

# Position Classification Standard for Correspondence Clerk Series, GS-0309

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## **SERIES DEFINITION**

This series includes all classes of positions the duties of which are to supervise or perform work involved in the composition or review of correspondence prepared for the purpose of obtaining or supplying factual information when the work primarily requires skill in the composition of letters and memoranda.

This standard supersedes the standard for the Correspondence Clerk Series, GS-0309 issued in December 1952.

## **SERIES COVERAGE**

The operations of the Federal Government generate a vast amount of correspondence, primarily in the form of memoranda and letters. Many of these letters and memoranda are routine, requesting or conveying well-established factual information. Although printed form letters have existed for years and automated letters are common now, there is still need for the original composition of routine factual correspondence. While some of this correspondence is between agencies of the Government or between components within the same agency, the bulk of it is with the public. The correspondence often provides information such as the procedures for filing a license application; who, generally, is eligible for a benefits program; the status of a person's claim or appeal; or the reasons for the authorization or denial of a requested Government action. At times, this correspondence with the public is aimed at obtaining information such as whether or not an individual desires a personal hearing on a particular matter, whether or not he or she has or wants to obtain an attorney or other authorized representative, and who has been designated as a personal representative in a particular matter. Most persons who write such correspondence do so in the course of their subject matter work, but in organizations where there is a high volume of incoming mail, there are positions devoted primarily to writing correspondence. Such positions are covered by this series.

The writing of routine factual correspondence described above, performed in positions covered by this occupational series, is distinguished from the writing of policy and action forming letters and memoranda by program managers and their technical staff. Such letters and memoranda provide interpretations of program guidelines, explain particular points of view, take courses of action, and present options outside an established framework of procedures. The writing of routine factual correspondence performed by Correspondence Clerks differs also from the writing of news releases, broadcast copy, magazine or journal articles, feature stories, text for brochures and pamphlets, reports, or other narratives, intended for publication, that require substantial factfinding by means such as literature search, personal interview, and analysis of questionnaires. This journalistic or public relations type of writing is generally tailored to reach a specific audience and to satisfy the requirements of a particular information medium. Often, the purpose of such writing is to convince or inspire as well as to inform its intended audience.

Positions devoted primarily to the review of correspondence for correct spelling, grammar, format, clarity of expression, accuracy and consistency of facts, and appropriate tone are

properly included in this series. In some instances, the review of correspondence for technical accuracy and sufficiency of its contents may be performed by subject matter-employees; however, correspondence clerks do perform subject matter review work.

While this series covers positions intended primarily for the composition or review of correspondence, grade level criteria contained within this standard may be applied to evaluate letter writing work performed as an adjunct to the primary work of positions classifiable in other occupational series.

A final note: Often the knowledges used by correspondence clerks parallel those required of employees engaged in the substantive work of an organization. However, the key difference between correspondence clerks and subject matter employees is in how that knowledge is employed. Correspondence clerks apply knowledge of a program or organization to notify persons about or to explain actions taken or decisions made by subject matter employees; they do not personally take these actions or make these decisions.

## EXCLUSIONS

The following kinds of positions are excluded from this series:

1. Positions that involve primarily writing, rewriting, or editing reports, scripts, articles, news stories and releases, that are to appear in publications or are to be presented in speeches or broadcasts. This kind of writing and editing requires knowledge of techniques for acquiring information about different subjects, as well as for analyzing, selecting, and presenting it in a form suitable for the intended audience. Such positions are classified in the [Writing and Editing Series, GS-1082](#).
2. Positions involving the composition of correspondence incidental to claims examining, voucher examining, or other subject matter or functional work. Such positions are classified in series that reflect the paramount qualification requirements.
3. Positions that involve editorial support work in preparing manuscripts for publication and verifying factual information are classified in the [Editorial Assistance Series, GS-1087](#).
4. Positions that primarily involve personal contacts with the public for the purpose of providing information on rights, benefits, privileges, and obligations under a body of law where less than full professional legal training is required. Such positions are classified in the [Job Family Position Classification Standard for Assistance Work in the Legal and Kindred Group, GS-0900](#).

## OCCUPATIONAL INFORMATION

The scope of the writing performed by persons in the Correspondence Clerk Series, GS-0309, includes letters, memoranda, or messages requesting or conveying factual information based on available records, subject matter specialist explanations, and standard interpretations of established rules, regulations, or other Federal guidelines. Material written is generally keyed to information in the record or to questions, requests, or complaints presented in incoming correspondence.

There is a wide range in the difficulty of correspondence work. Some letters transmit specifically requested facts or materials. Some are based on explicit instructions, notes, or models provided by other employees. Other letters require the writer to independently recognize issues, topics, or problems and to explain specifically applicable provisions of program guidelines. In other situations, the information initially given the writer may be vague, confused, wrong, or incomplete, requiring the sorting out of fact from error and reconstruction of past transactions or events.

The difficulty of a correspondence assignment cannot be judged by the end product alone. Considering the length, brevity, or number of topics contained in a letter written is not enough. The entire work process must be appraised. Is the issue or question obvious or obscure? Are the facts or materials employed in the letter composed readily available or must they be searched out? Difficulty also may stem from the variety of issues or actions involved in the case, the specificity and accuracy of the information given in an assignment, the accessibility of information needed, and the specificity and detail required in relating subject matter information to a given situation.

## TITLES

The title *Correspondence Clerk* is established for nonsupervisory positions.

Positions that meet the criteria of the [General Schedule Leader Grade Evaluation Guide](#) for evaluation as leaders should be titled *Lead Correspondence Clerk*.

