

PAY: General Schedule/Promotions/WIGI/QSI

	Question	Answer	OPM URL
1	What is the General Schedule classification and pay system?	The General Schedule (GS) classification and pay system covers the majority of civilian white-collar Federal employees in professional, technical, administrative, and clerical positions. GS classification standards, qualifications, pay structure, and related human resources policies (e.g. general staffing and pay administration policies) are administered by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) on a Government wide basis. The General Schedule has 15 grades - GS-1 (lowest) to GS-15 (highest). Each grade has 10 step rates (steps 1-10) that are each worth approximately 3% of the employee's salary. Within-grade step increases are based on an acceptable level of performance and longevity (waiting periods of 1 year at steps 1-3, 2 years at steps 4-6, and 3 years at steps 7-9). It normally takes 18 years to advance from step 1 to step 10 within a single GS grade if the employee remains in that single grade. However, employees with outstanding (or equivalent) performance ratings may be considered for additional quality step increases (maximum of one per year).	http://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/pay-systems/general-schedule/
2	How do General Schedule Promotions work?	GS employees may advance to higher grades by promotion at certain intervals (generally after at least a year), as determined by OPM regulations and qualification standards and DOI policies, up to the full promotion potential advertised in the job announcement. After that, competition under merit system principles is necessary to advance to a higher GS grade. Generally, a GS promotion increase is equal to at least two steps at the GS grade immediately before promotion to the	http://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/pay-systems/general-schedule/

		higher GS grade.	
3	What are GS Pay Adjustments, Locality Pay, and Special Rates?	<p>The GS base pay schedule is usually adjusted annually each January with an across-the-board pay increase on nationwide changes in the cost of wages and salaries of private industry workers. Most GS employees are also entitled to locality pay, which is geographic-base percentage rate that reflects pay levels for non-Federal workers in certain geographic areas as determined by surveys conducted by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. As of 2010, there are 32 locality pay areas, which cover the lower 48 States and Washington DC, plus Alaska, Hawaii, and the U.S. territories and possessions. Thirty-one of the locality pay areas cover large metropolitan areas (e.g. Los Angeles, New York, Washington DC) while the remainder of the lower 48 States is covered by the catch-all Rest of U.S. (RUS) locality pay area. GS employees on foreign areas are not eligible for locality pay. Special Rates are salary rates higher than the normal GS rates. These rates are approved by OPM based on serious difficulties in staffing certain occupations at GS grade levels in certain geographic areas.</p>	http://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/pay-systems/general-schedule/
4	What are within-grade increases or step increases?	<p>Within-grade increases (WGIs) or step increases are periodic increases in a General Schedule (GS) employee's rate of basic pay from one step of the grade of his or her position to the next higher step of that grade. For WGI purposes, an employee's rate of basic pay is the rate of pay fixed by law or administrative action for the position held by the employee before any deductions and exclusive of additional pay of any kind.</p>	http://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/pay-administration/fact-sheets/within-grade-increases/
5	Who in the GS can earn WGIs?	<p>Employees who occupy permanent positions earn WGIs upon meeting</p>	http://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/pay-administration/fact-sheets/within-grade-increases/

		<p>the following three requirements established by law: (1) The employee's performance must be at an acceptable level of competence. To meet this, an employee's most recent performance rating of record must be at least Level 3 ("Fully Successful" or equivalent). (2) The employee must have completed the required waiting period for advancement to the next higher step. (3) The employee must not have received an "equivalent increase" in pay during the waiting period.</p>	<p>leave/pay-administration/fact-sheets/within-grade-increases/</p>
6	<p>What is meant by Permanent Position for WGI purposes?</p>	<p>Permanent position means a position filled by an employee whose appointment is not designated as temporary and does not have a definite time limitation of 1 year or less. Permanent position includes a position to which an employee is promoted on a temporary or term basis for at least 1 year.</p>	<p>http://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/pay-administration/fact-sheets/within-grade-increases/</p>
7	<p>What are the required WGI waiting periods?</p>	<p><u>Step 1 to Step 2</u>: 52 weeks of creditable service at the Step 1. <u>Step 2 to Step 3</u>: 52 weeks of creditable service at the Step 2. <u>Step 3 to Step 4</u>: 52 weeks of creditable service at the Step 3. <u>Step 4 to Step 5</u>: 104 weeks of creditable service at Step 4. <u>Step 5 to Step 6</u>: 104 weeks of creditable service at the Step 5. <u>Step 6 to Step 7</u>: 104 weeks of creditable service at the Step 6. <u>Step 7 to Step 8</u>: 156 weeks of creditable service at the Step 7. <u>Step 8 to Step 9</u>: 156 weeks of creditable service at the Step 8. <u>Step 9 to Step 10</u>: 156 weeks of creditable service at the Step 9.</p>	<p>http://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/pay-administration/fact-sheets/within-grade-increases/</p>

