

U.S. Office of Personnel Management
Division for Human Capital Leadership & Merit System Accountability
Classification Appeals Program

Atlanta Field Services Group
75 Spring Street, SW., Suite 1018
Atlanta, GA 30303-3109

Job Grading Appeal Decision
Under section 5346 of title 5, United States Code

Appellant: [name]

Agency classification: Cook
WG-7404-4

Organization: [organization] Service
[organization] Services
[name] Medical Center
Department of Veterans Affairs
[location]

OPM decision: Cook
WG-7404-4

OPM decision number: C-7404-04-01

/s/ Marta Brito Pérez
Marta Brito Pérez
Associate Director
Human Capital Leadership
and Merit System Accountability

May 9, 2005
Date

As provided in section S7-8 of the *Operating Manual: Federal Wage System*, this decision constitutes a certificate that is mandatory and binding on all administrative, certifying, payroll, disbursing, and accounting officials of the government. There is no right of further appeal. This decision is subject to discretionary review only under conditions and time limits specified in section 532.705(f) of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations (address provided in the *Introduction to the Position Classification Standards*, appendix 4, section H).

Decision sent to:

[appellant]
[organization] Service
Department of Veterans Affairs
Medical Center
[address]
[location]

[name]
President AFGE Local [#]
[address]
[location]

[name]
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Introduction

On December 16, 2004, the Atlanta Field Services Group of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted a job grading appeal from [appellant] who occupies a job graded as Cook, WG-7404-4. Her job is located in the [organization] Service, [organization] Services, [location] Medical Center, Department of Veterans Affairs, [location]. The appellant requests that her job be graded as Cook, WG-7404-6. We accepted and decided this appeal under section 5346 of title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.). We received a complete administrative report for the appeal on January 14, 2005.

The appellant filed a job grading appeal with her agency and on November 3, 2004, the agency sustained the current grading of her job. She received the appeal decision on November 23, 2004, and filed an appeal with OPM through the servicing Human Resources Office on December 7, 2004.

To help decide the appeal, we conducted a phone audit with the appellant and we interviewed the appellant's second-level supervisor, who has also acted as her first-level supervisor for part of the past year. In reaching our job grading decision, we have carefully reviewed the audit findings and all information of record furnished by the appellant and her agency, including her official job description (JD), number [#].

General issues

The appellant makes various statements about the agency's evaluation of her job and the grading of cook jobs. In adjudicating this appeal, our only concern is to make our own independent decision on the proper grading of the job. By law, job grading decisions must be based solely upon a comparison between the actual duties and responsibilities of the job and the appropriate Job Grading Standards (JGS's)(5 U.S.C. 5346). Since comparison to standards and guidelines is the exclusive method for grading jobs, we cannot compare the appellant's job to others as a basis for deciding the appeal. Therefore, we have considered the appellant's statements only insofar as they are relevant to making that comparison.

The appellant notes that she served as a WG-6 cook in the absence of the incumbent of that job and helped with the duties of a senior cook when the Medical Center lost an employee and the position was not filled for several years. The JD also indicates that the work may require performance of relief duties in the [organization] Unit. The [organization] Unit is a single person unit consisting of one of the grade 6 cooks. When one of the other grade 6 cooks is absent, the [organization] Unit employee completes the work of the absent cook. In these cases, which the record indicates are infrequent, the appellant acts as relief for the [organization] Unit and performs some, but not all, of the duties of that position or unit. She may assist in ordering, issuing and storing food items in accordance with inventory and sanitation requirements; apportion individual items according to standardized recipes; and assemble completed recipe items in preparation for use by cooks. However, section II.C.3 of the Job Grading System, Part 1, indicates that duties performed in another employee's absence cannot be considered in grading a job.

The appellant discusses several duties that she performed several years ago, such as preparing food for the “Meals on Wheels” program. However, 5 U.S.C. 5346(c)(1) indicates that we can consider only current duties and responsibilities in grading jobs. OPM guidelines and previous decisions show that in evaluating jobs such as the appellant’s, current duties are those that have occurred in about the past year. Therefore, we may not consider duties performed several years ago in deciding this appeal.

Job information

The supervisor certified the accuracy of the official JD, but the appellant did not initially certify accuracy. However, she agreed during our interview that the JD is accurate for the duties she now performs. Our fact finding revealed that the JD is essentially accurate and we incorporate it by reference into this decision.

Within the [organization] Service, the appellant’s position is located in Food Processing under the [organization] Unit. Food Processing is comprised on six positions: four WG-7404-6 Cooks, one WG-7404-4 Cook, and one WG-7408-2 Food Service Worker. The organization provides meals for the medical center’s hospital and nursing home section.

