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Grade Evaluation Guide for Visual Arts Work



**Workforce Compensation
and Performance Service**



GRADE EVALUATION GUIDE FOR VISUAL ARTS WORK

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COVERAGE

This guide provides criteria for evaluating the grade level of nonsupervisory work classified in the following visual arts-related series:

Exhibits Specialist Series, GS-1010,
Illustrating Series, GS-1020,
Visual Information Series, GS-1084.

The grading criteria in this guide supersede the grade level criteria of the position classification standards for each of these series, issued in 1962, 1979, and 1962, respectively.

OCCUPATIONAL INFORMATION

This grade evaluation guide applies to the work of exhibits specialists, illustrators, and visual information specialists. For more detailed information on these three occupations, refer to their respective series coverage standards.

Exhibits specialists produce two- and three-dimensional displays of artwork, historical and scientific artifacts, or technical products and processes intended to inform, train, convince, or entertain. They also preserve and restore historic structures and large scale museum objects such as historic aircraft, that, for the purposes of this guide, are considered three-dimensional exhibits and historic artifacts.

Illustrators lay out and execute illustrations in a variety of styles and art media. They use freehand technique as well as drawing instruments and computer graphics software. Some illustrators also retouch photographs.

Visual information specialists, unlike exhibits specialists and illustrators, are designers rather than "doers."

While they may have the skills necessary to produce finished artwork, and in some cases actually do illustration and exhibits specialist work, the primary purpose of their work is to design and select the various elements of visual products. These visual products include books, magazines, pamphlets, exhibits, or series of visual images intended to accompany live or recorded oral presentations. Visual information specialists typically produce sketches, drawings, or models in order to communicate their design ideas to others.

While specific techniques and products differ among these occupational specialties, a common thread runs through the work of all three occupational categories and their various subspecializations: the requirement for planning and, in some cases, personally executing the creation of a visual product intended to convey information.

This guide measures the relative levels of difficulty of work in terms of a pattern common to all three of these occupational categories. The least difficult of full performance assignments

involves producing visual products conceived and designed by others. The emphasis is on applying technical knowledge and skill to produce work according to detailed specifications. An intermediate level of difficulty involves developing alternative designs and working out details of visual products conceived by others. The most difficult assignments require the design of original visual products. There is increased emphasis on originality, developing the design, and deciding the specific content of a visual product, following only general instructions regarding the subject matter to be depicted and objectives to be achieved.

Impact of Computers

Computers are becoming standard tools in the design and creation of visual products. They range from simple "desk top" personal computers to large scale integrated computer systems and subsystems that require extended training to attain proficiency in their use. Graphics software packages that perform drawing, page layout, photo retouching, animation, video, and color separation processes enable designers and illustrators to produce a wide variety of images. They range from two-dimensional line drawings to fully modeled, subtly colored pictures that create the illusion of three dimensions, and animated sequences that create the illusion of moving through space and around objects.

The computer graphics software is used in conjunction with a variety of peripheral devices. Some enable users to "scan in" or introduce existing images into the computer for display on the screen and subsequent enhancement or alteration. Hand-held devices such as the electronic stylus and the "mouse" permit electronic drawing and painting in a freehand manner. There are also a variety of output devices that range from the relatively commonplace printers found in any modern office to devices capable of reproducing computer-generated images as ink-on-paper, transparencies, or video. Other software applications include photo typesetting devices, sign making machines, and electronic transfer of full color images to other locations for high resolution photographic enlargement to poster-size prints.

Computer technology is considered for purposes of this guide as one of the many kinds of visual media that may be selected to communicate a particular message, and is to be treated as equivalent to these other media when applying the grading criteria provided. While there can be considerable difficulty in learning to work with this electronic medium, the degree of sophistication of the equipment used does not in itself make the work performed intrinsically more difficult. Rather, the essential difficulties in visual arts work lie in applying the principles of visual design and exercising the skill to portray what is seen or imagined through an art medium.

Use of computers to produce charts, graphs, illustrations, publication layouts, and typographical elements has blurred the distinctions between work traditionally performed by illustrators and graphic designers and that which is now performed by employees in other occupations. There is no one key to distinguish illustrators or visual information specialists from employees in other occupations who produce computer-generated graphics. Consider the primary purpose or focus of the position, the degree of personal intervention required to develop a computer-generated

visual product (such as freehand drawing or painting or manipulation of colors to achieve desired shades and tints), and the degree of artistic sophistication required of the visual product.