Positions that meet or exceed the criteria of the [General Schedule Supervisory Guide](#) for evaluation as supervisors should be titled *Correspondence Supervisor*.

The word "Typing" or "Stenography" is parenthetically added to the title of any position in this series when such a position includes a requirement for typing or stenographic skill at or above the level of proficiency required by competitive standards.

## EVALUATION OF POSITIONS

1. Supervisory positions are evaluated according to the classification criteria contained in the [General Schedule Supervisory Guide](#).
2. Work leader positions are evaluated according to the classification criteria contained in the [General Schedule Leader Grade Evaluation Guide](#).
3. Correspondence review positions are evaluated according to the grade level criteria contained in the position classification standard for the [Editorial Assistance Series, GS-1087](#).
4. Nonsupervisory positions engaged in the composition of correspondence are evaluated by the criteria contained in this standard.
  - § Positions should be evaluated on a factor-by-factor basis using factor level descriptions contained in this standard. Benchmarks are included to illustrate how the factor levels may be interpreted.
  - § The primary standard may be used to evaluate factors of positions that significantly exceed the factor level descriptions contained in this standard. (See the [Introduction to the Position Classification Standards, Appendix 3](#) and [The Classifier's Handbook](#).)

## GRADE CONVERSION TABLE

Total points on all evaluation factors are converted to GS grade as follows:

| GS Grade | Point Range |
|----------|-------------|
| 1        | 190-250     |
| 2        | 255-450     |
| 3        | 455-650     |
| 4        | 655-850     |
| 5        | 855-1100    |
| 6        | 1105-1350   |

## **FACTOR LEVEL DESCRIPTIONS**

### **FACTOR 1, KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED BY THE POSITION**

Factor 1 measures the nature and extent of information or facts that the worker must understand to do acceptable work (e.g., steps, procedures, practices, rules, policies, theories, principles and concepts) and the nature and extent of the skills needed to apply those knowledges. To be used as a basis for selecting a level under this factor, a knowledge must be required and applied.

#### **Level 1-2 -- 200 points**

Correspondence work at this level requires knowledge of the general functions and terminology of the employing organization to determine the subject of incoming correspondence and the appropriate established source of information for the reply.

- Knowledge of grammar, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation to compose straightforward letters or memoranda that request or provide factual information in proper English.
- Knowledge of the organization's format, routing, and control procedures to properly produce finished correspondence, obtain clearances, and record production.

Illustrations -- These knowledges are employed typically to compose responses to clear, specific, and common requests or questions. These responses take various forms; for example:

- acknowledgements such as letters noting receipt of claims for benefits or receipt of required forms or fees;
- transmittals such as letters sending application blanks, publications, or other requested materials or letters returning documents, case files, or other materials to their appropriate repositories; and
- general explanations of established facts such as who, generally, is eligible for a particular benefit program, what office to contact, and what specific routine information to provide in order to obtain an item or a service.

#### **Level 1-3 -- 350 points**

In addition to the knowledge described at the next lower level, this level requires knowledge of the organization to search records, files, or electronic data banks to locate information needed, to verify information given, and to locate appropriate subject matter specialists to obtain explanations and language for use in composing correspondence.

Knowledge is required of program rules, regulations, instructions, and procedures in order to answer vague or misstated questions, requests, or complaints with detailed, case specific,

explanations and to recognize from the circumstances described in an assignment or incoming letter issues or problems that have not been explicitly stated.

Also needed is knowledge of the organization's information release rules and procedures in order to decide whether, and to what extent, certain information may be furnished to a correspondent.

Illustrations -- These knowledges are used typically to notify, or to answer questions or complaints coming from, members of the public or their representatives about their status with or treatment by a Federal program. Such notifications and responses take various forms; for example:

- synopses of technical decisions on matters such as claims awards and denials;
- discussions tracing the status of one or more transactions to explain the source of an apparent delay or respond to an allegation of error;
- explanations that require search, verification, and presentation of information related to the substance of the matter (explanations involve such issues as time limits for filing applications, steps involved in processing a particular action, procedures for filing appeals, who may or may not represent an individual in dealing with a Government organization, and what related organizations or programs may be contacted for desired action or information);
- letters providing information about what entitlements or obligations exist under a particular program.

## **FACTOR 2, SUPERVISORY CONTROLS**

"Supervisory Controls" covers the nature and extent of direct or indirect controls exercised by the supervisor, the employee's responsibility, and the review of completed work. 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, e.g., close and detailed review of each phase of the assignment; detailed review of the finished assignment; spot-check of finished work for accuracy; or review only for adherence to policy.

**Level 2-1 -- 25 points**

The supervisor or higher grade correspondence clerk makes specific assignments accompanied by specific instructions explaining the desired topic, length, and tone of the letter and indicating priorities and deadlines.

The employee answers assigned incoming letters according to instructions and any matter not specifically covered by them is referred to the supervisor.

Responses are reviewed when completed and ready for signature for responsiveness, factual accuracy, style, format, grammar, spelling and timeliness.

**Level 2-2 -- 125 points**

The supervisor makes standing letter writing assignments according to subject matter, organizational, geographical or other categories appropriate to the work of the unit. Priorities and deadlines are explained initially and are generally found in the office's written operating instructions for subsequent assignments of the same type. The supervisor provides additional, specific instructions where assignments are out of the ordinary or where a routine assignment develops complications such as when information needed for a reply cannot be found.

The employee independently develops responses to routinely received questions, requests, or complaints according to established procedures and previous experience. Unfamiliar situations or deviations not covered by established procedure are referred to the supervisor for a decision or help.

