

**CLASSIFICATION APPEAL DECISION**

issued by:

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Washington, D.C. 20240

**APPELLANT:**

[REDACTED]

**POSITION:**

Secretary (Office Automation), GS-318-7

**ORGANIZATION:**

Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management  
Utah State Office

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

**DECISION:**

Secretary (Office Automation), GS-318-7  
(Appeal denied)

  
for Carolyn Cohen  
Director of Personnel Policy

FEB 1999

\_\_\_\_\_  
DATE

\_\_\_\_\_  
Copy of Decision Transmitted to:

[REDACTED]  
Connie Stewart  
Personnel Officer  
Bureau of Land Management

Wayne Garner  
Personnel Officer  
Utah State Office, BLM

## INTRODUCTION

On July 29, 1998, [REDACTED] appealed the classification of her position to the Director of Personnel Policy, Department of the Interior. [REDACTED] is employed as a Secretary (Office Automation), GS-318-7, in the Bureau of Land Management, Utah State Office, [REDACTED]. She has appealed for an upgrade of her position to the GS-8 level.

This is the final administrative decision within the Department of the Interior. The appellant may appeal the classification of her position to the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) in accordance with the procedures described in Appendix 4 of the Introduction to the Position Classification Standards. Information about submitting an appeal to OPM is included in the decision letter to the appellant.

## SOURCES OF INFORMATION

In deciding this appeal, we considered information from the following sources:

1. The appellant's letter of appeal, along with an attached copy of her current position description.
2. The material submitted by the Bureau of Land Management on December 1, 1998, including the appellant's current position description, summary evaluation of the position, organization chart and functional statement for the Division [REDACTED], and the position description (with amendments) for the position held by the appellant's supervisor, [REDACTED] Deputy State Director, Operations (DSD).
3. Additional material submitted by the appellant on December 21, including her performance plan for fiscal year 1998, and organization charts and program information for the Division [REDACTED] and the Utah State Office.
4. Telephone audit of the appellant's position on January 6, 1999, with a follow-up conversation on January 13, and a telephone interview with [REDACTED] on January 6.

## POSITION INFORMATION

The appellant provides administrative and clerical support for the DSD and for the four group leaders. (The position description and other program information refer to the supervisors who are subordinate to the DSD as "branch chiefs," but the organization charts reflect the current term, "group leaders.") She carries out and coordinates all of the administrative support and clerical activities for the Division [REDACTED] which are required for the Division's staff to accomplish their work. She evaluates the clerical activities of the Division and initiates actions to eliminate conflicts and duplication of procedures. She also organizes the flow of administrative and clerical processes in the office.

The appellant advises Division employees and others on the Division's administrative and clerical procedures, and follows up with the supervisor and staff to ensure that commitments are met. She develops material for the supervisor's presentations and locates and assembles information for a variety of reports produced by the Division or the State Office. She reviews for completeness and adequacy all outgoing correspondence and reports for the Division and composes routine correspondence concerning nontechnical matters.

The appellant makes travel arrangements for the staff, enters travel authorizations into the Federal Financial System, and ensures that all travel regulations are adhered to and that cost coding is correct. She arranges repair and maintenance of office equipment. She prepares and processes the Division's personnel actions, and she reviews the Division's time and attendance reports and enters them into the automated system.

### **SERIES AND TITLE DETERMINATION**

The position is properly placed in the Secretary Series, GS-318, which includes positions that assist one individual, and in some cases the subordinate staff of that individual, by performing general office work auxiliary to the work of the organization. To be included in this series, a position must be the principal office clerical or administrative support position in the office, operating independently of any other such position in the office. The appellant serves as the principal administrative and clerical support position for the DSD and the group leaders. She also provides administrative and clerical support for the other Division staff members.

The title Secretary applies to all nonsupervisory positions in this occupation. According to the Office Automation Grade Evaluation Guide, the parenthetical title Office Automation (OA) is added to the title of positions excluded from the Office Automation Clerical and Assistance Series, GS-326, when the positions require significant knowledge of office automation systems and a fully qualified typist to perform word processing duties. The appellant uses several types of software, including WordPerfect (word processing), Lotus and Access (spreadsheet), Power Point (graphics), Travel Manager, and other types of software. Because the appellant's position requires knowledge of automated systems and a fully qualified typist to perform word processing duties, the parenthetical designation (Office Automation) in the title is correct. Thus, the correct title is Secretary (Office Automation).

