

## Chapter 1. The Guide to Processing Personnel Actions

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## Chapter 1. The Guide to Processing Personnel Actions

### Subchapter 1. Introduction to this Guide

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#### 1-1. Authority.

The Office of Personnel Management's authority to prescribe reporting requirements covering personnel actions is in section 2951, title 5, United States Code. Section 7.2, civil service rule VII, is based on that statute and extends this authority to all types of appointments and personnel actions. In addition, Executive Order 12107 delegates to the Office of Personnel Management the authority to prescribe regulations relating to the establishment, maintenance, and transfer of official personnel folders.

#### 1-2. Coverage.

“The Guide to Processing Personnel Actions” (**Guide**) contains the Office of Personnel Management’s instructions on how to prepare personnel actions. Agencies may supplement the **Guide** with additional instructions and may require personnel action documentation in addition to what is called for in the **Guide**. However, in no case may an agency document derogatory or medical information on a personnel action if the information is not authorized by this **Guide**.

#### 1-3. Documentation of Personnel Actions.

**a. Request for Personnel Action.** For most of the personnel actions you process, there will be a Request for Personnel Action, Standard Form 52, or a similar agency form approved by the Office of Personnel Management as an exception to the Standard

Form 52. The Standard Form 52 is usually initiated by the office or supervisor who wants to take a personnel action, such as the appointment of an employee; occasionally the personnel office initiates the form. The requester completes one part of the Standard Form 52 and forwards it to others (such as the budget office) whose approval is required by the agency. The form is then sent to the personnel office for review and clearance by classification, staffing, and other personnel specialists, and for signature by the individual(s) to whom authority to approve personnel actions (appointing authority) has been delegated. Chapter 4, of this **Guide**, explains how to complete the Standard Form 52; if your agency has an exception to the Standard Form 52, approved by the Office of Personnel Management, the instructions in Chapter 4 apply to it as well. After the Standard Form 52 has been completed and the requested action has been approved, the form is sent to the personnel clerk or assistant who uses it to process the action in the agency’s automated personnel system.

**b. The Notification of Personnel Action** Standard Form 50, Standard Form 50-B, list form of notice, or an exception to one of these forms approved by the Office of Personnel Management, constitutes official documentation of Federal employment. Chapter 4, of this **Guide**, explains how to complete the Standard Form 50 and list form of notice. If your agency has an exception to the Standard Form 50 approved

by the Office of Personnel Management, the instructions in Chapter 4 apply to it, as well.

(1) The Notification of Personnel Action must be prepared for all accessions, conversions, and separations - nature of action codes beginning with 1, 5, or 3 - and for all corrections and cancellations of these actions. For these actions, the Notification of Personnel Action is required both as official notification to the employee and as official documentation of the action. The employee must receive a Notification of Personnel Action for these actions. A copy of the Notification of Personnel Action must be filed on the right side of the Official Personnel Folder. Accessions and separations due to mass transfer may be documented by a list form rather than the Standard Form 50.

(2) The Notification of Personnel Action is not required for the following actions:

- Exception to Reduction in Force Release;
- Realignment;
- Recruitment Bonus;
- Relocation Bonus;
- Time Off Award;
- Foreign Language Award;
- Gainsharing Award;
- Suggestion Award;
- Invention Award;
- Special Act or Service Award;
- Senior Executive Service Performance Award; and
- Performance Award.

These actions are **not** documented on the right side of the Official Personnel Folder. At the agency's option, they may be documented on the left side of the Official Personnel Folder while the person is employed in the agency. Agencies may choose to use the Notification of Personnel Action to notify employees of these

actions or they may choose other methods of notification. Other notification methods must meet the requirements in Chapter 4 of this **Guide**.

(3) For all other actions, the Notification of Personnel Action must be prepared and filed on the right side of the Official Personnel Folder. Agencies may choose to notify employees of the action with a copy of the Notification of Personnel Action or with another method that meets the requirements in Chapter 4 of this **Guide**.

### c. Central Personnel Data File.

Much of the Standard Form 52 and Standard Form 50 information is collected to meet Government-wide human resource information needs. This information is reported to the Central Personnel Data File (CPDF), a centralized automated information system that provides statistics on Executive Branch employment to the Congress, Office of Personnel Management, and other agencies. This information is used in a variety of ways to evaluate and formulate human resource systems and programs. Unless specifically authorized in the operating manual, **The Guide to the Central Personnel Data File**, all personnel actions described in this **Guide** are reported in Central Personnel Data File dynamics submissions.

