

Classification Audits

General Definition

A classification audit is a review of the duties and responsibilities comprising a position. In most cases, an audit is a conversation or a series of conversations about the position. It is a fact finding mission, with the reviewer (usually the classification and compensation analyst) asking most of the questions and the incumbent and/or the incumbent's supervisor providing most of the answers. Audit requests are typically processed within 60 days of receipt of all documents needed prior to the audit.

Types of Classification Audits

Paper Review. Whenever the classification and compensation analyst reviews a position and checks the duties described against an appropriate standard, they are technically performing an audit. However, in actual practice, this type of activity is referred to as a “paper review.” When the term “audit” is used, it refers to either a **desk audit** or a **supervisory audit**.

Desk Audit. The most common type of audit is the desk audit, which is a personal interview of the incumbent or a review of a work log by the classification and compensation analyst assigned to review the work. This interview or log review frequently takes place in the incumbent's work space, although it could most certainly occur elsewhere or be conducted over the phone.

Supervisory Audit. Whenever an established, unfilled position is being reviewed, the main source of information about that position must be the position's supervisor. The conversations which take place between the supervisor and the personnel management specialist regarding the work of the position constitute the supervisory audit.

Supervisory audits, however, are not limited to vacant positions. Since supervisors control the work, their viewpoint is invaluable to the classification process. It is wise, therefore, to conduct both a supervisory audit and a desk audit whenever a position is being reviewed. This will ensure that a balanced picture is presented.

Participants

As noted earlier, the classification and compensation analyst and the incumbent are the primary players in the audit process, although the incumbent's supervisor and/or other subject matter experts might also be interviewed. Interviewing the supervisor is a fairly common and widely recommended practice; interviewing subject matter experts is usually not necessary, except in the case of highly technical or scientific occupations.

Required Audits

An audit will be necessary **only** when:

- An upgrade of a position has been requested that would raise the grade above the established full performance level for the position.
- The position is a “mixed series” position, i.e. the position is composed of work in two or more series.
- The position is in an occupation for which no standard has been published.
- The position is being reclassified in a new series.
- The audit is part of a classification review project in which a specific set of positions is examined to ensure that the position descriptions are accurate and that the classification standards have been applied consistently across the organization.
- The audit is part of a human resources management evaluation, which is the periodic inspection of an organizational unit conducted to determine the overall effectiveness of the unit's human resources management program.
- A new classification standard has been issued, and VSU has directed that agencies audit and evaluate all positions affected.
- The incumbent in the position or the incumbent's supervisor specifically requests an audit.

Requesting an Audit

An employee or the employee's supervisor may request an audit at any time, provided significant changes have taken place within the position to merit such a review.

Ideally, the audit process will begin with a series of discussions. An employee may initiate this process by contacting the classification and compensation analyst for an assessment of the case and advice on how to proceed. **But, more importantly the employee should first sit down with the supervisor.** Quite frequently problems associated with duty assignments or position descriptions can be resolved informally at the local level, preempting the need for a formal audit.

But even if such swift resolution does not take place, early involvement on the part of the supervisor is still necessary. An employee-generated request for an audit must be forwarded via the supervisor, and supervisory approval will be needed should the position description require updating or other modification prior to review.

[An Audit Request form can be found in Commonly Used Forms](#)

Documents Needed Prior to the Audit

The following two documents will be needed before an audit can take place:

1. Up-to-date and approved position description describing the duties of the position.
2. Brief statement from either the incumbent or the supervisor addressed to the classification and compensation analyst describing the changes that have occurred within the position, thereby justifying the need for an audit. (Note: Submission of this statement may be waived at the discretion of the classification and compensation analyst.)

Conducting the Audit

Most desk and supervisory audits are conducted through face-to-face meetings or by telephone, with the classification and compensation analyst interviewing the incumbent and/or the incumbent's supervisor. The classification and compensation analyst will review the position description and ask questions related to the duties and responsibilities assigned.

Prior to the interview, the classification and compensation analyst may provide the incumbent and/or the supervisor with a list of position specific questions so they will know what to expect and can organize their thoughts prior to the actual interview. A written response is not required.

Prior to or during the course of the interview, the incumbent may be asked to provide a small selection of work samples to illustrate and clarify the work being done. The incumbent may also be asked to perform a desk audit or work log to ascertain specific duties performed on a regular basis. These requests, however, should be **kept to a minimum**, and every effort should be made to avoid making the process overly burdensome.

