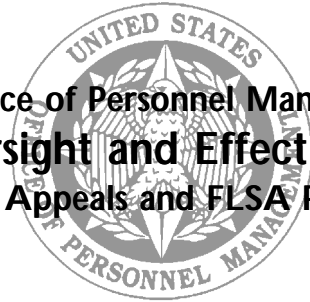


U.S. Office of Personnel Management
Office of Merit Systems Oversight and Effectiveness
Classification Appeals and FLSA Programs



Atlanta Oversight Division
75 Spring Street, SW., Room 972
Atlanta, GA 30303

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

Appellant: [Appellant]

Agency classification: Technical Information Specialist
GS-1412-9

Organization: [squadron]
[library]
Department of the Air Force
[state]

OPM decision: Technical Information Specialist
GS-1412-9

OPM decision number: C-1412-09-01

Kathy W. Day
Classification Appeals Officer

11/15/99

Date

As provided in section 511.612 of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations, this decision constitutes a certificate that is mandatory and binding on all administrative, certifying, payroll, disbursing, and accounting officials of the government. The agency is responsible for reviewing its classification decisions for identical, similar, or related positions to ensure consistency with this decision. There is no right of further appeal. This decision is subject to discretionary review only under conditions and time limits specified in the Introduction to the Position Classification Standards, appendix 4, section G (address provided in appendix 4, section H).

Decision sent to:

[Appellant]

[Civilian Personnel Officer]

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Introduction

On August 9, 1999, the Atlanta Oversight Division, U. S. Office of Personnel Management, accepted an appeal for the position of Technical Information Specialist, GS-1412-9, [organizational location], Department of the Air Force, [geographical location]. The appellant is requesting that her position be classified as Technical Information Specialist, GS-1412-11.

The appeal has been accepted and processed under section 5112(b) of title 5, United States Code. This is the final administrative decision on the classification of the position subject to discretionary review only under the limited conditions and time outlined in part 511, subpart F, of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations.

General issues

The appellant believes that she has been denied pay, allowances, and raises due to omissions, deliberate and unethical predetermination of her grade, and excessive time involved in procuring an accurate position description. She strongly believes that her involvement in revising the regulations and guidelines for the library, as well as her time spent supervising 1 clerk and 9 part-time volunteers support an upgrade of her position. She is requesting an upgrade, retroactive pay, awards determinations, interest, attorney fees, retirement credit time, and the transfer of the position description to a core document.

Although the appellant believes she is entitled to back pay and associated benefits, the Comptroller General of the United States (Decision B-180144, September 3, 1974) has stated that: "It has long been the rule of this office that a personnel action may not be made effective retroactively so as to increase the right of an employee to compensation." Comptroller General Decision B-240239, dated October 29, 1990, provides the general rule that an employee is entitled only to the salary of the position to which he or she 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. This rule was reaffirmed by the United States Supreme Court in United States v. Testan, 424 U.S. 392, at 406 (1976), where the court stated ". . . the federal employee is entitled to receive only the salary of the position to which he was appointed, even though he may have performed the duties of another position or claims that he should have been placed in a higher grade." Therefore, even if the appellant's previous position were found to be correctly classified at a higher grade, she would not be entitled to back pay, interest, allowance, etc.

The appellant provided copies of performance awards and letters of recommendation that she received for her performance and involvement in revising the regulations and guidelines for the library. However, quality of work and efficiency are not considered in determining the grade level of a position. Performance and incentive awards are properly used to recognize

achievements not considered through the classification process.

Position information

The appellant is assigned to position description number [#]. The appellant, supervisor and agency have certified to the accuracy of the position description.