### 1-4. Nature of Action (NOA), Legal Authority, and Remarks.

Each chapter on processing actions contains instructions on how to select the nature of action, the legal authority(ies), and the remarks for the action. A complete list

of natures of action (both the full and the abbreviated versions), the legal authorities, the remarks, and their associated codes is published in [The Guide to Personnel Data Standards](#).

**a. Nature of Action.** (1) The nature of action (NOA) is the phrase that explains the action that is occurring (such as “appointment” or “promotion”). Each nature of action has a unique numerical code that identifies, for statistical and data processing purposes, that particular nature of action. Each time a table directs you to enter a particular nature of action on a Standard Form 52 or Standard Form 50, you must also enter its code.

(2) The first digit of the nature of action code indicates the type of action:

- 100 series—appointments
- 200 series—returns to duty from nonpay status
- 300 series—separations
- 400 series—placements in nonpay and/or nonduty status
- 500 series—conversions to appointment
- 600 series—(reserved for Office of Personnel Management use)
- 700 series—position changes, extensions, and miscellaneous changes
- 800 series—pay changes and miscellaneous changes
- 900 series—(Reserved for use by agencies)

The second and third digits of the nature of action code indicate the particular kind of action, for example, “promotion,” “resignation,” etc.

(3) Nature of action codes 000-899 may be used only as authorized by the Office of

Personnel Management. Within the 000-899 group of codes are ones used to record actions involving particular groups of employees. If your agency is authorized to use any of these special codes, your personnel office will have a list of them and instructions on when and how they are to be used.

(4) Codes 900-999 may be used by agencies to document personnel matters that are of interest to the agency and for which the Office of Personnel Management does not require a Standard Form 50, for example, a change in the employee's position number when no other change occurs, or a change in the appropriation from which the employee is paid. In general, a Standard Form 50 documenting a 900 series action may not be filed on the right side of the Official Personnel Folder (OPF). The exception is when an agency uses the Standard Form 50 instead of an agency form to document something that is approved for long-term Official Personnel Folder retention. An example is completion of the supervisory or managerial probationary period. Actions in the 900 series are not reported in Central Personnel Data File dynamics submissions.

**b. Legal Authority.** (1) The legal authority is the law, Executive Order, regulation, agency directive, or the instruction under which the personnel action is taken. While the nature of action identifies the personnel action, the authority identifies the specific circumstances under which the action is taken. Agencies and the Office of Personnel Management use this kind of information to perform their personnel management functions.

(2) Each authority has a unique alphabetical or numerical code to identify it for statistical and data processing purposes. Each time a table tells you to use a particular authority, you must also use the code. When more than one authority and code is required, you must enter them on the Standard Form 52 and Standard Form 50 in the order in which they are listed in this **Guide**.

(3) Legal authority codes beginning with an alpha character (meaning a letter), and those beginning with the numbers “1” - “5,” are reserved for use by the Office of Personnel Management to identify authorities on actions that are reported to the Central Personnel Data File. An agency may create its own legal authority codes, using “6,” “7,” “8,” or “9” as the first character of the code, to identify an authority unique to the agency. Such an authority may be cited on an action *only* when the action is one that is *not* reported to the Central Personnel Data File *or* when the authority is to be cited as the *second* one on an action that is reported to the Central Personnel Data File.

(4) To obtain the legal authority code to be cited for a new law, regulation, Executive Order, or other authority on an action that will be reported to the Central Personnel Data File, contact the Deputy Associate Director, Center for HR Systems Requirements & Strategies by facsimile at 202-606-1719 or by email [owi@opm.gov](mailto:owi@opm.gov).

**c. Remarks.** (1) Remarks are put on the Standard Form 50 to explain the action to the employee, the payroll office, future employers,

the Office of Personnel Management, and to other Federal agencies. For some actions, specific remarks are always required; for others, the remarks will vary according to the employee's work history. Tables in the chapter that covers the action will tell you how to select the necessary remarks and list them. The remarks used on documentation of personnel actions are standardized and agencies **may not change** or alter a remark listed in this **Guide** without the prior approval of the Office of Personnel Management. Except as noted below, agencies may supplement the remarks to explain actions.

(a) When an employee whose appointment does *not* afford appeal rights submits a resignation or retirement, or is separated by the agency, no agency reasons for or explanation of the separation (“agency finding”) may be placed on the action.