Routine responses are reviewed when completed typically on a sample basis for responsiveness, factual accuracy, appropriate tone, style, and format, and timeliness. Responses to new or involved issues may be reviewed while in draft stage.

**FACTOR 3, GUIDELINES**

This factor covers the nature of guidelines and the judgment needed to apply them. Guides used in General Schedule occupations include, for example: desk manuals, established procedures and policies, traditional practices, and reference materials such as dictionaries, style manuals, engineering handbooks, the pharmacopeia, and the Federal Personnel Manual.

Individual jobs in different occupations vary in the specificity, applicability and availability of the guidelines for performance of assignments. Consequently, the constraints and judgmental demands placed upon employees also vary. For example, the existence of specific instructions, procedures, and policies may limit the opportunity of the employee to make or recommend decisions or actions. However, in the absence of procedures or under broadly stated objectives, employees in some occupations may use considerable judgment in researching literature and developing new methods.



Guidelines should not be confused with the knowledges described under Factor 1, Knowledge Required by the Position. Guidelines either provide reference data or impose certain constraints on the use of knowledges.

### **Level 3-1 -- 25 points**

Specific, detailed guidelines such as agency style manuals, dictionaries, organization charts and directories, subject matter notes or worksheets, and sample letters or paragraphs are provided for use by the employee. These guidelines are complete and specific, permitting little discretion in their application.

Employees work in strict adherence to any notes, standard letters or paragraphs provided, or pertinent portions of organizational and style manuals specified, and any deviation from these must be cleared by the supervisor or designated correspondence clerk of higher grade.

### **Level 3-2 -- 125 points**

Employees follow office or agency standard operating procedures with respect to such concerns as format, style, and terminology. Specific guidelines such as circulars, bulletins, directories, lists of "first name" addressees, style manuals, technical dictionaries, subject matter files, standard paragraphs, sample letters, and publications are available for reference. With each letter writing assignment, the employee decides what style and which format contained within the style and format guides is most appropriate; which, if any, of the available standard letters or paragraphs should be used; and what available subject matter references should be used when the subject matter in the incoming correspondence is covered by more than one official category or topic.

In addition to selecting the most appropriate guideline or reference, the employee decides whether to apply it wholly or in part, adapting style and format, paraphrasing standard letters, and summarizing subject matter material such as reports, fact sheets, case files, and work sheets as necessary. Judgment is also used in finding alternative sources of information on which to base a reply when the correspondent has provided sketchy or inaccurate information. Where existing manuals, instructions, dictionaries, subject matter references, or other guidelines cannot be applied, or where a significant deviation from an existing guideline is considered, the supervisor is consulted.

## **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.

### **Level 4-1 -- 25 points**

The work at this level consists of tasks that are clear-cut and directly related. They include identifying the response or message needed, selecting the most appropriate model letter or standard paragraphs, adding facts where necessary, and instructing the typist to prepare a finished letter.

The messages conveyed by the letters or actions received are clear and the appropriate response is obvious. For example, sending forms, pamphlets, or other publications intended for the public in answer to straightforward requests where the desired publication has been specifically identified. Where additional information is needed, the employee follows a predetermined sequence of steps in obtaining it.

Typically at this level the employee selects and makes minor adaptations to the most appropriate of several model letters keyed to frequently received correspondence or composes original, but standard, replies such as notifying persons that their requests for particular actions have been received and are being processed or messages requesting of individuals specific facts or materials.

### **Level 4-2 -- 75 points**

The work at this level consists of duties that involve related processes including identifying the principal subjects to be addressed, determining whether or not enough information has been provided in order to compose a letter, selecting one or more sources from among established information sources, and organizing facts obtained.

Correspondence composition duties typically involve selecting from available facts those most pertinent to the question or issue raised. For example, in responding to a person's inquiry as to eligibility for a particular benefit or service, the employee must recognize from the facts provided in which of several categories the inquirer falls and what entitlements, if any, for instance, persons in that category have. The employee decides what to include in a letter based on the action requested, question asked, or complaint made.

Correspondence varies with such things as the kind of information requested of or needed by the Government, the type of action involved, and the intended recipient's level of literacy and familiarity with the subject.

**Level 4-3 -- 150 points**

The work at this level includes responding to assignments and correspondence that requires the employee to identify and solve problems involving different processes, practices, and procedures.

In deciding what actions to take, the employee frequently must recognize issues unstated or garbled by the correspondent and must consider facts from various sources in order to reconstruct an individual's case or history of transactions with the Government. For example, where an assignment involves correspondence from a person unfamiliar with the Government program who prematurely files a formal request for a particular step in a multistep appeals process or correspondence from someone whose statements reflect possible omission of a step in the appeals process and therefore possible denial of the person's right to due process, the employee must recognize these problems and trace the individual's case by checking facts found in various records in claim files and obtained from knowledgeable persons such as regional officials and private attorneys associated with the case.

The work involves identifying program related conditions and elements) in both the incoming correspondence and from established records, comparing those identified from different sources, and relating them to applicable program rules, practices, and procedures. For example, an employee responding to a complaint over denial of a particular type of benefit must identify from circumstances described in the complaint letter and from information contained in the organization's records whether or not any of the conditions necessary for eligibility and entitlement to benefits are present and explain such interrelated conditions and requirements.

**FACTOR 5, SCOPE AND EFFECT**

Scope and effect covers the relationship between the nature of the work, i.e., the purpose, breadth, and depth of the assignment, and the effect of the work products or services both within and outside the organization.

