

Employee's Guide to the Classification Process

The following are questions (and answers) employees frequently have about position classification. Classification is the system used to categorize jobs by occupational group, series, class, and grade level according to similarities and differences in duties, responsibilities, and qualifications required. The information provided below only applies to General Schedule (GS) and Wage Grade (trades and labor) positions. It does not apply to Senior Executive Service (SES) positions, which are governed by different regulations.

The **Frequently Asked Questions** are:

- Why do we classify positions anyway? Who needs it?
- Who is responsible for what in the classification process?
- Whose job is it to write the position description (PD) for my position?
- Should I care whether or not my PD is accurate?
- How is classification actually done and why does it seem to take so long?
- When does a job have to be posted?
- Why do I have to be desk audited?
- Just what is a desk audit anyway?
- How should I prepare for a desk audit?
- How does the audit process work?
- What should I do if I disagree with the classification determination made by the classifier?
- What may be appealed?
- What are the appeal procedures?
- Is the OPM decision final?
- Concluding Thoughts

Why do we classify positions anyway? Who needs it?

We classify positions in order to provide fair and consistent treatment of employees in levels of responsibility and in pay. Classification also helps in projecting budgets, designing organizational structures, recruiting, and other management tasks. In this respect the public and private sectors are very similar. Where they differ is in the basis for classification. In the Federal Government, the Congress has established the basic law governing classification and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has provided implementing regulations. Individual positions are classified and the results of the classification - the determination of title, series, and grade - become the legal basis for paying an employee in that position. This became the "law of the land" in Chapter 51 of Title 5 U.S.C., as amended, enacted in 1949. This law authorized each agency subject to the Act to take classification action on positions, for OPM to conduct post-audits for compliance, and for employees to appeal classification decisions to OPM.

Who is responsible for what?

Classification of civilian positions is a commander's program, incorporating authority delegated from the Department of the Army to Army Commands, Army Service Component Commands, and Direct Reporting Units. Commanders may formally delegate classification to subordinate leaders and human resources staff, as well as to Civilian Personnel Advisory Centers. In Korea, Eighth Army Directorate of Human Resources Management (DHRM) carries out the responsibility for management of the classification program for the command. DHRM is also the executive agent for the classification program for US Forces Korea. Supervisors and managers are responsible for identifying the work to be performed; describing that work in [Position Descriptions](#) (PD's); and designing organizational structures that are efficient economical, and responsive to the needs of employees and agency management.

Employees are responsible for knowing and understanding the content of their PD and for requesting an explanation from their supervisor if they don't. Employees and supervisors should also be familiar with the classification standards that are used to classify their positions. And, while it is the supervisor's responsibility to write PD's, the best PD's usually result from joint efforts with the employee.

Classification is done by Human Resources Specialists with formally delegated classification authority. These "classifiers" are responsible for explaining how standards are applied and also upon request, for explaining the results of the classification process to supervisors and employees.

Whose job is it to write the PD for my position?

A position description is a written record of the principal duties and responsibilities assigned to your position by your supervisor. The preparation of position descriptions is a management responsibility.

Should I care whether or not my PD is accurate?

If your supervisor requires you to perform certain tasks or duties on a regular basis, and if those duties take up a good portion of your work time, they should be, officially assigned to your position in the PD. It is also true that duties now shown in your PD, but which are no longer performed, should be deleted. If the content of your PD is not up-to-date, then there is no way of validating that it is still properly classified. Inaccurate PD's also increase the chance that your performance may not be evaluated against the most appropriate criteria since PD's are the basis for performance plans.

How is classification actually done and why does it seem to take so long?

To classify a position, the classifier gathers background information about the position being evaluated and other positions in the organization where it is located. In addition, the classifier reviews relevant classification standard(s). This process often involves extensive research and reading, and enough discussion with the supervisor of the position to fully understand the functions and duties of the position. Classification may also include a desk audit (see below). The process takes less time when the work is common in the organization and the classifier has evaluated similar positions before. It takes more time if the PD is not well written and does not accurately reflect the responsibilities of the job.

When does a job have to be posted?

When management decides to establish a new job, it is posted in accordance with the [merit promotion procedures](#) that apply to that type of position, i.e., within the bargaining unit, excluded from the bargaining unit, or excepted. In contrast, if an audit is conducted and the position you hold is found to be at a higher grade because changes have occurred over a period of time and no other employee in the same office is eligible for the higher graded position, this will normally be processed as an "accretion of duties" promotion and does not usually have to be announced under the Merit Promotion Plan. Most positions, however, are announced and opened up for competition.

Why do I have to be desk audited?

The decision to conduct most [desk audits](#) is that of the human resources office responsible for the classification program in the command. For Eighth US Army and US Forces Korea, that office is DHRM. Audits may also be done at the request of supervisors, managers and employees.