The appellant is responsible for the administration of the Medical Information Research Center/Health Science Library. She spends 60 percent of her time directing library functions and performing literature searches in reference to clinical and health care for the allied health personnel and others such as patients, dependents, and base civilians. Literature searches require an interview with the requestor to determine the scope of the subject in order to get specific targeted information. The appellant decides how to produce this information by selecting the most appropriate search system available on the MEDLINE Internet or the CD search program. She sorts through computer printouts and hundreds of articles to find the most relevant literature and extracts pertinent information to summarize. She directs the acquisition of interlibrary loans and negotiates lending agreements. She stays abreast of technical information and new programs to ensure that the medical library has or can access current available resources.

The appellant spends 40 percent of her time directing the library programs which include the safety program, journal collection, cataloguing, filing, shelf maintenance, short term loans, vendor relations, and other administrative programs. She supervises 9 part-time volunteers and 1 full-time Administrative Clerk. She provides training and monitors the work, assigns work, plans work schedules, and updates job descriptions. She manages the annual library budget and justifies expenditures for the coming fiscal year. She publishes newsletters and flyers to inform the hospital staff of library programs and systems information.

The appellant works under the general supervision of the Education and Training Flight Commander. She works independently and establishes deadlines and sets priorities for the library. Completed work is evaluated for appropriateness and conformance to Air Force and Joint Commission on the Accreditation of Healthcare Organization guidelines.

Standard determination

Technical Information Services Series, GS-1412, August 1994.
General Schedule Supervisory Guide, April 1993.

The appellant states that she spends at least 25 percent of her time supervising 1 full-time employee and 9 part-time volunteer employees. However, the appellant has limited supervisory responsibilities over the volunteers, and only two part-time volunteer employees work on any given day. The total work hours of all 9 part-time volunteers average approximately 40 hours per week, and they perform recurring assignments. The appellant's supervision of 1 full-time clerical

employee and 9 part-time volunteer employees operating as described does not constitute a major duty which would occupy 25 percent of her time. Therefore, we have determined that supervisory duties performed by the appellant do not meet the minimum criteria established by the General Schedule Supervisory Guide and that guide will not be used in evaluating the appellant's position.

Series determination

The agency placed the position in the Technical Information Services Series, GS-1412. This series includes positions that involve supervision or performance of work in developing, coordinating, processing, and transmitting specialized information. The work requires (a) a broad knowledge of one or more scientific, engineering, technical, or other disciplines or fields of interest sufficient to understand the significance and relationships of the concepts and ideas contained in the information, and (b) a practical knowledge of one or more techniques for organizing, accessing, or disseminating information. Common functions in the occupation are indexing; developing and maintaining thesauri; preparing bibliographies, digests, and reports; searching subject-oriented literature and databases; and cataloging highly specialized materials.

We find the appellant's position is properly placed in the Technical Information Services Series, GS-1412.

Title determination

Technical Information Specialist is the title authorized for all nonsupervisory positions in the GS-1412 series.

Grade determination

The GS-1412 series standard is written in the Factor Evaluation System (FES) format. Under the FES, positions are placed in grades on the basis of their duties, responsibilities, and the qualifications required as evaluated in terms of nine factors common to nonsupervisory General Schedule positions.

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

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

The appellant disagrees with the agency evaluation of factors 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7. We have reviewed factors 8, and 9 and agree with the agency evaluation. Therefore, only those factors contested by the appellant will be addressed in the appeal decision.

Factor 1 - Knowledge Required by the Position:

This factor measures the nature and extent of information or facts that a worker must understand to do acceptable work, such as the steps, procedures, practices, rules, policies, theories, principles, and concepts; and the nature and extent of the skills needed to apply this knowledge. The agency credited this factor with Level 1-6. The appellant believes Level 1-7 should be credited.