### **GRADE DETERMINATION**

The grade of the appellant's position is determined by application of the position-classification standard for the Secretary Series, GS-318. The 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 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 and/or the benchmarks. 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 lower point value must be assigned.

The appellant disagrees with the levels assigned by her servicing personnel office for factors 2, 5, and 7.

#### Factor 1, Knowledge Required by the Position

This factor requires that two elements be considered in determining the overall level to be assigned. One of these elements, Work Situation, reflects the complexity of the organization served by the secretary. Work Situation, in combination with Knowledge Type, produces the number of points to be credited for Factor 1.

Knowledge Type III involves knowledges at the next lower level (Type II) and knowledge of the duties, priorities, commitments, policies, and program goals of the staff sufficient to perform non-routine assignments such as independently noting and following up on commitments made at meetings and conferences by staff members, shifting clerical staff in subordinate offices to take care of fluctuating workloads, or locating and summarizing information from files and documents when this requires recognizing which information is relevant to the problem at hand. At this level, the secretary is fully responsible for coordinating the work of the office with the work of other offices and for recognizing the need for such coordination in various circumstances.

The appellant's position requires Type III knowledges. She must know the responsibilities, priorities, commitments, and policies of the DSD and group leaders in order to take such actions as following up on commitments, routing incoming work to the appropriate group or office, locating information and assembling reports, and coordinating the work of the Division with the work of other divisions within the State Office and the field offices.

Secretarial positions at knowledge Type IV require a basic foundation of administrative concepts, principles, and practices sufficient to perform independently such duties as eliminating conflict and duplication in extensive office procedures, determining when new procedures are needed, systematically studying and evaluating new office machines and recommending acceptance or rejection of their use, studying the clerical activities of the office and subordinate offices and recommending a specific restructuring of the way activities are carried out. Positions at this level also require a comprehensive knowledge of the supervisor's policies and views on all significant matters affecting the organization that would enable the secretary to perform duties such as developing material for the supervisor's use in public speaking engagements, including developing

background information and preparing outlines for speeches, and briefing or advising staff members or individuals outside the organization on the supervisor's views on current issues facing the organization.

The appellant's position does not require Type IV knowledges. Her work involves taking measures to improve and enhance efficiency in the Division's administrative and clerical functions, to the degree that such measures are inherent in her responsibility for such duties as coordinating the work of the Division with the work of other offices and being responsible for information and reporting requirements within the Division. She functions as the quality assurance and quality control person for correspondence, personnel, travel, time and attendance, and other administrative and clerical matters in the Division. However, she does not eliminate conflict and duplication in extensive office procedures or have responsibility for the clerical activities of subordinate offices. She is responsible for arranging for the purchase of office machines, e.g., in locating the best price for a particular machine, as well as for maintenance and repair, but her responsibility does not extend to the evaluation of new machines for their effect on the efficiency of the Division. In addition, while she must know the Division's priorities, commitments, policies, and program goals, she does not perform duties requiring the level of knowledge described at Type IV, such as developing speech material for the supervisor or briefing others on the supervisor's views. She does prepare overheads, copies, and other material for the DSD's meetings with the other division chiefs and with the field office managers, but does not develop background material and outlines for speeches. In summary, the appellant is not required to have the level of knowledge of the substantive programs of the Division required for Type IV to be credited.

At Work Situation B, the staff is organized into subordinate segments which may in turn be further divided. Direction of the staff is exercised through intermediate supervisors, and the subordinate groups differ from one another in such aspects as subject matter, functions, relationships with other organizations, and administrative requirements in ways that place demands upon the secretary that are significantly greater than those described at the next lower level, Work Situation A. There is a system of formal internal procedures and administrative controls, and a formal production or progress reporting system.