SERIES AND TITLES

This guide does not affect current practice regarding series or title determination. Continue to classify positions evaluated by this guide to the most appropriate series published in the Office of Personnel Management's [Handbook of Occupational Groups and Families](#), and in keeping with the discussions of coverage and titling in the individual series coverage standards.

GRADING OF POSITIONS

The grade level criteria in this guide cover typical full performance nonsupervisory positions at grades GS-7 through GS-12. When a position fails to meet the lowest, or exceeds the highest, level provided for a particular factor, evaluate that factor using the FES Primary Standard along with this guide.

Evaluate positions on a factor-by-factor basis using the factor level descriptions found in this guide. Only the designated point values may be used. The guide includes specific illustrative work situations to supplement the concepts contained in the factor level descriptions. Any one of these examples is not, by itself, totally representative of the factor level. Avoid evaluating positions solely on the basis of comparison with assignments covered in the illustrations. More complete instructions for evaluating positions are contained in the instructions for the Factor Evaluation System.

GRADE CONVERSION TABLE

Total points on all evaluation factors are converted to GS grade as follows:

GS Grade	Point Range
7	1355-1600
8	1605-1850
9	1855-2100
10	2105-2350
11	2355-2750
12	2755-3150



FACTOR LEVEL RELATIONSHIPS

The following table illustrates how the FES factor levels combine in typical visual arts positions at grades GS-7 through GS-12. The table is designed to help users understand the most common factor relationships at each grade, for example, the level of knowledge required to perform work of a particular level of complexity. However, other combinations of factors may be appropriate for particular positions.

FACTOR LEVELS	GS-07	GS-09	GS-11	GS-12
1. Knowledge Required	1-6	1-6	1-7	1-7
2. Supervisory Controls	2-2	2-3	2-4	2-4
3. Guidelines	3-2	3-3	3-3	3-4
4. Complexity	4-3	4-3	4-4	4-5
5. Scope and Effect	5-2	5-3	5-3	5-4
6/7. Personal Contacts/ Purpose of Contacts	2b	2b or 3b	2b or 3b	3b
8. Physical Demands	8-1 or 8-2	8-1 or 8-2	8-1 or 8-2	8-1 or 8-2
9. Work Environment	9-1 or 9-2	9-1 or 9-2	9-1 or 9-2	9-1 or 9-2

FACTOR LEVEL DESCRIPTIONS

FACTOR 1, KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED BY THE POSITION

Level 1-6 -- 950 points

At the next lower level, knowledge of the basic principles of visual design or basic skill in the use of the common art media is used to perform elementary assignments that are developmental in nature, or that involve the production of a limited variety of visual products and require no significant subject matter knowledge. In contrast, at this level work requires:

- Knowledge of a variety of methods, techniques, and materials used in the design, production, and reproduction of visual products to plan the technical details of, or produce, aesthetically composed visual products in a timely manner.
- Basic knowledge of specialized subject matter such as medicine, science, or technical equipment; a field peculiar to the employing organization; or a range of general subjects relating to the work of the organization. This knowledge is needed to understand the specifications and generally usable, observable, and recognizable visual materials provided with the assignment with little explanation or research. (Visual materials are items to be incorporated into a visual product, such as photographs or charts to be reproduced as part of a publication, items to be illustrated, or artifacts to be exhibited.)

AND, where the work includes hands-on production of visual products, it requires:

- Skill in working with either a variety of art media (e.g., pen-and-ink, pencil, tempera, wash, oils, acrylics, air brush, and computer generated graphics); a variety of commercial or graphic art techniques (e.g., typesetting and paste-up of copy, screen printing, building scale models, mounting photographs or manuscripts, mat cutting, fabricating brackets to support specimens and artifacts, etc.); a variety of building materials (e.g., wood, sheet metal, plastics, fiberglass and masonry); or a variety of mechanical assemblies or architectural structures.

Illustrations:

- Plans the visual aspects of publications, exhibits, or presentations where the general format and specific themes to be illustrated are predetermined. Selects photos, illustrations, specimens, or other visual materials from among those provided with the assignment or found in the files. Judges the reproducibility of the material and any enlargement or reduction necessary to achieve the specified visual effect. Specifies appropriate typefaces and sizes along with other typographical elements from among an approved group. Prepares layouts of pages, two-dimensional exhibit panels, or presentation materials such as photographic slides, overhead transparencies, and posters.