8	When does a WGI waiting period begin?	A WGI waiting period begins upon (1) first appointment in the Federal service, (2) receiving an "equivalent increase," or (3) after a period of nonpay status and/or a break in service in excess of 52 calendar weeks.	http://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/pay-administration/fact-sheets/within-grade-increases/
9	What is considered an "equivalent increase" for GS employees?	<p>An equivalent increase is considered to occur at the time of any of the following personnel actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * A within-grade increase, excluding (1) a quality step increase granted under 5 CFR part 531, subpart E, or (2) an interim WGI if that increase is later terminated under 5 CFR 531.414; * A promotion (permanent or temporary) to a higher grade, including the promotion of an employee receiving a retained rate under 5 CFR 359.705 or 5 CFR part 536 that does not result in a pay increase, but excluding (1) a temporary promotion if, at the end of that temporary promotion, the employee is returned to the grade from which promoted, or (2) a promotion to a higher-graded supervisory or managerial position when the employee does not satisfactorily complete a probationary period established under 5 U.S.C. 3321(a)(2) and is returned to a position at the lower grade held before the promotion; <p>Application of the maximum payable rate rule in 5 CFR 531.221 that results in a higher step rate within the employee's GS grade; or</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Application of the Superior qualifications and special needs pay-setting authority in 5 CFR 531.212 that results in a higher step rate within the employee's GS grade. 	http://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/pay-administration/fact-sheets/within-grade-increases/

10	What is the effective date of a WGI?	A WGI is effective on the first day of the first pay period beginning on or after the completion of the required waiting period. (5 U.S.C. 5335 and 5 CFR 531.412.)	http://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/pay-administration/fact-sheets/within-grade-increases/
11	What is a quality step increase (QSI) and how does it affect a within-grade increase?	<p>A QSI is a faster-than-normal WGI used to reward employees at any GS grade level who display high quality performance. To be eligible for a QSI, employees must: (1) be below step 10 of their grade level; (2) have received the highest rating available under their performance appraisal system; (3) have demonstrated sustained performance of high quality; and (4) have not received a QSI within the preceding 52 consecutive calendar weeks.</p> <p>A QSI does not affect the timing of an employee's next regular WGI unless the QSI places the employee in step 4 or step 7 of his or her grade. In these cases, the employee becomes subject to the full waiting period for the new step--i.e., 104 weeks or 156 weeks, respectively--and the time an employee has already waited counts towards the next increase. The employee receives the full benefit of receiving a WGI at an earlier date and has not lost any time creditable towards his or her next WGI.</p>	http://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/pay-administration/fact-sheets/quality-step-increase/
PAY: Federal Wage Grade System			
1	What is the Federal Wage System?	The Federal Wage System (FWS) was developed to make the pay of Federal blue-collar workers comparable to prevailing private sector rates in each local wage area.	http://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/pay-systems/federal-wage-system/facts-about-the-federal-wage-system/

2	How did the FWS come about?	<p>Before the FWS, blue collar Federal workers were paid according to local prevailing private sector rates since the Civil War. Up until 1965, each Federal agency had authority to determine local prevailing rates and establish wage area boundaries for its employees. As a consequence, blue collar Federal workers at the same grade level in the same city working for different agencies received different rates. In 1965, this inequity was addressed by Presidential memo ordering Federal agencies to coordinate their wage-setting activities. In 1972, Public Law 92-392 established the current FWS. OPM has administrative oversight.</p>	http://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/pay-systems/federal-wage-system/facts-about-the-federal-wage-system/
3	Who is covered by the FWS?	<p>The FWS now covers Federal trade, craft, and laborer employees who are paid from appropriated and non-appropriated funds.</p>	http://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/pay-systems/federal-wage-system/facts-about-the-federal-wage-system/
4	How are the wages set for a wage area?	<p>For each wage area, OPM identifies a "lead" agency. The "lead" agency is responsible for conducting wage surveys, analyzing data, and issuing wage schedules under the policies and procedures prescribed by OPM. All agencies in a wage area pay their hourly wage employees according to the wage schedules developed by the lead agency. OPM has identified the Department of Defense (DOD) as the lead agency for each local wage area. OPM does not conduct local wage surveys. Labor organizations also play an important role in the wage determination process by providing representatives at all levels of the wage determination process.</p>	http://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/pay-systems/federal-wage-system/facts-about-the-federal-wage-system/

5	How does the FWS compare to the GS pay system?	<p>There are a number of differences between the FWS and the GS in terms of occupational coverage, geographic coverage, and pay adjustment cycles because separate separate laws and regulations authorize different surveys and methodologies. GS locality payments, which are authorized under the Federal Employees Pay Comparability Act of 1990, are based on a comparison of Federal and Non-Federal pay. Each January, the law provides for GS employees to receive a general across the board increase based on the 12 month increase (if any) in the Employment Cost Index, plus an increase, if warranted based on the local cost of labor for white-collar occupations in each of the 32 GS locality pay areas.</p> <p>On the other hand, the FWS operates under carefully regulated procedures OPM has developed cooperatively with Federal agencies and labor organizations over a 30 year period. These procedures are not static, but have been continually updated based on the advice of the Federal Prevailing Rate Advisory Committee.</p>	http://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/pay-systems/federal-wage-system/facts-about-the-federal-wage-system/
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