The complexity of the Division [REDACTED] matches Work Situation B. There are three major subdivisions, or groups, under the DSD (there are four group leaders, but the organization charts show three distinct groups). Two of the groups are further subdivided and have team leaders below the group leader level, and a third group (Fire and Aviation Management) oversees the Eastern Great Basin Coordination Center. The groups and teams differ from one another in terms of functions, relationships with other organizations, both inside and outside the State Office, and administrative requirements. The disparate functions of the groups and teams include land and mineral patents; public land use authorizations, exchanges, compliance, and trespass abatement; land title clearance and adjudication; mineral sale and lease revenue collection; revenue deposits

and accounting; fire suppression and management; aviation safety and management; appraisal of lands and minerals; engineering survey, design, construction, and maintenance; cadastral survey and geospatial data base maintenance; corporate automated data collection and management; cartographic products and services; and lands and minerals case recordation, status, and legal land descriptions in an automated records system. The groups and teams differ in their relationships with other Divisions in the State Office, the field offices, other Federal and State agencies, and with the public because of the variety of functions for which they are responsible.

Because of the size of the Division staff (approximately 60 employees) and the variety of functions, the Division has a system of formal internal procedures and administrative controls, as well as a formal internal reporting system. For example, the appellant conveys administrative and procedural instructions and information to the groups, and she deals with the group leaders to assemble information for a variety of reports, such as the annual work plan. In addition, she reviews outgoing correspondence and reports for quality assurance.

At Work Situation C, organizations are typically divided into three or more subordinate levels with several organizations at each level, and the staffs are augmented by various staff specialists in such fields as personnel, management analysis, and administration. The organizational complexity of the Division does not match Work Situation C, nor does it have any of the types of staff specialists found in such organizations. In addition, the Division is divided into two subordinate levels, not the three (or more) levels typical of Situation C. Therefore, Work Situation C is not credited.

In summary, Knowledge Type III is required of the appellant, and Work Situation B describes the complexity of the organization she serves. The combination of Knowledge Type III and Work Situation B is evaluated at Level 1-4.

Level 1-4

550 points

### Factor 2, Supervisory Controls

The servicing personnel office has credited Level 2-3, but the appellant contends that her position should be evaluated at a higher level.

At Level 2-3, the supervisor defines the overall objectives and priorities of the work in the office and assists the secretary with some special assignments. The secretary plans and carries out the work of the office and handles problems and deviations in accordance with established instructions, priorities, policies, commitments, and program goals of the supervisor, and accepted practices in the occupation. The methods used by secretaries at this level are almost never reviewed in detail. Completed work is evaluated for adequacy, appropriateness, and conformance to established policy.

The DSD defines the objectives and priorities of the office. The appellant is expected to exercise independent initiative and experienced judgment in determining what to do. She plans and carries out most of her work in accordance with the supervisor's priorities, commitments, and program goals. Much of the day-to-day work is not subject to review, although work products may be reviewed by the originating office or individual for adequacy, appropriateness, and conformance to policy. The appellant performs most of the duties typically found at Level 2-3, such as (in brief) receiving and screening telephone calls and visitors and taking care of many questions herself; scheduling appointments and, occasionally, conferences, and briefing the supervisor regarding arrangements and topics; assembling data and other information for reports; receiving and reading incoming correspondence and reports, screening items which she can handle and forwarding the rest to her supervisor or other members of the staff; occasionally drafting replies to non-technical correspondence; relaying instructions to Division staff; reading outgoing correspondence for procedural and grammatical accuracy, conformance with general policy, adequacy, and correctness. She also assists the staff in the procedural aspects of expediting the work of the office, including helping the staff implement the DSD's procedural requirements, explaining reporting requirements and other administrative matters, and arranging for the collection of data and other information. Thus, the level of supervision the appellant receives, including the way she receives assignments, her responsibility for carrying out the types of duties described above, and the review of her work, matches Level 2-3.

At Level 2-4, the supervisor sets the overall objectives of the work. The secretary and the supervisor, in consultation, develop the deadlines and the work to be done. The secretary handles a wide variety of situations and conflicts requiring the use of initiative to determine the approach to be taken or methods to use. Completed work is reviewed only for overall effectiveness.

