to one or more procurement phases or functions. The nature of the appellant's procurement support work fully meets but does not exceed Level 1-3. After receiving approved requests for purchases, the appellant reviews them to assure adequacy of documentation. If the purchase of goods or services costs less than \$2,500, she contacts the vendor, makes the purchase, and assures that the correct goods are received timely and in good

condition. When approved purchases cost more than \$2,500, she forwards them to the Acquisition and Materials Management Office for further processing.

Work at Level 1-4 requires a more in-depth or a broader knowledge of a body of procurement regulations, procedures, and policies involving (1) specialized requirements and/or (2) large purchases. Examples of work at this level are work situations that require a knowledge of a *wide* variety of interrelated steps and procedures required to assemble, review, and maintain procurement files related to *complex* contracts (for example, large purchases for specialized supplies, large purchases for services and construction). The appellant's procurement support assignment does not require the *wide* variety of knowledge anticipated at Level 1-4. The appellant's procedural procurement work is more limited in both breadth and scope.

Level 1-3 is assigned, and 350 points are credited.

Factor 2, Supervisory controls

This factor covers the nature and extent of direct or indirect controls exercised by the supervisor, the employee's responsibility, and how the work is reviewed or controlled. Controls are exercised by the supervisor in the way assignments are made, instructions are given to the employee, priorities and deadlines are set, and objectives and boundaries are defined. Responsibility of the employee depends upon the extent to which the employee is expected to develop the sequence and timing of various aspects of the work, to modify or recommend modification of instructions, and to participate in establishing priorities and defining objectives. The degree of review of completed work depends upon the nature and extent of the review.

At Level 2-2, the supervisor or other designated employee provides standing instructions on recurring assignments by indicating what is to be done; applicable policies, procedures, and methods to follow; quality and quantity of work expected; priority of assignments; and deadlines. The employee at this level receives additional, specific instructions for new, difficult, or special assignments including suggested procedures, sources of information including the location and type of written material that may be used as an aid in completing the assignment. Standing instructions cover the steps involved in processing documents or transactions. The employee at Level 2-2 works independently and refers to the supervisor only those situations that are not covered by instructions or precedents. Review of completed work and the methods used by the employee is done primarily through indicators like the frequency and nature of problems resulting from errors in processing, problems with responding to inquiries or requests, the nature and frequency of complaints from serviced employees or others, and through a review of reports or other controls built into the system.

At Level 2-3, the supervisor or other designated employee assigns work with standing instructions on objectives, priorities, and deadlines and provides guidance for unusually involved situations. The employee plans and carries out successive steps necessary to perform procurement support tasks, using accepted practices or procedures to resolve problems and deviations in the more difficult procurement support tasks. Completed work is reviewed for technical soundness, appropriateness, and conformity to policy and requirements.

The appellant independently processes small purchase requests using standing instructions on recurring assignments. She refers to her supervisor or others the more complicated procurement requests. The appellant's position fully meets Level 2-2. In contrast to positions at Level 2-3, the appellant does not independently handle the more difficult and complicated large purchases or contracts. Her procurement support work is more limited and straightforward and does not require resolution of problems or deviations from accepted practices or procedures as envisioned at Level 2-3.

Level 2-2 is assigned, and 125 points are credited.

Factor 3, Guidelines

This factor covers the nature of guidelines and the judgment needed to apply them. Guides used include, for example, desk manuals, established procedures and policies, traditional practices, and reference materials, such as dictionaries and style manuals.

At Level 3-2, guidelines include a number of established procedures and specific guidelines in the form of desk procedures, commercial catalogs, Federal supply code manuals, specific acquisition regulations, precedent actions, and coding and processing manuals. Because of the number and similarity of guidelines and work situations, the employee must use judgment to identify and select the most appropriate procedures to use, choose from among several established alternatives, or decide which precedent actions to follow as a model. The employee at this level uses judgment and initiative in handling aspects of the work not completely covered, for example, when responding to vendor questions or organizing daily tasks.

Positions at Level 3-3 deal with more complicated guidelines because of the nature of the purchases or contracts. For example, in gathering material to respond to a contractor's protest or to resolve problems encountered in acquisition closeout, the employee determines relevant information by reviewing and reading various documents in contract files and procurement records. When reconstructing an incomplete contract file, the employee may have to rely on experienced judgment, rather than guides, to fill in gaps, identify sources for information, and make working assumptions about what transpired. At this level, the employee uses judgment to interpret guidelines, adapt procedures, decide approaches, and resolve specific problems. For example, the employee uses judgment to devise more efficient methods for procedural processing, gather and organize information for protests or inquiries, or resolve problems that could not be resolved at lower levels. Work at this level may include employees suggesting the development of controls, training, or specific guidance related to the procedural handling of documents and information related to contracts and purchases.

Level 3-2 is fully met. The appellant's guidelines include various VA directives, hospital memoranda, and procurement regulations; Federal procurement regulations; style manuals; and operating policies of the VAMC and [the appellant's organization]. Guidelines used by the appellant for small purchases are specific and do not require significant interpretation or adaptation. The appellant consults with her supervisor when situations call for significant deviations from established guidelines.

The appellant's position does not meet Level 3-3. In contrast to this level where guidelines are not completely applicable because of the nature of problems encountered or complexity of the assignments, the appellant's guidelines are more specific for small purchases and do not involve the complexity of problems encountered by employees at Level 3-3. Further, there is no requirement for the appellant to recommend guideline revisions or changes, apply judgment to interpret the guidelines, or adapt procedures as envisioned at Level 3-3.

Level 3-2 is assigned, and 125 points are credited.

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.