The appellant’s job involves breakfast preparation and preparation of some foods for other meals. The appellant spends 50 percent of her time in cooking, 20 percent in cleaning and 30 percent in prepping for future meals. She works the early shift. The appellant prepares breakfast and other staff members transport the food to patients. She follows a computerized menu which takes into account the number of patients to feed and specifies how much of each item is required and what portions to prepare. It also indicates the type of diet and how many portions to make and eliminates the need for determinations for the amount or style of ingredients. She plans her activities to have items ready for serving in a timely manner and maintains the food at the proper temperature. The appellant assembles meals for patients that require little processing, using specialized instructions from a printout developed by a computer database used at the facility. Most foods are prepackaged and require only warming or cooking for a predetermined period of time at a predetermined temperature. She prepares items such as pancakes, French toast, precooked bacon, eggs, and cooked cereals.

During the rest of her time, the appellant prepares portions of the lunch for higher grade cooks to complete. She gathers food, such as soup, starches, carrots, potatoes and onions and prepares them for later meals. She may gather items for the following morning’s breakfast. The appellant prepares simple food and assists in food preparation by peeling potatoes, cutting vegetables, assembling and tossing salads. The appellant’s duties include preparing regular or special diet foods and meals such as soups, gravies, sauces, cold cuts, desserts and other foods. With the use of the computer printouts, the appellant selects quantities of ingredients needed, weighs and measures ingredients, apportions individual items according to standardized recipes and assembles completed recipe items in preparation for use by higher graded cooks. Modified and diabetic salads require selection of regular or diet dressing for use. The appellant operates and cleans a variety of kitchen equipment, and cleans the work area after use.

The appellant works under the general supervision of a Cook Supervisor, but until recently, was supervised by the Food Operations Manager. She may also receive guidance from a senior cook. She receives instructions as required for some difficult tasks; however, she performs tasks independently after training. Work is spot checked to ensure procedures are followed by the appellant. A supervisor or higher grade cook is typically present throughout the shift.

Occupational code, title, and standard determination

The agency placed the appellant's job in the 7404 Cook occupation, titled it Cook, and used the 7404 JGS to determine the grade level of the job. The appellant does not disagree with the assigned occupational code or title of her job. Based on our review of the record, we agree and find that the appellant's job is properly titled and coded as Cook, WG-7404.

Grade determination

The 7404 occupation uses four factors for grade determination. The four factors are: *Skill and Knowledge, Responsibility, Physical Effort, and Working Conditions.*

Skill and Knowledge

At the grade 4 level, the work requires a working knowledge of the methods and procedures relating to food preparation in small quantities, and the skill to apply such information to cook a limited variety of prepared foods or short order foods. Employees know how to read and can understand written food service material such as food labels, standardized recipes, computerized food production sheets, and basic work instructions. They have a knowledge of special and modified diets and various tables of weights and measures. They regulate cooking temperature and steam pressure, and check for correct cooking time and the condition of the food being cooked. Grade 4 cooks are skilled in planning, coordinating and timing the sequence of steps required to have their menu items ready for serving at mealtime. They are knowledgeable of infection and spoilage control procedures. They know how to operate, breakdown, and clean the food service equipment they use such as a meat grinder and griddle. As an example of work at this level, cooks prepare all forms of hot cereals; broil meats; prepare and cook concentrated or dehydrated soups, sauces, and gravies and prepare pureed diet foods and convenience items such as hash browns, fish fillets, and chicken nuggets. They perform a full range of simple cooking by preparing and cooking items that require little or no processing. They operate a variety of kitchen equipment which utilizes gas, electricity, steam, or microwave heat sources.

The grade 4 level is met. As described at that level, the appellant uses grade 4 level knowledge and skills to follow specialized instructions from a computer database and prepare and assemble meals for patients. This involves a limited variety of prepackaged and other food items that require little processing. The work requires knowledge to enter personal identification codes and dates, in order to retrieve recipe, menu and inventory data and to produce printouts of such information for various work units in the kitchen. Comparable to the grade 4 level, the appellant times the sequence of steps required to have items ready for serving and maintaining food at the proper temperature. She follows instructions for oven temperature and timing for cooking and uses a steam table to keep items warm. Like grade 4 level work, most foods are prepackaged and

require only warming or cooking for a predetermined period of time and a predetermined temperature. The appellant prepares breakfast items such as pancakes, French toast, eggs, frozen potatoes and precooked bacon; and convenience items such as frozen hash browns, fish and chicken portions and other regular or special diet foods such as soups, gravies, sauces, cold cuts, desserts and other foods. She measures and weighs appropriate portions according to the computer printout for the meal and the number of servings to be prepared. She also prepares food by peeling, chopping, grinding and other methods. As at the grade 4 level, the appellant operates and cleans a variety of kitchen equipment, including griddles and grinders. The appellant is responsible for keeping her work area and the equipment clean. She ensures the food service area is properly cleaned and secured, maintains job safety and appropriate care of assigned equipment at all times.