(b) When an employee whose appointment does afford appeal rights submits a resignation or retirement *before* receiving *written* notice of a proposed disciplinary or adverse action, no remarks regarding the proposal may be placed on the action.

(2) Remarks are identified in this **Guide** by codes for ease of reference. The first characters of the remarks codes indicate the purpose for which the remark is used; the other characters of the code have no significance.

<i>First Character</i>	<i>Remarks Explains</i>
A	Appointment Limitations
B	Benefits and Leave Entitlements
C	Corrections and Cancellations
E	Employment Conditions
G	Service Credit

K	Position Change Actions
M	Miscellaneous Information
N	Pay In Addition To or Outside of Salary to Relocate or to Accept Reassignment
P	Rate of Pay
R	Employee's Reason for Resignation, Retirement, Failure to Relocate or accept Reassignment
S	Agency's Comments on Employee's Separation
T	Tenure
X	Retained Grade and Pay
Y-Z	(Reserved for internal use by agencies)

### 1-5. Other Standard Form 50 Data.

The Office of Personnel Management has developed standard codes to record other data on personnel action forms and to report data to the Central Personnel Data File. These codes and their definitions are published in [The Guide to Personnel Data Standards](#). Only the codes published in [The Guide to Personnel Data Standards](#) and in this **Guide** may be used to document information in the following blocks of the Standard Form (SF) 52, SF 50, and SF 50-B:

<u>SF52</u>	<u>SF 50/SF 50-B</u>
B-5-6	5-6
B-8-13	8-13
B-16-21	16-21
B-23-24	23-24
B-26-30	26-30
B-32-35	32-35
B-37-38	37-38
B-45-51	47-48

### 1-6. Cancellations and Retroactive Personnel Actions.

When a personnel action is determined to be in error, follow the instructions in Chapter 32 of this **Guide** regarding proper action to take.

### 1-7. Need for Accuracy and Use of Personnel Action Data.

a. Personnel action data are used by both employing agencies and the Office of Personnel Management. They are used by agency personnelists and managers to make decisions about employees, for example, whether a current employee is qualified for promotion, is eligible for reinstatement, etc. Agencies and the Office of Personnel Management's Workforce Information and Planning Group use employee data, including nature of action and authority, to generate statistics providing a wide variety of information on the Federal workforce to the President, Congress, Office of Personnel Management personnel program managers, agencies, and to the public. This information is used to make policy decisions on personnel programs which affect current and future Federal employees. The data reported to the Central Personnel Data File are also used by the National Personnel Records Center to provide locator and general reference service concerning Federal employees.

b. To protect the interests of both the employee and the Government, it is critical that actions be documented correctly and

that data on each action discussed in this **Guide** be reported to the Office of Personnel Management's Central Personnel Data File accurately and on a timely basis; the operating manual, **The Guide to the Central Personnel Data File**, explains how and when to submit data to the Central Personnel Data File. When personnel action data are received by the Office of Personnel Management, they are rigorously screened and edited. Lists of errors found in the screening process are sent back to

the submitting agencies.

### **1-8. Questions Regarding Unusual Cases.**

An agency's Human Resources Office should direct questions to the Deputy Associate Director, Center for HR Systems Requirements & Strategies by facsimile at 202-606-1719 or email at [owi@opm.gov](mailto:owi@opm.gov).

## Subchapter 2. How to Use this Guide

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### 2-1. How the Guide is Organized.

The first seven chapters of **The Guide to Processing Personnel Actions (Guide)** contain general instructions for processing personnel actions, including how to complete the Standard Form 52, Request for Personnel Action, and the Standard Form 50, Notification of Personnel Action, and how to determine creditable service and calculate a service computation date. Chapters 9 through 32 contain instructions for specific types of actions. Chapter 34, Topic Index and Chapter 35, the *Glossary*, are readers aids for using this **Guide**. The Topic Index helps identify the correct chapter where information is located and the Glossary defines terms.

Each specific type of action is covered in a separate chapter. Chapters 9 through 32 contain:

- C an introduction that explains the personnel actions covered by the chapter, and definitions of those actions;
- C step-by-step instructions on how to process the action, (decisions to be made and actions to be completed); and
- C tables to help you select the correct information to put on the Standard Form 52 and the Standard Form 50.