The appellant receives supervisory assistance with some special assignments and does not function merely within the context of the overall objectives of the work. As the standard points out, Level 2-4 is most likely to be found in organizations of such size and scope that many complex office problems arise which cannot be brought to the attention of the supervisor. The Division [REDACTED] is not so large and complex that such problems cannot be brought to the DSD's attention. In addition, the appellant does not perform most of the typical Level 2-4 duties listed in the standard. For example, she reviews correspondence prepared for the DSD's signature, but she is not responsible for reviewing such material for departures from policy and for resolving conflicts over such departures, as would be the case at this level. She seldom arranges conferences and does not perform related work requiring the type of initiative described at Level 2-4, i.e., arranging for one of the supervisor's subordinates to represent the Division. She sometimes drafts correspondence but does not prepare the letters of acknowledgment or commendation, such as those responding to items appearing in speeches or publications concerning the Division's programs, that are characteristic of Level 2-4. She does not make the complicated types of arrangements for social obligations as described at Level 2-4. She gathers data and information for reports but is not responsible for obtaining information described at

Level 2-4 involving specialized subject matter, the sources of which are not initially known and which may be available in only one or very few places or is otherwise difficult to locate. She facilitates the flow of work and information in the Division but is not responsible for devising administrative procedures and issuing instructions to the staff, as would be the case at Level 2-4. The fact that the appellant performs most work independently is not sufficient for evaluating the position at this level. Also, in terms of the level of review, the appellant's work is reviewed in a manner consistent with Level 2-3 and not merely for overall effectiveness, as would be the case at Level 2-4.

Level 2-3

275 points

### Factor 3, Guidelines

At Level 3-3, guidelines include a large body of unwritten policies, precedents, and practices which are not completely applicable to the work or are not specific and which deal with matters relating to judgment, efficiency, and relative priorities rather than procedural concerns. The secretary applies and adapts guidelines, such as regulations or the supervisor's policies, to specific problems for which the guidelines are not clearly applicable.

Some of the appellant's tasks are covered by manuals or other written instructions. However, much of her work is not covered by specific guides that are applicable to the tasks at hand, and she must work according to the Division's policies and procedures for dealing with similar types of assignments. In some cases, such as the annual work plan, the State Office receives specific instructions for submission of the data, but internal Division procedures are not specific for how she is to facilitate the necessary responses from the subordinate staff and assemble the Division's product. In other cases, such as monitoring travel expenditures or other budget-related matters, the appellant operates primarily on the basis of unwritten guides that are not applicable to many aspects of the work. She must apply and adapt the available guidelines, such as the DSD's policies, to all types of work which are not covered by applicable guidelines. These types of guidelines and the judgment needed to apply them are consistent with Level 3-3. Level 3-3 is the highest level described in the standard, and the appellant's position does not exceed this level in any aspect.

Level 3-3

275 points

### Factor 4, Complexity

At Level 4-3, the work includes various duties involving different and unrelated processes and methods, such as preparing one-of-a-kind reports from information in various documents or setting up conferences requiring the planning and arranging of travel and hotel accommodations for participants, based on a knowledge of their schedules and commitments. Decisions regarding

what needs to be done and how to accomplish it are based on the secretary's knowledge of the duties, priorities, commitments, policies, and program goals of the supervisor and staff, and involve analysis of the subject, phase, or issues involved in each assignment. The chosen courses are selected from many alternatives.

The appellant's duties involve different and unrelated processes and methods, including the types of examples cited at Level 4-3. Although she does not normally set up conferences, she arranges travel and performs similar duties involving various administrative processes. She also prepares both recurring and one-of-a-kind reports. She must be familiar with the duties, priorities, commitments, policies, and program goals of the DSD and staff. For example, the Division provides services to the field offices, and the appellant must be familiar with the Division's impact on the field offices in order to decide what to do. The diversified, complex, and changing responsibilities of the Division increase the difficulty in deciding what needs to be done and result in numerous alternatives that the appellant must consider in performing the work. Thus, Level 4-3 is met. This is the highest level described in the standard, and the appellant's position does not exceed this level in any aspect.

Level 4-3

150 points

#### Factor 5, Scope and Effect

The servicing personnel office has credited Level 5-2, but the appellant contends that her position should be evaluated at a higher level.

At Level 5-2, the purpose of the work is to carry out specific procedures. The work affects the accuracy and reliability of further processes. Duties frequently appearing at this level include serving as liaison between the supervisor and subordinate units, consolidating reports submitted by subordinate units, and arranging meetings involving staff from outside the immediate office.

The appellant facilitates the administrative and clerical work of the office. She performs nontechnical review of work submitted for the DSD's signature, serves as liaison between the DSD and the groups and teams, consolidates data from the groups into reports, and arranges meetings including those involving individuals from outside the Division. Her work affects the accuracy and reliability of further processes, including the reliability and acceptability of the work of the Division. Thus, the purpose and effect of her work match Level 5-2.