- Produces and installs the graphics elements of museum exhibits. Applies basic knowledge of artifact conservation principles and methods and skill in commercial art techniques to perform a combination of tasks that includes: building scale models, deciding and executing the appropriate method for mounting photos and illustrations of all sizes, fabricating brackets to support three-dimensional artifacts, and producing screen printed exhibit labels and designs on a variety of surfaces at any angle.
- Produces, assembles, and installs three-dimensional museum exhibit cases or structures based on design specifications that vary in their degree of detail. Applies basic knowledge of artifact conservation principles and methods to develop lists of needed construction materials, and uses woodworking or other mechanical skills to prepare layouts (either full size or to scale), machine rough stock into necessary shapes and sizes, decide and execute the most appropriate method of joining various components, and apply required laminates or other finishes.
- Executes fully modeled and, if appropriate, colored illustrations depicting a variety of general and technical subjects. Work is performed either on the drawing board or by means of a computer graphic system using freehand technique. It is intended for use in photographic slides, posters, brochures, manuals, and other means of presentation. Applies basic knowledge of technical equipment to depict accurately items that are readily observed. Applies knowledge of a wide range of general subject matter to render illustrations as specified.
- Assists higher level preservationists or architects by performing a portion of the structural investigation and subsequent construction necessary to preserve historic structures. Applies basic knowledge of early American construction methods and styles sufficient to distinguish between historically significant construction features and more recent work. Reports findings to a more knowledgeable preservationist. Applies knowledge of, and skill in, a variety of construction and restoration methods and materials to preserve or produce replicas of specified individual components of a structure (e.g., stairways, doors, interior trim) or a small portion of a structure (e.g., a porch, fence, or small, one-room outbuilding).

Level 1-7 -- 1250 points

In addition to knowledge of (and, in some cases, skill in) visual arts methods and techniques required at Level 1-6, work at this level requires knowledge of the subject matter area supported or depicted that is thorough enough to plan visual products that interpret subject matter content information provided with the assignment. Employees typically are required to apply knowledge of a subject matter or program area in order to:

- develop original designs, concepts, or visual styles for publications, exhibits, or presentation materials that present to the public the ideas or image desired by the organization, that evoke certain responses from viewers (e.g., humor, excitement, pride), or that reduce the cost of production, installation, or maintenance of the visual product;

- transform spoken or written descriptions of items, processes, issues, or events into visual representations without benefit of existing pictures, models, or diagrams; or
- graphically or physically reconstruct biological, medical, geological, architectural, archeological, technological, or other kinds of artifacts, specimens, or materials that have been significantly damaged, distorted, or altered.

Illustrations:

- Plans original visual treatments for printed publications or exhibits, or the visual aspects of oral presentations. Meets with the client (e.g., author, editor, or program official) to learn the information objectives of the project, the points to be emphasized, the relationships to be stressed, and the relative degree of importance of various pieces of the information to be disseminated. Applies knowledge of both visual arts methods, techniques, and materials and the subject matter to be depicted in translating the subject matter into visual designs. Makes the initial decisions on such design matters as size, layout, kind and quality of materials, medium, color schemes, typography, lighting effects, specific visual elements or materials to be incorporated (e.g., photos, illustrations, or artifacts), reproduction methods, or fabrication techniques.
- Collaborates with subject matter experts and designers to plan the fabrication of unique permanent museum exhibits. Translates broad design concepts into the details required to procure the most appropriate fabrication materials, design the necessary joinery, and solve problems in displaying artifacts (such as their extreme weight or sensitivity to heat, light, or fumes from conventional building materials, or their accessibility for purposes of maintenance or scholarly research). Applies knowledge of, and skill in, exhibit fabrication methods, techniques, and materials, and knowledge of the characteristics of the specimens and artifacts to be displayed. Projects typically are of a scale requiring the assistance of several other exhibits specialists whose work the employee coordinates and evaluates. The employee also coordinates fabrication work with other visual arts organizations, such as graphics design and production, and with organizations outside the visual arts area such as safety management and facilities engineering.
- Meets with management and subject matter experts to plan illustration projects. Advises on the technical advantages and disadvantages of various formats, styles, media, and methods of reproduction, suggesting those that will best meet the information objectives of each project. Applies subject matter knowledge to research source materials, often to the extent of personally dissecting, disassembling, or reconstructing items to be illustrated, in order to translate information into original illustrations without benefit of established formats or clear, unambiguous visual models or samples.
- Manages projects involving the preservation of a variety of historic structures including lighthouses, residences, fortresses, arsenals, canal locks, and outbuildings. Structures to be preserved and presented to the public are typically in a state of extreme disrepair or their historical appearance has been obliterated by repeated alterations. Combines

knowledge of modern and traditional building methods, techniques, and materials with knowledge of architectural styles associated with specific historic periods to identify construction features of a particular period and adapt original preservation plans to accommodate conditions found at the site. Projects typically involve designing missing portions of ornamental work in keeping with the architecture, materials, and craft methods of a particular historic period. Designs are based on research in libraries and study of existing structures of the same style and historic period.