Just what is an audit anyway?

It is a fact-finding process which involves interviews with both the incumbent and the supervisor of a position. Interviewing the incumbent and the supervisor gives the classifier both a detailed description and a broad overview of the position. Remember, it is the position that gets classified and not the person! For the classifier to be able to do the most accurate job of classifying your position, he or she needs accurate information. One of the best ways to acquire this information is to interview the person who is actually doing the job. Many people dread having their position audited. Employees worry about not remembering to say everything they want to; about not saying the "right" things; about not being

prepared; about not being able to explain things clearly enough for a "personnel" type to understand. Well, classifiers worry about audits too! They worry about not being able to put the employee at ease, about forgetting to ask an important question; and about not getting enough information because they know how important classification decisions are to both employees and supervisors.

How should I prepare for a desk audit?

If your position is desk audited, you should emphasize the major areas of your work and how your position fits into your organization's operations, as well as those of the command. Most important, do not understate or exaggerate your duties and responsibilities. Make sure that when the classifier leaves, he or she has a good understanding of your position. Here are some ways you can prepare for an audit.

- Talk to your supervisor to make sure you understand the reason for the audit.
- Be sure to read over and familiarize yourself with your position description.
- Ask your supervisor to clarify anything you don't understand in the PD.
- Think about the amount of time you spend doing the various parts of your job.
- Think about any changes that have occurred to your job in the past year.
- Have examples of your work available to show the classifier.

How does the audit process work?

When a desk audit is to be conducted, the supervisor of the position is contacted first. The supervisor may check with you and set up an audit time, or may ask you to work directly with the classifier. Most audits take about an hour, and should be scheduled at a time that is convenient for you and your office. You and your supervisor should identify a private office in which the interview can be held. If you forget to mention something in the interview, call or go by to see the classifier and add the information. If the classifier calls you back for more information, don't panic and assume that there is a problem. The classifier may have overlooked something or may want to be sure he/she completely understood what you meant. The classifier will also interview your supervisor to discuss your position from management's perspective, including where the job has been and where it is going. After the audit is completed, the results will be given to your supervisor. The classifier can discuss the results with you, but not until after your supervisor has informed you.

What should I do if I disagree with the classification determination made by the classifier?

You can ask to see the position classification standards used to classify your position. These usually are kept in the personnel office. If you have read the standards and disagree with the findings, you should set up a meeting with the classifier and ask for an explanation of how the standards were applied. If you don't want to see the position classification standards, you can also just set up a meeting with the classifier to discuss the findings. If you still disagree with the findings, you have **appeal rights** to the Department of Defense or to the Office of Personnel Management.

What may be appealed?

You may seek a change in the grade, occupational series, and sometimes the title of your position. Some things may not be appealed. For instance, you may not appeal the content or accuracy of your official position description, the accuracy of an OPM classification standard, your personnel office's proposed classification decision, the classification of positions to which you are not officially assigned, or the classification of positions to which you are detailed or temporarily promoted for a period of less than two years. Before submitting an appeal, you should make sure that your position description identifies the major duties you are assigned and perform. If the position description is significantly inaccurate, you should try to resolve the problem by discussing it with your supervisor.

What are the appeal procedures?

If you are a GS employee, you may appeal at any time to the Department of Defense or directly to OPM. However, you may not appeal both at the same time. You may have a representative (designated in writing) help you prepare and present your appeal case, but the representative cannot be someone with management or classification authority over your position. You or your designated representative should send your appeal to the OPM office serving the geographical area where your position is located. If you decide to go to OPM with your appeal, it should contain the following information in writing:

- Your name, mailing address, and office telephone number;
- The present classification of your position and the requested classification;
- The name of the agency and the office in which you work;
- The city where you are employed and the organization's mailing address;
- A copy of your official position description and either a statement affirming that it is accurate or a detailed explanation of the inaccuracies and an explanation of the efforts made to correct the position description;
- Any additional information about the position that will aid in understanding it; and
- Arguments supporting the requested classification by referencing the appropriate classification standards.

Is the OPM decision final?

Yes, an OPM appeal decision is binding. OPM will notify both you and your agency in writing of its decision. The effective date of any change in grade, occupational series, or title will be stated in the decision. You should be aware that even if OPM reclassifies your position, the decision might not necessarily be favorable to you. OPM may raise or lower the grade of a position as the facts warrant, even if that should lead to a result unexpected or unwanted by you.

Concluding Thoughts

Position classification and position management are not "mysterious" processes, but rather necessary management responsibilities. The more we all understand the concepts, the more effective and efficient the classification process will be. Classifiers are resources for anyone who has questions or seeks advice on position and organizational design. Perhaps the most important thing to remember about the classification system is that it would be almost impossible to have "equal pay for substantially equal work" without it.