In General Schedule occupations, effect measures such things as whether the work out-put facilitates the work of others, provides timely services of a personal nature, or impacts on the adequacy of research conclusions. The concept of effect alone does not provide sufficient information to properly understand and evaluate the impact of the position. The scope of the work completes the picture, allowing consistent evaluations. Only the effect of properly performed work is to be considered.

**Level 5-1 -- 25 points**

The purpose of the assignment is to originate letters or write replies based on readily available and easily understood information. At this level, the letters written are typically based on model letters or standard paragraphs with little deviation. They are generally for purposes of transmittal, acknowledgement, or notification and may include straightforward procedural instructions, requests for specific information, or standard paragraphs. For example, letters

acknowledging receipt of completed applications for Government employment, services, or benefits that point out obvious inconsistencies or omissions and explain corrections or additional information needed.

The writing of these transmittals, acknowledgements, or notifications facilitates the work of employees performing the substantive work of the organization by relieving them of routine correspondence tasks. It also provides timely information and materials to members of the public.

### **Level 5-2 -- 75 points**

The purpose of the assignment is to compose original letters that provide explanations of Government decisions, actions, and processes, based on the application of specific rules, regulations, or procedures pertaining to a program of benefits, training, or other Government activity. For example, explaining why an individual has been denied all or a portion of Federal benefits claimed; how an individual's benefits or earnings were computed; or why a demand for money owed to the Government has been made and how the amount owed has been computed.

Letters written can affect the acceptability of Government decisions and actions by providing understandable explanations that will satisfy persons' inquiries or need to take further action. Some letters written may provide the specific reasons or data to individuals for use as a basis for administrative appeal when they have received unfavorable decisions or have been adversely affected by Government action. Letters written may explain a person's current status with respect to a Government program and choices available enabling that person to make appropriate personal decisions (such as whether or not to request a personal hearing in connection with a benefits appeal or whether or not to continue working to earn additional credits for social security retirement insurance) or they may advise individuals of procedural errors they have made so that requests and other dealings with the Government may be resubmitted and receive prompt, accurate attention.

## **FACTOR 6, PERSONAL CONTACTS**

This factor includes face-to-face contacts and telephone and radio dialogue with persons not in the supervisory chain. (**Note:** Personal contacts with supervisors are covered under Factor 2, Supervisory Controls.) Levels described under this factor are based on what is required to make the initial contact, the difficulty of communicating with those contacted, and the setting in which the contact takes place (e.g., the degree to which the employee and those contacted recognize their relative roles and authorities).

Above the lowest level, points should be credited under this factor only for contacts that are essential for successful performance of the work and that have a demonstrable impact on the difficulty and responsibility of the work performed.

The relationship of Factors 6 and 7 presumes that the same contacts will be evaluated for both factors. Therefore, use the personal contacts that serve as the basis for the level selected for Factor 7 as the basis for selecting a level for Factor 6.

### **Level 6-1 -- 10 points**

The employee has face-to-face and telephone contacts with employees within the immediate office or correspondence unit and with those in related or support units such as claims examining, typing, and publication supply units. There are also telephone contacts with members of the general public who request specific and readily available items such as application forms, notices, and pamphlets.

### **Level 6-2 -- 25 points**

The employee has face-to-face and telephone contacts with subject matter persons employed outside the immediate organization and at various levels of the agency. There are also contacts with members of the general public who are not sure what information they are looking for, or if they are sure, do not know how to identify it by title or topic.

## **FACTOR 7, PURPOSE OF PERSONAL CONTACTS**

In General Schedule occupations, purpose of personal contacts ranges from factual exchanges of information to situations involving significant or controversial issues and differing viewpoints, goals, or objectives. The personal contacts that serve as the basis for the level selected for this factor must be the same as the contacts that are the basis for the level selected for Factor 6.

### **Level 7-1 -- 20 points**

The purpose of the employee's contacts is to obtain, clarify, or give factual information. Those contacts include asking a subject matter specialist for technical information for use in a letter, explaining what model letter or standard paragraph to use in a particular situation, asking a mail unit employee whether a particular letter has been released, notifying congressional staff of a delay in answering a congressional letter and telling members of the general public whether or not a requested form or publication is available and its cost.

## **FACTOR 8, PHYSICAL DEMANDS**

The "Physical Demands" factor covers the requirements and physical demands placed on the employee by the work assignment. This includes physical characteristics and abilities (e.g., specific agility and dexterity requirements) and the physical exertion involved in the work (e.g., climbing, lifting, pushing, balancing, stooping, kneeling, crouching, crawling or reaching). To some extent the frequency or intensity of physical exertion must also be considered, e.g., a job requiring prolonged standing involves more physical exertion than a job requiring intermittent standing.

### **Level 8-1 -- 5 points**

Letter writing is done sitting at a desk. In some positions, employees walk to other offices, bend and stoop to reach files, and lift or carry light reference books, files, papers, or pamphlets.

## **FACTOR 9, WORK ENVIRONMENT**

The "Work Environment" factor considers the risk and discomforts in the employee's physical surroundings or the nature of the work assigned and the safety regulations required. Although the use of safety precautions can practically eliminate a certain danger or discomfort, such situations typically place additional demands upon the employee in carrying out safety regulations and techniques.

### **Level 9-1 -- 5 points**

The work is performed in an office setting that is adequately lighted, heated, and ventilated. Employees are subject to everyday risks or discomforts that require normal safety precautions such as observing fire regulations, not running on stairs, avoiding spilling liquids on walkways and steps, closing file drawers, etc.