At Level 1-6, the appellant must have a knowledge of established techniques and requirements of the employing organization, for example the prescribed thesaurus used for indexing and the rules governing changes to the vocabulary, the cataloging rules used by the organization, or the structure and content of internal databases. In addition, she also must have a knowledge of the commonly accepted concepts, standard methods, techniques, and principles of the subject-matter specialty required by the work. Knowledge is used to independently perform assignments involving the categorization, summarization, or location of scientific, technical, or other specialized information. Assignments do not require significant deviation from established methods and precedents and are characterized by such features as: information sources (e.g., articles, technical reports, proposed legislation), which are of limited technical complexity and usually involve concepts and principles that are fairly well understood; information is obtained, analyzed, and organized using standard reference tools and established techniques and practices, such as application of existing indexing terms, customary reference interviewing techniques, standard search strategies, commonly available legal reference materials (e.g., the Congressional Record, Code of Federal Regulations), and foreign language dictionaries; and participation in formulating plans for changes and improvements is limited to development of factual data, such as usage data on new terms in the literature or frequently asked reference questions.

Level 1-6 is met. The appellant performs duties that require a knowledge of the medical sciences field; library management; searching methods; and book and journal collections, as well as an ability to index and summarize journal articles and technical reports. For the appellant to perform literature searches, she must understand the available search methods and determine and select the appropriate method to use, such as MEDLINE or CD Rom. She uses interviewing techniques to gather information from the requestor that helps her develop a search strategy and identify appropriate literature. She must understand the significance and relationship of information to choose the most relevant articles. In addition, she uses standard methods and

techniques to index, categorize, organize, and summarize material.

At Level 1-7, the work requires knowledge of a wide range of techniques, methods, sources and procedures within the functional information area (e.g., indexing, thesaurus control, digest preparation, reference) and subject-matter knowledge requiring extended specialized experience to modify standard information practices, precedents and techniques, adapt automated systems, or make significant departures from previous approaches to similar problems or projects, to solve a variety of information organization, access, and dissemination problems; evaluate, select, and adapt precedents to meet specialized information requirements; and apply standard practices of other fields and disciplines as they relate to the subject specialty. At this level, assignments may also include staff assignments relating to program planning or coordination of services, such as marketing, or contracting and contractor oversight.

The full intent of Level 1-7 is not met. Several years ago, the appellant rewrote guidelines and local procedures for the library based on established policies and standard practices. Although she believes this assignment is indicative of the level of knowledge required for her work, it does not equate to the kind of knowledge described at Level 1-7. Level 1-7 describes extensive departure from standard procedures and precedents and the development of new techniques and procedures for complex work in the subject specialty, as well as the application of standard procedures of other fields and disciplines that may relate to the specialty. The appellant's work is limited to directing the library functions and medical information research for the Health Science Library and does not routinely require significant departures from normal procedures and practices. When performing literature searches, she gathers the information that is to be researched by conducting an in-depth interview with the requestor which gives relevant information to be targeted for the search. The subject matters that are researched do not generally require modification of practices, techniques, or significant departures from standard search approaches. Typically, the appellant is responsible for providing the requestors with the most current medical references on a specific subject matter by indexing, summarizing, and preparing reports which enable providers to access information necessary to make diagnostic decisions to meet patient needs.

Level 1-6 is credited for 950 points.

Factor 2 - Supervisory Controls:

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

At Level 2-4, the highest level described in the standard, the supervisor defines continuing areas of responsibility or long-term assignments and sets the general objectives (e.g., turnaround time for assigning indexing terms to articles or reports). Overall deadlines flow from the work situation (e.g., articles or reports to index, the legislative calendar), or, in the case of projects, the specialist consults with the supervisor to establish priorities, deadlines, and resources required.

The specialist, having developed expertise in the particular specialty or function, is responsible for planning and carrying out the work, resolving most of the conflicts that arise, coordinating the work with others, and interpreting policy on her own initiative in terms of established objectives. In some assignments, such as special projects, studies, or evaluations, the specialist also determines the approach to be taken and the methods to be used. The specialist keeps the supervisor informed of progress, potentially controversial matters, issues with far-reaching implications, and intractable problems. The supervisor reviews completed work from an overall standpoint in terms of feasibility, compatibility with other information program requirements, or effectiveness in meeting objectives or achieving expected results.