FACTOR 2, SUPERVISORY CONTROLS

Level 2-2 -- 125 points

The supervisor makes assignments by indicating generally what is to be done, (e.g., specifying the content, format, and style of the product), limitations, quality expected, deadlines, and priority of assignments. The supervisor provides detailed instructions for new, difficult, or unusual assignments, including suggested work methods or advice on precedent material available.

The employee carries out routine assignments independently without specific instructions, but refers problems and unfamiliar situations to the supervisor for decision or help. The employee typically works from rough sketches of the proposed project, and is responsible for working out the details in conformance with established format and style.

The supervisor assures that finished work and methods used are technically accurate and in compliance with instructions or established procedures, and that work is of an acceptable level of aesthetic quality.

Level 2-3 -- 275 points

The supervisor makes assignments by defining objectives (e.g., specifying what subject matter is to be depicted and for what purpose), priorities (e.g., specifying what degree of emphasis each aspect of the subject matter is to receive), and deadlines, and assists the employee where projects call for substantial departures from established styles or formats, or from customary methods or materials.

The employee plans and carries out the successive steps of producing the visual product, and independently solves technical problems that arise in the course of using common materials, methods, or techniques. The employee is personally responsible for the aesthetic quality of the visual product.

Completed work is evaluated for compliance with established practice and policy and for meeting the objectives of the assignment. Only methods that represent substantial departures from customary practice are reviewed in detail.

Level 2-4 -- 450 points

The employee is given only the broad objectives and resource limitations of the project. The employee consults with the supervisor or client to develop specific ideas on the appearance and contents of the product (e.g., specific photos, illustrations, or artifacts; typography; color scheme; lighting effects; size and placement of artifacts; or number of views to be illustrated). This differs from the next lower level where projects are based on the ideas and suggestions developed by the supervisor or client.

The employee independently plans and carries out visual arts projects; resolves most differences of opinion or interpretation with clients or contractors; and coordinates the work with clients, contractors, and others such as project team members or structural and fire safety experts.

Completed work is reviewed only in terms of its effectiveness in meeting the overall objectives of the project. This is generally based on the degree of client satisfaction.

FACTOR 3, GUIDELINES*Level 3-2 -- 125 points*

At this level, the format and content of the visual product are specified, methods and techniques for producing the work are established, and there are a number of essentially identical previous projects available on which to model the work.

The employee uses judgment in locating and selecting appropriate references and in making minor deviations in format or design details to fit the specific project. Unusual situations where precedents are not available or methods must be substantially altered are referred to the supervisor for additional guidance.

Level 3-3 -- 275 points

At this level, the subject matter is well defined and the aspects to be depicted are already decided. Unlike the next lower level, formats or methods have not been specified in detail with total accuracy. Guidelines consist primarily of examples of previous similar, but not identical projects done for the organization; examples of similar, but not identical visual products found in books or magazines; or sketches, construction drawings, photographs, virtually intact specimens, or other materials provided by clients.

The employee uses judgment in transforming these ideas and visual materials into finished visual products that achieve the desired purpose and effect. The employee is expected to recognize where precedent projects, design specifications, or materials offered by clients must be adapted, decide how they should be adapted, and recommend these changes.

Level 3-4 -- 450 points

At this level, the subject matter to be depicted is either novel or vague, and the form and content of the visual product are left to the discretion of the employee. Because of the unique nature of projects, guidelines are scarce or of limited use. Guides that do exist typically consist of rough sketches, simplistic diagrams, or damaged specimens provided by clients.

The employee uses initiative and resourcefulness in researching the subject matter to be depicted (e.g., specimens, historic structures, or aircraft), searching for appropriate visual elements, or testing new materials and methods to use in creating a visual product.

FACTOR 4, COMPLEXITY*Level 4-3 -- 150 points*

The work involves a variety of visual arts projects, each with its own sequence of different technical processes. Themes or subjects, as well as the general format (medium, color scheme, overall dimensions, etc.) to be used, are already established or specified by others. The emphasis is on technical proficiency in the development of visual products. (This differs from the next lower level where projects involve either isolated tasks in producing a visual product or creating faithful copies of existing illustrations, models, or other visual products with specified minor changes.)