## **CORRESPONDENCE CLERK, GS-309-03**

Incumbent serves in a correspondence unit of a military personnel command activity composing responses to a variety of requests and questions related to an individual's military status or record. Replies are based on worksheets developed by military personnel examiners.

### *Duties:*

- Reads incoming worksheets written by military personnel examiners. These worksheets contain notes and instructions for composing finished replies to requests and questions that have required technical determinations on matters such as the correct amount of retirement pay, family housing eligibility, and amount of service creditable toward retirement.

- Selects format, forms, and standard paragraphs as indicated on work sheets and composes correspondence incorporating factual information provided by the examiners. Expands abbreviated worksheet notes into fully developed sentences and paragraphs, adding appropriate regulatory citations as needed.
- Submits completed draft letters, memos, certificates, etc. to typists for typing in final form. Instructs typists in matters such as format, addressees, addresses, and necessary number of copies. Reviews typed correspondence for adherence to specified format and typographical accuracy. Assembles final correspondence into a prescribed "package" of letter, attachments, and enclosures in the right number of copies and submits it to the authorized official for signature.

**Factor 1, Knowledge Required by the Position -- Level 1-2 200 points**

- Knowledge of the designations and uses of approximately 30 different forms and form letters used separately or in combination to convey or request military personnel-related information.
- Knowledge of the basic rules of grammar, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation, and of standard abbreviations for military rank and pay grades in order to compose fully developed sentences and paragraphs from terse notes made up of phrases and abbreviations.
- Knowledge of unit rules for selecting the appropriate correspondence format and procedures for assembling correspondence "packages" including the number and disposition of copies in order to recognize inconsistent format instructions on examiner's worksheets and review typed correspondence.

**Factor 2, Supervisory Controls -- Level 2-2 - 125 points**

The employee composes finished correspondence based on the notes and instructions contained in worksheets of military personnel examiners.

The employee works independently in completing recurring assignments and refers problems such as incomplete or inconsistent information to the supervisor for resolution.

Completed correspondence is reviewed for adherence to worksheet content and for adequacy of format, grammar, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation.

**Factor 3, Guidelines -- Level 3-1 -- 25 points**

Guidelines include worksheets developed by military personnel examiners, form letters, a locally developed manual containing standard paragraphs, a Departmental correspondence manual and duty station directories. Correspondence is composed in strict adherence to worksheet content, form letters, and format guides.

**Factor 4, Complexity -- Level 4-2 -- 75 points**

The employee composes correspondence based on notes and instructions in worksheets for approximately 15 categories of personnel requests or transactions. The employee selects the most appropriate of about 30 different forms and certificates and adds the correct regulatory citations to correspondence conveying military personnel determinations. Responses vary based on the nature of the inquiries concerning individuals' military status or record.

**Factor 5, Scope and Effect -- Level 5-1 -- 25 points**

The purpose of the work is to develop finished correspondence from notes and instructions provided by military personnel examiners, using model letters, standard paragraphs, forms, and certificates. Correspondence composed facilitates the work of military personnel examiners and administrators by relieving them of correspondence work.

**Factor 6, Personal Contacts -- Level 6-1 -- 10 points**

Contacts are mainly with other correspondence clerks and typists in the correspondence unit.

**Factor 7, Purpose of Contacts -- Level 7-1 -- 20 points**

Contacts are to ask or answer questions related to work procedures and to provide typing and letter assembly instructions.

**Factor 8, Physical Demands -- Level 8-1 -- 5 points**

The work is done primarily while sitting at a desk. Occasional walking and carrying of service record jackets, forms, letters, and manuals are necessary.

**Factor 9, Work Environment -- Level 9-1 -- 5 points**

The work involves only normal risks or discomforts typical of an office setting and requires no special safety precautions.

**TOTAL POINTS -- 490**

**CORRESPONDENCE CLERK, GS-0309-04**

Serves in a correspondence unit of a military personnel command activity composing responses to a variety of common requests, questions, and complaints related to an individual's military status or record. These responses require examination of service records, but do not require more involved technical determinations such as those made by military personnel examiners.



*Duties:*

- Reads incoming correspondence concerning current and former service members written by service members themselves, their relatives, employers, prospective employers, creditors, commanding officers, military finance centers, attorneys, congressmen, federal, state, and local government agencies, and other authorized parties.
- Identifies the specific kind of information required to answer the correspondence that has been screened and coded to any one of 10 general categories by the "make ready" unit. Determines the correspondent's entitlement to such information.
- Searches individual service record "jackets," records on microfiche, and service record information retrieved electronically via computer terminal to gather information on an individual's current military status or past record such as the date and place an individual entered the military service, his or her current duty station, current rate of pay, periods of active and inactive duty, disciplinary actions taken against the individual, training received, dates and places of duty, past assignments, rates or ranks held at particular periods of time, etc. Information is used to determine eligibility for and preparation of upgraded or reissued discharge papers and certificates; to determine eligibility for particular medals and citations; to prepare necessary documents certifying an individual's military or civilian status for a court's use in determining his or her susceptibility to garnishment in child support, alimony, or mortgage default cases; to prepare service transcripts needed by a former service member for use in obtaining specialized employment such as work as a merchant seaman; etc.
- Composes letters, messages, or telegrams to other military commands, branches of service, or other appropriate sources to request information not found in records at hand or omitted from the incoming correspondence or information needed to resolve conflicting or inconsistent information found in initial search.