The appellant meets Level 2-4. She has developed the expertise to plan and carry out her assignments independently. She manages the day to day assignments by coordinating the work with others (i.e., volunteer employees and one full-time employee). She was tasked with the special project of organizing the library using her own approach which involved rewriting the library guidelines and procedures. Because of this, she is very familiar with policy and objectives of the programs. She handles most conflicts that arise and keeps the supervisor informed of potential controversial matters. Her work is generally reviewed for conformance with Air Force regulations and other standards.

At Level 2-5, according to the Primary Standard, the supervisor provides administrative direction with assignments in terms of broadly defined missions or functions. The employee has responsibility for independently planning, designing, and carrying out programs, projects, studies, or other work. Results of the work are considered technically authoritative and are normally accepted without significant change. If the work should be reviewed, the review concerns such matters as fulfillment of program objectives, effect of advice and influence on the overall program, or the contribution to the advancement of technology. Recommendations for new projects and alteration of objectives usually are evaluated for such considerations as availability of funds and other resources, broad program goals, or national priorities.

Level 2-5 is not met. This level describes independent responsibility for broad programs and authoritative technical advice that may affect organizational policies or contribute to the advancement of technology. It reflects administrative supervision only, with full technical authority delegated to the employee. Typically, this level of authority is accompanied by responsibility for a significant program or function. The appellant is responsible for independently planning and prioritizing the work of the Health Sciences Library according to established policies and accepted practices. While the appellant has significant technical responsibility, her program responsibilities are limited to the operation of the library and her supervisor has final authority over program decisions, especially if they affect the mission or functions of the library. Neither the absence of immediate supervision in day-to-day operations, nor the fact that technical recommendations are normally accepted, serves to support a level above 2-4.

Level 2-4 is credited for 450 points.

Factor 3 - Guidelines:

This factor covers the nature of guidelines used, and the judgment needed to apply them. The agency credited this factor with Level 3-3. The appellant believes Level 3-5 should be credited. However, we believe that the appellant does not meet the full intent of Level 3-4, therefore, Level 3-5 cannot be considered.

At Level 3-3, the guidelines include thesauri, dictionaries, cataloging rules and formats, authorities lists, literature in the specialized subject area, national and/or international information standards, and agency policies and regulations. The guidelines are not completely applicable to the work or have gaps in specificity. For example, assigning indexing terms requires some interpretation to cover evolving subject-matter areas. The specialist uses judgment in interpreting and adapting the guidelines for application to specific cases, problems, or situations. In addition, the specialist analyzes the applicability of standard information practices to specific circumstances and proposes regulatory or procedural changes to improve the effectiveness or efficiency of technical information operations.

Level 3-3 is met. The appellant deals with written guidance such as Air Force Guidelines, hospital instructions, and other established standards that provide specific instructions that usually apply to her work. She may occasionally have to interpret or adapt guidelines to a specific case. The appellant was instrumental in revising the written guidelines for the library. Therefore, she is knowledgeable of the standard practices and technical procedures and may make changes in certain local procedures to improve the operation of the library.

At Level 3-4, the guidelines are essentially the same as in Level 3-3; however, they are often inadequate in dealing with the more complex or unusual problems. For example, when the standard thesaurus or list of indexing terms does not cover rapidly evolving terminology or highly specialized fields of knowledge, considerable interpretation and adaptation are required. The specialist at this level uses initiative and resourcefulness to deviate from or extend accepted methods, techniques, and practices (e.g., recommending addition of new indexing terms to cover new or rapidly changing subject areas); resolve important issues when precedents do not apply (e.g., evaluating and recommending new methods for information transfer); or identify areas for improvement in established methods of reference searching, indexing, or preparing legislative digests.

Level 3-4 is not met. The appellant does not routinely deal with complex or unusual situations that would require deviating from accepted practices, methods, or techniques to the extent described at this level. Guidelines are basically applicable in most situations. She is not responsible for developing new research methods, criteria or policies.

Level 3-3 is credited for 275 points.