Most of the instructions and tables for a particular action are in the same chapter. There will be times, however, when you will have to look elsewhere. For example,

- C When a table in one chapter applies to several kinds of actions and the table has not been reprinted in other chapters, you will be told to turn to it.
- C Instructions regarding benefits are complicated and they are not reprinted. You are told where to find them elsewhere in Office of Personnel Management publications.
- C When general instructions apply to more than one kind of action, they have been combined in the first 7 chapters.

### 2-2. Identification of Changes to the Guide.

When revised pages are issued, new or changed material is indicated by a right-hand arrow (>) at the beginning and a left-hand arrow (<) at the end of such changed material. The deletion of information is indicated by three consecutive stars (\*\*\*) . These designations are not usually used when an entire chapter is re-issued.

## Job Aid

### Getting Ready to Process Personnel Actions

When you process personnel actions, there are forms you will use, terms you will hear, and manuals to which you will refer constantly. To make your work easier later on, you should do the following steps.

STEP	ACTION
1	Establish an office file of reference materials that will be used with this <b>Guide</b> when processing personnel actions. Your file should include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>title 5, United States Code;</b></li> <li><b>title 5, Code of Federal Regulations;</b></li> <li><b>The Guide to Personnel Recordkeeping;</b></li> <li><b>The Guide to Personnel Data Standards;</b></li> <li><b>The CSRS and FERS Handbook for Personnel and Payroll Offices;</b></li> <li><b>Federal Employees Group Life Insurance Program - A Handbook for Employees, Annuitants, Compensators and Employing Offices;</b></li> <li><b>The Federal Employees Health Benefits Handbook for Personnel and Payroll Offices;</b> and</li> </ul> Your agency's instructions for processing personnel actions. (Some parts of this <b>Guide</b> will refer you to your agency's instructions.)
2	Read <b>The Guide to Personnel Recordkeeping</b> , which covers personnel records and files. Keep it handy for easy reference. You will use it often.
3	Become familiar with <b>title 5, United States Code</b> , and <b>title 5, Code of Federal Regulations</b> , which contain many of the authorities cited on personnel actions. The <b>Code of Federal Regulations</b> is updated through daily publications of the <b>Federal Register</b> .
4	Become familiar with personnel language. Read through the <i>Glossary of Terms</i> in this <b>Guide</b> (Chapter 35).  Refer to the <i>Glossary</i> as you process actions to learn the definitions of terms you do not know or understand.
5	Become familiar with personnel forms. You will use many of them.  Thoroughly read the instructions on the form and in this <b>Guide</b> <i>before</i> using any form. (You may find it helpful to keep a copy of each form you complete as a sample for future reference.)

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## Job Aid

### Instructions for Processing Personnel Actions

The chapters in the **Guide** will tell you how to select the codes and information to enter on the Standard Form 52, Request for Personnel Action. If you do not have all the information you need about the reason for the action or about the employee it concerns, **ASK QUESTIONS** of the personnel specialist who approved the action. **DO NOT GUESS.** Your documentation affects the rights and benefits of Federal employees.

Follow the 3 steps in the table below when processing personnel actions.

STEP	ACTION
1	<p>Decide what kind of action has been requested or is needed.</p> <p>Most personnel actions are processed starting with the receipt of a Standard Form 52, Request for Personnel Action. Check blocks 5-B and 6-B in Part B. If you cannot tell from the Standard Form 52, ask the personnel specialist who approved the action.</p>
2	<p>Locate the correct chapter in the <b>Guide</b> for instructions on processing the action.</p> <p>Use the reader aids, the Table of Contents and the Topic Index (Chapter 34), in the <b>Guide</b> to choose the most likely chapter. If terms are unfamiliar to you, refer to the Glossary (Chapter 35).</p> <p>Once you have chosen a likely chapter, review the chapter contents page and the coverage section for that chapter. These will help you decide whether the instructions you need are contained in the chapter.</p>
3	<p>Follow carefully the instructions found in the chapter(s) appropriate for the action you wish to process.</p> <p>Read the narrative information included in the chapter before going to the tables and figures. Provided in each chapter are definitions for terms used. Also provided are instructions that refer to special situations that may occur which the tables and figures may not address.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Continued on next page</i></p>