Composes correspondence arranging information gathered into logical sequence and appropriate format including any necessary forms. Submits completed draft letters to typists for typing in final form instructing them on matters such as format, addressees, addresses, and necessary number of copies. Assembles final correspondence into a prescribed "package" of letter, attachments, and enclosures in the right number of copies and submits it to the authorized official for signature.

**Knowledge Required by The Position, Level 1-3 -- 350 points**

- Knowledge of the internal organization of military service member records and the relationships of their parts in order to search records and extract service information required in developing accurate and adequate written responses to a

variety of requests, questions, and complaints, and to recognize errors, inconsistencies, or omissions in service record information.

- Knowledge of the various military services' personnel management related organizations, such as Finance, Reserve, and Records Centers and their functions and terminology such as that related to duty status, rank, and pay in order to understand incoming correspondence, to identify and contact in writing likely sources for needed information, and to compose accurate replies.
- Knowledge of the rules for entitlement to a variety of military certificates, decorations, and citations in order to determine the response to a correspondent's request for issuance or reissuance.
- Knowledge of the rules of grammar, spelling, and punctuation for composing correspondence and reviewing correspondence composed or typed by others.
- Knowledge of unit rules and procedures for recording assignments, for selecting the proper format, releasing service member information, and contacting other offices in the employing organization and other military components.

### **Factor 2, Supervisory Controls, Level 2-2 -- 125 points**

The employee answers routine correspondence in selected categories routed directly to the unit. The unit supervisor or authorized assistant provides instructions on changes in rules or unit procedures. The employee independently identifies, gathers, selects, and organizes the appropriate information. Completed replies are checked for accuracy, responsiveness, and adherence to unit procedure.

### **Factor 3, Guidelines, Level 3-2--125 points**

Guidelines include model letters, a Departmental correspondence manual, Military Personnel Command directives, correspondence unit directives, duty station directories, and posters depicting and explaining military decorations. Since each correspondent's circumstances are unique and information provided by the correspondent is not always complete or consistent, each reply requires exercise of judgment in selecting the most appropriate of several alternatives offered by the guidelines. Where inconsistencies or gaps in information cannot be resolved and correspondent's status remains unclear, the situation is referred to the supervisor.

### **Factor 4, Complexity-Level 4-2--75 points**

The employee composes responses to several different categories of situations, each requiring information gathering and organization. Information searches require determining which of several types of records may exist and their location either in local files and data banks or in those of other organizations. Information provided by incoming correspondence or in the records at hand is often incomplete and there are often a number of different types of records to locate. Depending on the circumstances, a number of different kinds of correspondence may be composed to obtain and convey information before a final reply is composed. Responses vary

with such things as the kind of personnel matter involved and the extent of the inquirer's understanding of the military personnel system.

**Factor 5, Scope And Effect-Level 6-1 -- 10 points**

The purpose of the work is to develop timely and factual replies to current or former service members, to their commanding officers, close relatives, courts of law, Government agencies, and other authorized parties having requests or questions related to the service member's military status or record.

The work affects the accuracy of court actions such as allowing garnishment of an individual's pay. It also affects the acceptability of a former service member's claim for veterans' benefits, application for employment in the Merchant Marine, or request for U.S. citizenship.

**Factor 6, Personal Contacts, Level 6-1-10 points**

The employee has contacts with, employees within the correspondence unit, with employees in related or support units such as "make ready" clerks, military personnel examiners, "Freedom of Information Privacy Act" specialists, and typists.

**Factor 7, Purpose of Contacts, Level 7-1-20 points**

Contacts are to question or explain incomplete information; to provide instructions on format, forms, and enclosures; to explain a correspondence situation and request guidance on release of information; and to request additional forms.

**Factor 8, Physical Demands, Level 8-1-5 points**

The work is done primarily while sitting at a desk. Occasional walking and carrying of service record jackets, forms, letters, and manuals are necessary.

**Factor 9, Work Environment—Level 9-1-5**

The work involves only normal risks or discomforts typical of an office setting and requires no special safety precautions.

**TOTAL POINTS – 790**

**CORRESPONDENCE CLERK, GS-0309-05**

Incumbent serves in a correspondence unit of a military personnel command activity composing responses to a variety of requests, questions, and complaints related to an individual's military status or record. These typically include correspondence that poses problems such as persons seeking to obtain information, benefits, or other desired action for which they have made previous, unsuccessful, attempts at obtaining.

*Duties:*

- Reads incoming correspondence concerning current and former service members or their dependents on matters such as desired or disputed reassignments, reenlistment eligibility, shipboard conditions, bachelor or family housing eligibility or problems, and hardship discharges.
- Identifies both the basic issues to be addressed and complicating factors (such as charges of rudeness, unresponsiveness, and error) to be considered in any response.
- Searches for and gathers information on the facts and on the regulatory provisions that apply to the specific circumstances discussed in the incoming correspondence. Information is gathered from written sources at hand such as individual service records, prior correspondence on the same subject or pertaining to the same individual, personnel manual and regulations, and through telephone conversations with other persons in the Department. Documents all telephone and face-to-face contacts to substantiate replies composed.
- Composes letters, messages, or telegrams to other military commands, branches of service, or other appropriate sources to request information not found in sources at hand, omitted from the incoming correspondence, or needed to resolve conflicts or inconsistencies in information already gathered.
- Composes detailed explanations in response to correspondence received, arranging information into logical sequence and appropriate format and choosing the appropriate words and expressions to convey the desired tone (such as warmth and concern to the parents of a missing service member). Instructs typists on matters such as format, addressees, addresses, and necessary number of copies.