Factor 4 - Complexity:

This factor covers the nature, number, variety, and intricacy of tasks, steps, processes, or methods in the work performed; the difficulty in identifying what needs to be done; and the difficulty and originality involved in performing the work. The agency credited this factor with Level 4-3. The appellant believes a higher level should be credited.

At Level 4-3, assignments consist of various tasks and duties involving different and unrelated but established processes and methods. Typically, the work consists of analyzing literature of limited technical complexity, or performing a segment or segments of more specialized services or projects. Decisions regarding what needs to be done depend on the analysis of each objective and the nature of the information to be provided or categorized; choosing a course of action often involves selecting from many alternatives, including identifying and recommending minor deviations from established practices of the library or information center. Accomplishing the assignment involves ascertaining and analyzing interrelationships (e.g., the effect of indexing decisions on the accessibility and usefulness of the information by users). Examples of assignments at this level include retrieving information that is readily available using standard search strategy, finding background information on social welfare issues where sources are readily available, and assigning indexing terms where the decisions on choice and number of terms are apparent from the content of the article.

Level 4-3 is met. The appellant performs duties that provide a variety of information services and related products to users. She must decide which database to search for the specific information and what pertinent information to extract. In most instances, the facts are clear-cut and apply directly to the issue and do not routinely involve any unusual circumstances. Internet searching involves retrieving information that is readily available for the appellant to index, catalog, and summarize. Although rapid changes in technology place an increasing demand on the appellant, more powerful tools to manage the work ultimately make the work easier.

At Level 4-4, assignments typically consist of a substantial number and variety of duties within a specialization requiring a variety of techniques and methods to determine the best approach. Decisions regarding what needs to be done include assessment of new or unusual circumstances, variations in approach, and/or incomplete or conflicting information. Planning, coordination, and problem resolutions are affected by the need to keep abreast of the specialized information needs of users; the increasing quantity of information available; missing, vague or conflicting bibliographic information; changes in the subject specialty; and changes in the means of accessing and disseminating information. Assignments involve determining the nature and extent of information needs or problem areas, developing approaches best suited to answer those needs, and assigning priorities to the work.

Level 4-4 is not met. The appellant believes that the complexities of finding the correct databases to search on an ever-changing Internet require expertise in the medical sciences in order to obtain correct patient-specific information. The Internet is a tool that constantly provides new information. However, a variety of techniques are not required to access the data. Although the searches may require a number of steps, they are basically interrelated and there are a limited

number of procedures and methods available. Decisions regarding what needs to be done consist of choosing the appropriate database to search and choosing the pertinent information from the literature based on specific medical information and parameters provided by the requestor.

Level 4-3 is credited for 150 points.

Factor 5 - Scope and Effect:

This factor covers the relationship between the nature of the work, as measured by the purpose, breadth, and depth of the assignment, and the effect of work products or services both within and outside the organization. The agency credited this factor with Level 5-3. The appellant believes this level is exceeded.

At Level 5-3, the purpose of the work is to provide access points to a variety of specialized articles or reports or to locate information relevant to users' needs using established practices and techniques. The work affects other library and information personnel, and the ability of users to perform their missions. Furnishing accurate, timely, and responsive information enables users to accomplish their missions more effectively and helps prevent duplication of effort (e.g., defense-related research and development, legislative policy analysis).

Level 5-3 is met. The appellant states that she provides expert advice and guidance covering the medical sciences to users of the library. The purpose of the appellant's work is to ensure that the library is equipped with up-to-date medical reference material that will assist users with patient care and to use her expertise to research the medical sciences using the MEDLINE and other available tools. Because she has been involved in the development of the library programs and the availability of or access to the databases, she serves as the authority in researching information. She trains medical staff and others on how to use the systems.

At Level 5-4, the purpose of the work is to provide expertise in organizing, accessing, or disseminating technical information in a specialized subject-matter area to meet users' needs for specialized and complex information. The work may include establishing criteria, such as expansions or enhancements to controlled vocabularies; formulating projects, such as planning a new service or system enhancement; or analyzing reports of advanced scientific research or information on complex issues before the Congress that are conflicting, incomplete, or unclear. The work product or service affects access to and dissemination of specialized information provided by the agency and other agencies that provide specialized information services; or access to and dissemination of information within or outside of the agency in support of legislative decision-making on major national issues.