At the grade 6 level, cooks prepare a variety of foods and have basic knowledge of food preparation principles and a practical understanding of the physical changes that occur during the processing and cooking of food. They have a working knowledge of the planning process involved in cooking an entire meal including the different preparation methods for various food items, the necessary time for cooking these different items, and how to schedule and coordinate their preparation to produce a properly cooked meal on time. Grade 6 cooks evaluate a variety of raw and cooked food items to decide if they are fresh and whether cooked foods are done. They know the principles of food spoilage, food borne illness, and food safety. They adjust standardized recipes for the number of servings required for large quantity cooking and perform yield testing for selected food items to determine the serving weight or volume after preparation. Grade 6 cooks are skilled in operating and cleaning specialized equipment such as a cook tank, agitating kettle, pump fill station, tipper tie, blast chiller and vacuum packer. They know how to operate, breakdown, and clean the standard food service equipment they use such as a food processor, slicing machine, rotary or convection oven, and a deep fat fryer. Grade 6 cooks have a practical knowledge of methods and procedures necessary for ordering, issuing, and storing food items. As an example of work at this level, cooks, working alone or with a higher grade cook, roast, broil, bake, fry, boil, steam and stew meats, fish, and poultry. They prepare soups, stocks, broths, gravies, sauces, and puddings without the use of packaged mixes and a variety of dessert items.

The grade 6 level is not met. Unlike this level, the appellant does not perform the more difficult cooking processes requiring greater knowledge of food preparation or make comparable food or recipe determinations. She does not use different food preparation methods involving various food items, e.g., roast, broil, bake, fry, boil, steam, and stew meats, fish and poultry, or prepare other food items requiring skills comparable to the grade 6 level. Vegetables or other items designed for an appealing appearance are bought already prepared. The appellant's work primarily includes simple cooking and use of prepackaged foods. She prepares food for up to 200 patients but does not have to make grade 6 level determinations in adjusting recipes for the number of servings required in large quantity cooking. The appellant does not train lower grade cooks or advise them on how to improve their work methods and is not typically involved in ordering, issuing, or storing food items. Additionally, the appellant does not operate the specialized equipment such as a cook tank, agitating kettle, pump fill station or tipper tie characteristic of grade 6 level work.

This factor is credited at the grade 4 level.

Responsibility

At the grade 4 level, cooks receive assignments in the form of written and oral instructions from their immediate supervisor. Instructions typically consist of the cook's worksheet, standardized recipes and meal schedules. The employee is responsible for the proper use and cleaning of equipment, safety practices, and food service sanitation. A higher grade cook or supervisor checks to see that the work is being done properly and is available to answer technical questions. Work is evaluated by the supervisor or higher grade cook in terms of quality of food cooked and adherence to instructions and time schedules.

The grade 4 level is met. As described at that level, the appellant is assigned work using a computer generated worksheet which prints out a worksheet with all items to be prepared, portion sizes and any modifications required for each meal. She is responsible for cleaning and sanitation of all equipment and work areas. Comparable to grade 4 level review, the appellant's work is evaluated by the supervisor or higher grade cook by making visual inspections of the work on a random schedule. Inspections may also be done, when another staff member notices possible issues with the items being prepared. The supervisor determines if the foods are being presented to the patients at the correct temperature and the correct portions. For example, the supervisor may check to see that the correct type and amount of salad dressing is being placed on each salad.

At the grade 6 level, cooks receive oral instructions or written direction in the form of a cook's worksheet, menus, standardized recipes, meal schedules, and special work orders. They plan, coordinate, and time their work to assure food items are prepared on time and are at the proper temperature. Cooks at this level make judgments about the recipe modifications needed to meet changes in the number of servings required. They adjust the amounts and proportions of ingredients in recipes while maintaining the original balance between ingredient quantities and the number of portions needed. They suggest adaptations of standardized recipes. Cooks at this level assist in training lower grade cooks and advise them on how to improve their work methods. They are responsible for operation, breakdown, and cleaning of standard food service equipment they use such as a food processor, slicing machine, rotary or convection oven, and a deep fat fryer. Work at this level is evaluated in terms of the timeliness, quality, flavor, and appearance of prepared foods and conformance to sanitation and safety standards.

The grade 6 level is not met. The appellant is not responsible for the greater variety of food items prepared by grade 6 cooks and judgments associated with them or the greater variety of equipment used. She works within tighter controls, in the form of exact preparation guidance provided in a computer printout, than anticipated at the grade 6 level and is not required or permitted to make recipe modifications or adjustments. The appellant is not required to supervise or train other employees. Her work is spot checked for adherence to procedures rather than the review for timeliness, flavor, or appearance given to grade 6 work which involves more cooking processes and food and recipe judgments.

This factor is credited at the grade 4 level.

Physical Effort and Working Conditions

Physical Effort and *Working Conditions* are the same in the standard for all grade levels. Because they do not have grade level impact, and the appellants' work meets the levels described in the JGS, we will credit both factors as being met and will not address them further.

Decision

The appellant's job is properly graded as Cook, WG-7404-4.