Assembles final correspondence into a prescribed "package" of letter, attachments, and enclosures in the right number of copies and submits it to the authorized official for signature.

### **Factor 1, Knowledge Required by the Position - Level 1-3--350 points**

- Knowledge of standard rules and requirements for a variety of military personnel management-related topics such as creditable service for the purpose of pay, promotion, transfer to reserve, and retirement; assignment of various types of retirement status; housing and other entitlements of transferred personnel; hardship discharges; and reenlistment eligibility in order to recognize and
- discount erroneous or false information provided by the correspondent and to discern the correspondent's actual situation, to find the most applicable official guidelines, to develop a useful reply, or to refer the matter to a more appropriate organization for reply or action.
- Knowledge of the internal organization of military service member records and the relationship of their parts in order to search records and extract service information required in developing accurate and adequate written responses to a variety of requests, questions, and complaints, and to recognize errors, inconsistencies, or omissions in service record information.
- Knowledge of the various military services' personnel management-related organizations such as Finance, Reserve, and Records Centers as well as their functions and terminology such as that related to duty status, rank, and pay in order to understand incoming correspondence, to identify and contact likely sources of needed information, and to compose accurate replies.
- Knowledge of the rules of grammar, spelling, and punctuation for composing correspondence and reviewing correspondence composed or typed by others.
- Knowledge of unit rules and procedures for recording correspondence assignments, for selecting proper correspondence format, releasing service member information, and contacting other offices in the employing organization and other military components.

### **Factor 2, Supervisory Controls, Level 2-2--125 points**

The supervisor makes standing assignments on a variety of designated personnel-related matters such as housing assignments, discharges, and shipboard conditions. The employee judges the sensitivity of the matter and the accuracy of the situation presented and decides how best to respond. The employee independently identifies, gathers, selects, and organizes the appropriate information to compose a reply. Completed replies are evaluated at the time of signing for accuracy, clarity, appropriate tone, and timeliness.

**Factor 3, Guidelines, Level 3-2--125 points**

Available guidelines include previous replies written on similar but not necessarily identical matters, military personnel regulations, the Enlisted Transfer Manual outlining the various entitlements of enlisted personnel upon reassignment, and a listing of key Member of Congress highly interested in the Department's affairs. The employee applies these and other guidelines in light of the particular circumstances presented in or developed on each correspondence problem. Correspondence situations involving factual circumstances that are not covered by available existing guidelines are referred to the supervisor.

**Factor 4, Complexity, Level 4-3 150 points**

The employee is responsible for composing responses to incoming letters, each of which presents a unique set of circumstances. The employee must compare and reconcile situations presented in the incoming correspondence with available records and must identify the pertinent military personnel-related topic or topics to be addressed before composing a response. Information on these topics is gathered from a variety of documentary and personal sources in a sequence that varies with each correspondence matter. The employee must decide, based on the circumstances presented in the correspondence, how extensive the reply should be and which words and phrases to use to convey the appropriate message, both in fact and in tone. In order to respond to questions or complaints concerning specific cases or situations, the employee identifies the conditions that influenced particular actions or decisions from facts and circumstances described in incoming letters and found in available records. The conditions identified from different sources are reviewed to discern and explain the interrelatedness of varied military personnel rules, practices, and procedures and their application to the correspondent's situation.

**Factor 5, Scope and Effect, Level 5-2--75 points**

The purpose of the work is to develop timely and accurate replies to current or former service members, their representatives, or their families. The replies developed enable service members or their representatives to take the necessary steps to obtain desired action on supposed entitlements or to consider alternatives where no action or benefits can be expected.

**Factor 6, Personal Contacts, Level 6-2--25 points**

In addition to contacts with employees in supporting units, the employee has contacts with persons in the same military department, but in another organization, such as those responsible for writing assignment orders for service members or commanding officers of units to which service members who are the subject of correspondence are assigned. There are also contacts with "case workers" employed by Members of Congress.

**Factor 7, Purpose of Contacts, Level 7-1--20 points**

Contacts are for the purpose of obtaining or providing factual information related to a current or former service member's military status or record.

**Factor 8, Physical Demands, Level 8-1--5 points**

The work is done primarily while sitting at a desk. Occasional walking, stooping to open file drawers, and carrying of binders containing manuals and regulations are necessary in the course of the work.

**Factor 9, Work Environment, Level 9-1--5 points**

The work is performed in an office and involves only the risks, discomforts, and normal precautions associated with such a work setting.

**TOTAL POINTS -- 880**

## EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

This memorandum is published to provide interpretive/explanatory information regarding the standard to which it pertains. It does not contain evaluation criteria. Explanatory Memoranda include background information that may be helpful to users in understanding and applying standards and in explaining the standards to managers and employees.

### Introduction

The draft FES Classification Standard for the Correspondence Clerk Series, GS-0309, was distributed for review and comment in February 1981, with comments due April 30, 1981. This memorandum summarizes the comments received and discusses the changes made in the standard before it was published in final form.

### Comments Received

Overall reaction to the draft was favorable. Specific issues raised by reviewers included the following:

#### A. Series Definition

Issue: The proposed series definition, identical to the existing one, may be too broad and general.

Discussion: The agency raising this issue did not feel that the proposed definition made it clear that this series covers clerical work in the preparation of factual correspondence. The agency suggested that the distinction between subject matter and correspondence work be made in the definition and offered specific language for a revised definition.

Action: The suggested language was adopted with some modification.

#### B. Series Coverage

Issue: The distinction between correspondence clerk work and that of subject matter employees needs to be further clarified.