Level 5-4 is not met. Although the appellant arranged the on-line services and determined the technology best suited for the library, this does not fully meet the intent of Level 5-4. Her work does not normally involve a variety of unusual conditions, does not impact decision-making on national issues, and does not impact a wide range of agency activities or the operations of other agencies.

Level 5-3 is credited for 150 points.

Factor 6 - Personal Contacts and Factor 7 - Purpose of Contacts:

Factor 6 assesses face-to-face as well as telephone contacts with persons not in the supervisory chain. In General Schedule occupations, the purpose of personal contacts ranges from factual exchanges of information to situations involving significant or controversial issues and differing viewpoints, goals, and objectives. The personal contacts which serve as the basis for the level selected for Factor 7 must be the same contacts as those that are the basis for the level selected for Factor 6. The agency credited Level 2b. The appellant believes Level 3b should be credited. We agree with the appellant.

Persons Contacted

At Level 2, personal contacts include employees in the same agency, but outside the immediate organization (e.g., users within the agency, other agency employees) and/or individuals or groups outside the agency, such as technical information specialists in other organizations and users outside the agency, in a moderately structured setting.

The appellant exceeds Level 2 since her contacts include individuals outside her agency.

At Level 3, personal contacts include individuals or groups from outside the employing agency, such as technical information specialists, librarians and/or subject-matter experts in other agencies and/or in non-federal libraries, information services or laboratories; users from other agencies; or representatives of professional associations. This level may also include contacts with program officials several managerial levels removed from the specialist when such contacts occur on an ad hoc or other irregular basis.

Level 3 is met. According to the position description, the appellant has contacts outside of the immediate agency. The appellant's contacts include employees of the Department of Defense and Department of Veterans Affairs; staff members of local hospital libraries, universities, and regional libraries; and occasionally authors of journals. Although the agency determined that Level 3 was not met because the appellant did not normally have contacts with higher level program management officials, the standard only states such contacts may occur. It does not require this kind of personal contact to credit Level 3.

Purpose of Contacts

At Level b, the purpose of contacts is to plan or coordinate work efforts, solve operating problems, or to provide advice to managers and users on noncontroversial issues and concerns.

Level b is met. The appellant coordinates work efforts to get the information that she needs to respond to requests for information, and she provides information to users.

At Level c, the purpose of contacts is to persuade individuals and groups with different opinions or interests (e.g., to change criteria or methods, accept changes in thesauri and align related tools with these changes, accept modifications in levels and means of access to security classified and/or proprietary information, or cooperate in meeting objectives).

Level c is not met. The appellant compares getting professionals to answer phones and communicating in their language to persuading them to change their criteria or methods, accept modifications, etc. However, this level is intended to recognize employees who must persuade or negotiate uncooperative, skeptical or dangerous persons not merely persuade them to communicate more clearly or consider a different method.

The combination of Level 3 for *Contacts* and Level b for *Purpose* equates to 110 points according to the table in the standard.

Factor 6 and Factor 7 are credited with Level 3b for 110 points.

SUMMARY		
FACTOR	LEVEL	POINTS
1. Knowledge Required by the Position	1-6	950
2. Supervisory Controls	2-4	450
3. Guidelines	3-3	275
4. Complexity	4-3	150
5. Scope and Effect	5-3	150
6. Personal Contacts 7. Purpose of Contacts	3-b	110
8. Physical Demands	8-1	5
9. Work Environment	9-1	5
	TOTAL	2095

A total of 2095 points falls within the range for GS- 9, 1885 to 2100 points, according to the Grade Conversion Table in the GS-1412 standard.

Decision

The position is correctly classified as Technical Information Specialist, GS-1412-9.