The appellant's work does not meet Level 5-3, at which secretaries modify and devise methods and procedures that significantly affect the office's mission. At this level, secretaries identify and resolve various problems and situations that affect the orderly and efficient flow of work in transactions with parties outside the organization. Although the appellant occasionally improves internal procedural functions in the Division, e.g., by developing a form for employees to use to

submit travel information, the purpose of her work is not to modify and devise methods and procedures. Instead, she carries out procedures, consistent with Level 5-2. In addition, her work affects processes and procedures within the Division but does not significantly affect the Division's mission accomplishment. Most of her work is not directed toward facilitating the flow of work in transactions with parties outside the Division, as would be the case at Level 5-3. She deals with offices outside the Division, such as personnel in the Denver Service Center regarding financial matters, but the effect of such work is to facilitate the work of processes within the Division, not the substantive mission accomplishment of the Division. Therefore, Level 5-3 is not credited.

Level 5-2

75 points

#### Factor 6, Personal Contacts

Contacts at Level 6-2 are with employees in the same agency but outside the immediate organization, including officials at the field office, regional, or headquarters level. Contacts at this level are also with members of the public in a moderately structured setting. The appellant's contacts are with other employees in the Division, the field offices, the Denver financial center, and, to a limited extent, from other agencies, including employees from the National Park Service and the Forest Service in the Eastern Great Basin Coordination Center. Such contacts correspond to Level 6-2.

The appellant's contacts do not meet Level 6-3, at which contacts are with high-level officials from outside the agency in moderately unstructured settings. The appellant does not have such contacts.

Level 6-2

25 points

#### Factor 7, Purpose of Contacts

The servicing personnel office has credited Level 7-1, but the appellant contends that her position should be evaluated at a higher level. The purpose of the appellant's contacts clearly exceeds Level 7-1, at which contacts are merely to exchange or clarify information, e.g., in providing receptionist services.

At Level 7-2, the purpose of the secretary's work is to plan, coordinate, or advise on work efforts or to resolve operating problems. Typical duties at this level include ensuring that reports and responses to correspondence are submitted by the staff on time and in the proper format, making travel arrangements, and scheduling conferences.

The purpose of the appellant's contacts is to coordinate administrative and procedural matters and to advise on work efforts and resolve problems. She performs the types of duties described at Level 7-2. She is responsible for facilitating the flow of information from the DSD to the staff, and from the staff back to the DSD. She ensures that correspondence and reports are submitted on time and in the proper formats. She communicates with staff members and Denver Service Center employees regarding travel matters and time and attendance reporting. In all of these types of contacts, she is responsible for resolving problems. Level 7-2 is the higher of the two levels described in the standard, and the position does not exceed this level in any aspect.

Level 7-2

50 points

Factor 8, Physical Demands

The appellant's work is largely sedentary, with some walking, bending, and lifting of light items. This corresponds to Level 8-1, at which the work is sedentary and no special physical demands are required to perform the work. This is the only level described in the standard for Factor 8, and the appellant's work does not exceed this level in any aspect.

Level 8-1

5 points

Factor 9, Work Environment

The appellant's work is performed in an office setting that is adequately lighted, heated, and ventilated. This matches Level 9-1, at which the work environment involves everyday risks or discomforts and requires normal safety precautions. This is the only level described in the standard for Factor 9, and the appellant's work does not exceed this level in any aspect.

Level 9-1

5 points

EVALUATION SUMMARY

<u>Factor</u>	<u>Level</u>	<u>Points</u>
1 Knowledge Required by the Position	1-4	550
2 Supervisory Controls	2-3	275
3 Guidelines	3-3	275
4 Complexity	4-3	150
5 Scope and Effect	5-2	75
6 Personal Contacts	6-2	25
7 Purpose of Contacts	7-2	50
8 Physical Demands	8-1	5
9 Work Environment	9-1	5
	Total	<u>1410</u>

The total number of points credited, 1410, converts to a grade of GS-7 (1355-1600) according to the grade conversion table in the standard.

**DECISION**

For the reasons given above, the authorized classification of the appealed position is Secretary (Office Automation), GS-318-7.