Discussion: Several reviewers raised this issue. The distinction between correspondence clerk work and that of subject matter employees was covered in the Series Coverage portion of the draft. It was also included in the Exclusions section of the draft, that stated that the series did not cover positions where the primary emphasis is on subject matter or functional work rather than on correspondence composition work.

Action: The language in the Series Coverage section was strengthened to better distinguish between correspondence clerk positions and those classifiable to a subject matter series. Series coverage material now explains that correspondence clerks relay factual information about



actions taken by employees in a specialized subject matter series; correspondence clerks do not take substantive actions themselves.

### **C. Exclusions**

**Issue:** The draft did not explicitly exclude positions where typing was required in addition to composition of correspondence.

**Discussion:** The previous standard, published in 1952, specifically excluded positions where employees composed and typed their own letters. The 1952 exclusion was absolute; if a position required typing as well as composition of correspondence, regardless of how difficult the composition work might be, it was to be excluded from the Correspondence Clerk Series and classified in the Clerk-Typist Series, GS-0322. Several agencies mentioned that the draft did not list such an exclusion and asked for clarification. The concept of the clerk-typist position has changed since the early 1950's. Specialized clerical work is now classified where possible in specialized clerical series, whereas general office clerical tasks when combined with typing are classified in the Clerk-Typist Series, GS-0322. For specialized clerical positions that require the services of a fully qualified typist, the word Typing is added parenthetically to the title. The revised classification standard for the Correspondence Clerk Series, GS-0309, treats covered positions that require typing in this way.

**Action:** A provision was included for adding the parenthetical title of (Typing) to correspondence clerk positions that require the services of a fully qualified typist.

**Issue:** Several agencies asked if positions primarily involved in the performance of duties concerned with the internal management and control of correspondence are properly excluded from the Correspondence Clerk Series.

**Discussion:** One agency recommended that an additional exclusion be listed covering correspondence control-type positions. Several other agencies indicated that positions involving some correspondence review as well as correspondence control work would be reduced in grade if the draft standard were applied.

**Action:** No action was taken. Exclusion 2 provides for such a situation; i.e., positions in which correspondence control work is indeed primary and correspondence review or composition is performed incidentally are excluded from the Correspondence Clerk Series.

**Issue:** One agency asked if the draft continued the exclusion in the previous standard of positions that involve "selection of the proper form for conveying specific information, even though the information is sent out in the form of a letter."

**Discussion:** The agency was concerned at this apparent omission in the draft, or change in series coverage, because certain of its positions would be affected by such a change. The agency interpreted language in the draft's factor level description 5-1 and in benchmark 309-3-1 as implying coverage of positions that selected and sent out forms.

Action: The cited factor level description and benchmark were revised to avoid the impression that they described situations in which forms are merely selected and sent out with no

composition. It was never intended that positions involved solely with selecting forms for conveying information be included in the Correspondence Clerk Series.

#### **D. Titles**

Issue: The proposed title "Correspondence Unit Supervisor," unchanged from the previous prescribed title, should be changed.

Discussion: By including the word "unit," the proposed title could be seen as a reference to an organizational entity.

Action: The title has been changed to "Correspondence Supervisor,"

#### **Factor 1-Knowledge Required by the Position**

Issue: Factor Level Description (FLD) 1-3 appears to exceed the intent of Level 1-3 of the Primary Standard.

Discussion: One agency raised the issue saying that the draft stated in FLD 1-3 that knowledge is required of program rules, regulations, instructions, and procedures in order to answer vague or misstated questions, requests, or complaints with detailed, case-specific explanations, and to identify issues or problems where none have been explicitly stated. This knowledge requirement, the agency felt, would exceed Level 1-3 in the Primary Standard, which recognizes performance of the full range of standard clerical assignments and the resolution of recurring problems. The aim of this factor level description is to describe a situation where the correspondence clerk, familiar enough with the program and with recurring problems and situations described in incoming correspondence, is able to recognize a particular problem or an issue where the correspondent or the assignment's originator has provided only a set of circumstances rather than an explicit statement of an issue or problem.

Action: The language in FLD 1-3 was revised to bring it closer to the Primary Standard. Also, the word "recurring" in FLD 1-2 was changed to avoid the possibility of identifying the situation

described there with the situation described at Level 1-3 in the Primary Standard ("knowledge ... to resolve recurring problems").

#### **Factor 2, Supervisory Controls**

Issue: An FLD 2-3 should be added to reflect independence in resolving nonrecurring problems.

Discussion: One agency requested an FLD 2-3 for the reason stated. Our view, however, is that the FLD 2-2 provided in the standard adequately covers the typical correspondence situation; i.e., recurring problems covered by established responses.

Action: None taken.

## **F. Benchmarks**

Issue: The draft provided too few benchmarks and these were limited to a single organizational setting.

Discussion: Many of those commenting raised this issue. We decided to provide only a limited number of benchmarks (one for each typical grade level) in a single organizational setting primarily to illustrate how the factor level descriptions should be interpreted. Our purpose is to illustrate grade level distinctions for a type of correspondence and to avoid creating a misleading impression that a given level of difficulty was linked to a particular kind of subject matter or program. Factor level descriptions, rather than benchmarks, are the primary basis for evaluating positions in this occupation.

Action: None taken.

## **Impact Data**

Commenting agencies reported no significant impact on grade levels as a result of test application of the draft. Written comments covered 610 positions classified in the Correspondence Clerk Series, GS-0309. There were no upgrades reported and only 12 potential downgrades, less than 2 percent of the total sample.