Since the absence of face-to-face contact does make telephone interviews somewhat more challenging, it is especially important to carefully document what was said and heard during the call. As soon as possible after hanging up the phone, the classification and compensation analyst conducting the audit should prepare their audit notes for the file summarizing the facts that were gathered.

Evaluating the Position

The Evaluation Process

Evaluation is essentially a matter of comparison. The individual classifying the job (usually the classification and compensation analyst) looks at the duties and responsibilities assigned to the position and how those duties are exercised and compares that information with the various types of work described by VSU in its published standards. With reference to these standards, the classification and compensation analyst can determine in which occupation the position in question fits and what grade and title would be most appropriate.

Basic Principles of Evaluation

The results of the evaluation process are sometimes poorly understood, not because the process is especially complex, but because certain basic principles are either unknown or under

appreciated. It is important that both management and employees acknowledge and understand the following concepts as they relate (or fail to relate) to classification:

Range of Duties. Each grade level represents a **range** of duties and responsibilities. To some extent, the work of a position may expand and even become more difficult without affecting the grade. Several positions in a given organization may, for example, look identical on paper, sharing the same series and grade, but there may, in fact, be some variation in how the work is performed. One of the positions might be in the lower part of the grade range, another in the middle, and the third in the upper part of the range. To a limited degree, the standard(s) used to evaluate the work will accommodate shades of difference from one position to another.

Amount of Work. Quantity alone does not count. An employee may be doing more work, but unless those additional duties are more difficult and more complex than those performed previously, the grade of the position will not be affected. Volume is not a factor: Performing “more of the same” at the same level of complexity, even if it is a lot more of the same, will not raise the grade.

Performance. A position is classified, **not** the employee in the position. Classification actions neither measure nor reward performance. An employee's performance in a job has no direct relationship with the classification of that job. Classification measures **what** an employee is asked to do, **not** how well the employee does it.

Admittedly, an exceptional employee may (by virtue of performance) draw more complex duties into the assignment area (see below under **Accretion of Duties**). On the other hand, a poor performer may cause the job to deteriorate as duties normally resting with the position are re-assigned elsewhere. Either of these situations might result in an altered grade, but in neither case was performance alone an issue. Performance changed the job, and the change in the job changed the classification. Superior or inferior performance in and of itself would not have done so.

Since the upgrade of a position does not recognize performance, classification must not be viewed as part of the awards program. Unfortunately, the fact that promotions are happy occasions and that money is involved invariably clouds this issue.

Length of Service. An employee's length of service in a position has no bearing on its classification. Requesting a promotion is not an acceptable way to thank an employee for long years of faithful service. The various award options available through the Agency's awards and recognition program should be used for this purpose.

Other Positions. Positions are compared against standards, not against other positions. The classification of what appears to be a similar position in another organization is essentially irrelevant to the classification at hand.

Automation. The use of computers may sometimes increase a position's productivity, but increased productivity alone will not affect the grade. If the basic work processes remain the same, the grade will remain the same. When the nature of the work does change as a result of

new technology, the grade is as likely to decrease as it is to increase. Automation may simplify the work, thereby lowering the grade. Or it may allow the work to expand, with the employee tackling more complicated assignments that, prior to automation, would not even have been attempted. In the latter case a higher grade could, in fact, be contemplated.

Accretion of Duties. Any position may evolve over time. When new **higher level** duties are **permanently** added to a position, for whatever reason, and the additional duties constitute a substantial portion of the employee's overall workload, the classification of the job must be adjusted to reflect this change. The action in these instances would be a non-competitive promotion, based on accretion of duties.

Impact of the Person on the Job. When a significant number of new **higher level** duties are added to a position due to the **incumbent's special skills or abilities**, the classification of the position must be adjusted to reflect this change. In this instance, the action would be a non-competitive promotion, based on the impact of the person on the job. The Position Description must be noted in the remarks section "Incumbency Only Allocation."

Admittedly, it is sometimes hard to distinguish an "impact" action from an "accretion" action. The difference becomes important, however, when the position is ultimately vacated. At that point, a position that was upgraded based on employee impact must be reassessed and reevaluated and will, in most cases, revert to its previous classification. In contrast, a position upgraded through accretion of duties could possibly retain the higher grade, depending on the circumstances of the case.