At Level 4-2, the work involves performing related procedural tasks in processing procurement transactions. The employee makes decisions, such as how to sort incoming documents, locate and assemble information, and correct errors based on a review or knowledge of similar cases or samples, or by selecting from among other clearly recognizable alternatives. The employee considers factors such as the appropriate format, content, or processing requirements for each transaction. The actions taken by the employee are similar although the specific pattern of actions may differ (for example, order and kinds of contacts made, reference sources checked, corrections made) depending on the given discrepancy and the information present in procurement files.

At Level 4-3, the work involves performing a variety of procurement support duties involving the use of different and unrelated procedures and methods. Transactions at this level are not standardized, deadlines are continually changing, functions assigned are relatively broad and varied, or the transactions are interrelated with other systems (for example, supply) and require extensive coordination with various personnel depending on the nature of the problem. For example, employees at this level assemble and review various solicitation packages that involve numerous line items, contract clauses, provisions, and attachments for incompatible information or administrative discrepancies. Also at this level, the employee provides procurement support work throughout the procurement cycle by assembling contracts, abstracting bids, processing amendments and modifications, monitoring the status of deliveries, reconciling invoices, and preparing information for closing out contracts.

Level 4-2 is fully met in that the appellant performs a variety of related procurement support tasks using primarily simple noncompetitive purchasing methods. Transactions are standardized and require only limited coordination, and the functions are narrow and deadlines are clear. The appellant's position does not meet Level 4-3 in that the appellant's procurement support work is more narrow in focus and scope than work illustrative of Level 4-3. Because of the straightforward, standardized transactions processed in the appellant's position, there is less difficulty in clerically processing them than is typical of Level 4-3.

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

Factor 5, Scope and effect

This factor covers the relationship between the nature of the work, that is the purpose, breadth, and depth of the assignment, and the effect of work products or services both within and outside the organization.

At Level 5-2, the purpose of the work is to perform a range of procurement support tasks that are covered by well-defined and precise program procedures and regulations. Work products affect the accuracy and reliability of purchasing agents and contracting specialists and personnel in related functions. The work products at this level affect the smooth flow of everyday operations.

Employees at Level 5-3 treat a variety of problems in procurement transactions such as requests to expedite urgently needed items or a vendor's inability to meet delivery schedules. The employee treats these or similar problems in conformance with established procedures. The work results in recommendations, solutions, or reports that directly affect customer or vendor relations or operations.

The appellant's position meets Level 5-3. The appellant's position affects the VAMC shop operations and ultimately affects the physical well being of persons, that is, arranging the timely delivery of urgently-need supplies or equipment. Although the variety and number of purchasing problems the appellant faces minimally meets Level 5-3, the potential impact of the appellant's work on patient care is as significant as envisioned at that level.

Level 5-3 is assigned, and 150 points are credited.

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

Personal contacts include face-to-face and telephone contacts with persons not in the supervisory chain. The purpose of the contacts ranges from factual exchanges of information to situations involving significant or controversial issues and differing viewpoints, goals, or objectives. Levels assigned to these factors are based on what is required to make the initial contact, the difficulty of communicating with those contacted, and the setting in which the contacts take place, for example, the degree to which the appellant and those contacted recognize their relative roles and authorities. Points may be credited under this factor only for contacts that are essential for successful performance of the work.

At Level 1, contacts are with workers in the immediate organizational unit or in closely-related support units and/or with employees outside the organization or with members of the general public in very highly structured situations. At Level 2, contacts are with employees in the same agency, but outside the immediate organization. Level 2 contacts also include contacts with members of the public in a moderately structured setting. For example, contacts may include vendors and/or contractors who are explaining reasons for delay or who are attempting to expedite urgently-needed items. The appellant's contacts include both VAMC staff members as well as a variety of vendors in a moderately structured setting. Level 2 is assigned.

At Level a, the purpose of the contacts is to clarify or exchange information related to procurement support assignments. This may involve answering simple questions such as whether a requisition has been received, explaining more technically oriented subject matter such as training an employee in how to assemble a complex contract, or answering bidders' questions about solicitations.

At Level b, the purpose of the contacts is to plan and coordinate actions to correct or prevent errors, delays, or other complications occurring during the procurement cycle. This may involve obtaining vendors' cooperation in submitting paperwork or other information or requesting others to correct errors in documentation of data entry. The appellant's contacts with vendors are to obtain information on items, prices, discounts, and delivery dates. She also contacts vendors to establish a clear understanding of what is being requested, make small purchases, determine the status of procurement actions, authorize payments, and resolve problems such as untimely delivery and shipment of damaged or wrong goods. The purpose of the appellant's contacts meets Level b.

Level 2b is assigned, and 75 points are credited.

Factor 8, Physical demands

This factor covers the requirements and physical demands placed on the employee by the work assignment. The appellant's position meets Level 8-1 in that her work requires some physical efforts such as standing, walking, bending, or sitting. Level 8-2 is not met since there are no special physical demands, such as work that on a regular and recurring basis requires above average physical agility to walk around or over building materials, excavation sites, and heavy equipment found at construction sites or similar areas.

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

Factor 9, Work environment

This factor considers the risks and discomforts in the employee's physical surroundings, the nature of the work assigned, and the safety regulations required. As at Level 9-1, the appellant's work is primarily performed in an office setting.

Level 9-1 is assigned, and 5 points are credited.

Summary

The appellant's position is evaluated as follows:

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	5-3	150
6. Personal contacts & 7. Purpose of contacts	2b	75
8. Physical demands	8-1	5
9. Work environment	9-1	5
Total		910

Using the grade conversion table in the GS-1106 standard, the total of 910 points equates to GS-5. Therefore, the appellant's position is properly graded at GS-5

Decision

The appellant's position is properly classified as Procurement Technician, GS-1106-5.