**Job Aid****Instructions for Processing Personnel Actions, continued**

<b>STEP</b>	<b>ACTION</b>
<p><b>3</b> continued</p>	<p>Follow carefully the instructions found in the chapter(s) appropriate for the action you wish to process, continued.</p> <p>The instructions cover only the Office of Personnel Management’s requirements and may not include everything that your agency requires. Therefore, if your agency has its own processing instructions, you must follow them, as well. Because each personnel office may operate under different procedures, this <b>Guide</b> does not tell you who is responsible for each processing step.</p> <p>When you find that a step has already been completed, use this <b>Guide</b> to check to see that it was completed correctly. <b>DO NOT</b> just copy something from a previous Standard Form 50, Notification of Personnel Action. <i>If there was a mistake on the previous action and you copy it, your mistake may affect the employee’s pay or benefits.</i></p> <p>The chapter(s) will tell you how to select the codes and information to enter on the Standard Form 52. Use the Standard Form 52 as a “draft” to prepare the Standard Form 50. Chapter 4 gives you general information on how to complete the Standard Form 52 and explains what your final Standard Form 50 must contain. More specific information is in the chapter that covers the particular action you are processing.</p>

## Job Aid

### How to Use a Decision Logic Table

#### Charts instead of paragraphs.

Most of the instructions in this **Guide** are in the form of Decision Logic Tables. A Decision Logic Table gives you instructions in the form of a chart rather than in the form of a paragraph. Some Decision Logic Tables will help you select information which must be put on the Standard Form 50, Notification of Personnel Action.

#### Rules on a Decision Logic Table.

It is easier to make a decision with a Decision Logic Table because all the conditions you must consider are shown in separate boxes. A sentence in a Decision Logic Table is called a “rule.” Each rule shows conditions which must be considered, their relationships to each other, and the decision or appropriate instructions.

#### Reading the rules.

Decision Logic Tables used in this **Guide** are read across (horizontally). To read a Decision Logic Table, look at the caption for column A, the entry for the rule in column A, the caption for column B, the entry for the rule in column B, etc., until you have read across the entire table.

For example, look at the chart below. Rule 1 reads, “*If the appointment is based on the selection from a certificate issued from a civil service register maintained by an agency with a delegation of competitive examining, and the appointment is with Career-Conditional Status, then Nature of Action is Career-Cond Appt.*”

<b>R</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>
<b>U</b>			
<b>L</b>	<i>If the appointment is based</i>	<i>And the appointment is</i>	<i>Then Nature of Action</i>
<b>E</b>	<i>on the</i>		<i>is</i>
<b>1</b>	Selection from a certificate issued from a civil service register maintained by an agency with a delegation of competitive examining	With Career-Conditional Status	Career-Cond Appt
<b>2</b>	Reinstatement of a person who had competitive status or was serving probation	With Career Status	Career Appt
<b>3</b>	(i.e., was on a career or career-conditional appointment) when separated	With Career-Conditional Status	Career-Cond Appt

*Continued on next page*

**Job Aid****How to Use a Decision Logic Table, continued**

Look at the chart below to read rule 2. To make it easier to follow, parts of rules 1 and 3 have been blocked out. Rule 2 reads, “*If the appointment is based on the reinstatement of a person who had competitive status or was serving probation (meaning, was on a career or career-conditional appointment) when separated, and the appointment is with Career Status, then Nature of Action is Career Appt.*” Notice that you begin to read each rule with the heading for the first column (A).

<b>R U L E</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>
	<i>If the appointment is based on the</i>	<i>And the appointment is</i>	<i>Then Nature of Action is</i>
<b>1</b>			
<b>2</b>	Reinstatement of a person who had competitive status or was serving probation	With Career Status	Career Appt
<b>3</b>	(meaning, was on a career or career-conditional appointment) when separated		

Look at the chart below to read rule 3. It reads, “*If the appointment is based on the Reinstatement of a person who had competitive status or was serving probation (meaning, was on a career or career-conditional appointment) when separated, and the appointment is with Career-Conditional Status, then Nature of Action is Career-Cond. Appt.*” Because there is no new entry for rule 3 in the first column (A), use the last entry, which also is used for rule 2. Each new entry is separated from the preceding one by a horizontal line; if there is no new entry for a particular rule, read the last entry from the rule above. (Parts of rules 1 and 2 are blocked out to make it easier to read the rule.)

<b>R U L E</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>
	<i>If the appointment is based on the</i>	<i>And the appointment is</i>	<i>Then Nature of Action is</i>
<b>1</b>			
<b>2</b>	Reinstatement of a person who had competitive status or was serving probation		
<b>3</b>	(meaning, was on a career or career-conditional appointment) when separated	With Career-Conditional Status	Career-Cond Appt