Handling Controversial Actions

Special care must be taken with classification actions that are unusually complex, controversial, or otherwise precedent-setting. Communication and cooperation are key.

Need for Consultation

The fundamental classification process is the same for every position regardless of outside considerations or long range impact. The classification and compensation analyst performs basic fact finding for a well established position and evaluates the position using the appropriate standard(s). When reviewing an unusually complex, controversial, or otherwise precedent-setting position, the classification and compensation analyst will also check the database for similar positions, gather information from counterparts withi7/16/2007n the USG and, if appropriate, convene meetings with other specialists to discuss relevant issues. When comfortable with the classification decision, **and prior to certifying the position**, the classification and compensation analyst will submit a copy of the position description and evaluation statement or classifier's note to the Director of Human Resources and Employee Development for review.

Final Review and Approval

The Director of Human Resources and Employee Development will review the classification decision, providing concurrence or non-concurrence, and, if appropriate, will discuss the

decision and its ramifications with the classification and compensation analyst and possibly the incumbent and the incumbent's supervisor. The classification and compensation analyst will ensure that all interested parties are apprised of the decision and will keep it on file along with other significant classification decisions.

Issuing the Classification Decision

Initial Notification

It is important that the first news of a classification decision be communicated personally, by phone or in a face-to-face meeting, to the supervisor of the position. Speaking personally to the most interested parties will give them an opportunity to ask questions and, if the news is not good, the personal touch can sometimes be more effective.

Formal Publication of the Decision

The final classification decision may be published in an Evaluation Statement:

Evaluation Statement. An evaluation statement is a written narrative explaining why the position was placed in a specific series and why it was assessed at a certain grade. The statement will normally include some structured comparison matching the position against the criteria provided in the standard(s).

Actions Requiring Written Explanations

Every classification action does not need to be explained in writing. A formal comprehensive statement will be prepared **only** when:

- The position is classified above the current established full performance level.
- The position is "mixed" either in terms of series or grade (i.e., the position includes duties associated with two or more series and/or two or more different grade levels).
- The classification action may establish a precedent for other like positions across the mission area.
- The classification appears likely to result in a classification appeal, (e.g. when a request for promotion is denied).

Content and Format of Formal Evaluation Statements

The evaluation statement should be written clearly and concisely. The information may be recorded on a preprinted form designed for that purpose or on plain bond paper, the focus being on **content**, not on format.

The report should concentrate on those aspects of the job that were crucial in determining the final grade. Since all factors contained in a given standard are not necessarily equal in impact, it is seldom necessary to discuss them all. Factors, for example, that received maximum credit during a previous evaluation, and were not changed as a result of the most recent review, need not be addressed.

Written statements answer questions about a classification decision, either now or in the future, and should be discussed in sufficient detail to provide a reasonable response. An evaluation statement should demonstrate the basic logic that governed the decision and briefly, but clearly, specify which aspects of the job were important to the classification (and, if pertinent, which were not).

Access to Evaluation Documents

Evaluation statements and Position descriptions are public records and therefore releasable to management, employees, other agencies, or the general public. VSU's published classification policies are also public documents and must be made available to anyone who wishes to see them.

Responding to Classification Decisions

Decision to Upgrade. Once a position has been reviewed and found to merit a higher grade, the action is usually completed as soon as possible. Should management disagree with the decision, two alternatives are available: management may either (1) allow the action to go through or (2) they may remove the higher level duties from the position thereby maintaining the lower grade. One option that is **not** available is a continuation of the status quo. Either the position is upgraded or the duties are altered; there is no other choice.

Decision to Downgrade. Classification reviews seldom conclude with a recommendation to downgrade a position, particularly if the position is encumbered. However, should this occur, the action will not go into effect until the incumbent has been given the opportunity to appeal. If the downgrade action has been processed, the employee may be entitled to retain his/her pay grade. An employee whose position has been downgraded must receive a written notification explaining the action and outlining the employee's rights to appeal.

Decision to Retain the Current Grade. Though the duties of positions may change, or the manner in which the work is performed has changed, the changes may not affect the title, series or grade-level of positions. In such cases, the classification review can conclude with a recommendation to retain the current grade. When this occurs and either management or the employee is dissatisfied with the explanation provided by the classification and compensation analyst, the decision may be appealed.

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