The employee makes decisions necessary to work out details of the final visual product (illustration, publication, or two-dimensional exhibit layout, free-standing three-dimensional exhibit case, sequence of slides or transparencies) after the subject, theme, and general format have been determined and presented to the employee in the form of sketches, scale models, plans, or diagrams.

The employee applies knowledge of the characteristics of a variety of art media and visual materials and methods to produce finished visual products. These products typically present factual information or depict specific operations or occurrences, and are based on design concepts and subject matter content provided by others.

Level 4-4 -- 225 points

The work involves varied projects requiring the application of a wide range of methods, techniques, materials, or art media. The projects are conventional, but no format or visual style has been specified and the employee must visually interpret the subject matter to be depicted. Visual products have been produced before on the same general subject matter and in the same general manner of presentation, i.e., illustration, publication, exhibit, sequence of visuals to accompany a speech, training class, or briefing. The emphasis is on planning, research, and collaboration with persons knowledgeable in the subject matter to be depicted or presented.



The work requires decisions on how best to present specified subject matter information. These decisions include assessing whether there is sufficient subject matter information and visual material immediately available, and identifying possible sources of additional information and material needed to develop a visual product. The employee also must decide which images, views, or artifacts to present and how to give particular visual emphasis to some of them through size, color, texture, variations in the degree of detail, typography, lighting, or location.

Projects typically require departing from past approaches used in the design or production of similar products in order to create a new visual effect, or to adjust to differences in time or money available, in location or space available, in certain details of the subject matter itself, or in aspects of the subject matter to be emphasized.

Level 4-5 -- 325 points

The work involves projects characterized by the need for extensive research into, and decision making on, the subject matter to be depicted due to conditions such as:

- novelty of the subject matter to be depicted or presented (e.g., newly found zoological species, newly conceived technology, newly observed natural phenomenon, unique historic structures);
- abstract nature of the subject matter to be depicted or presented (e.g., broad concepts or ideas as opposed to specific events or processes); or
- multiplicity of themes in the subject matter to be depicted and diversity in the levels of knowledge and interest among members of the audience.

The work requires decisions on design and technique similar to those required at Level 4-4, and in addition, decisions on the precise subject matter content and the aspects of the subject matter to be emphasized. Because there is no previous visual treatment of the subject matter due to its novelty or unique nature, the employee plays the major role in transforming ideas and information into a visual product.

The work requires translating subject matter ideas and information into unprecedented visual products. The employee typically decides what aspects of the subject matter will be depicted and emphasized as well as how each will be depicted.

FACTOR 5, SCOPE AND EFFECT

Level 5-2 -- 75 points

The purpose of the work is to develop individual visual products (e.g., illustrations, models, individual exhibit cases or panel layouts) where the design (e.g., medium, color, layout, joinery,

and dimensions) is predetermined. These visual products typically are part of projects of broader scope such as publications, presentations, or exhibits.

Work products contribute to the overall visual effect of a larger, composite visual product.

Level 5-3 -- 150 points

The purpose of the work is to plan the details of developing a variety of conventional visual products that depict or present subject matter information or ideas. These visual products are conventional in that similar products have been produced in the past covering the same general subject matter and using the same general manner of presentation.

Work products support and affect the adequacy of such activities as public information, training, developing technical publications, or conducting relations with professional communities associated with the work of the organization.

Level 5-4 -- 225 points

The purpose of the work is to design visual products characterized by their novelty and unusual scale involving a multiplicity of media or individual visual components. The products typically require specifying, accepting, and when necessary, rejecting custom-produced photographs, illustrations, murals, maps, video or animated sequences, models, sculpture, exhibit display cases, or unique support or suspension systems for artifacts of unusual size, weight, or fragility.

Designs affect a wide range of activities both within and outside the agency, such as in-house production operations, procurement actions, and finance office transactions; the activities of private sector visual arts production contractors (e.g., illustrators, photographers, printers, exhibit builders, muralists, cartographers, sculptors, and model makers); and the activities of other local, State, and Federal agencies involved in related work.

FACTOR 6, PERSONAL CONTACTS AND FACTOR 7, PURPOSE OF CONTACTS

Match the level of regular and recurring contacts with the purpose of those contacts and credit the appropriate point value using the chart below.

Personal Contacts

1. Coworkers in the immediate work unit or employees in related or support units (e.g., units where other visual products are produced or where other phases of assigned visual arts projects are carried out).

2. Employees in the same agency, but outside the visual arts organization. These employees may either be requesting the services of the visual arts employee or providing information or services to the visual arts employee.
3. Individuals or groups outside the agency on matters for which there is no routine working relationship already established; or, on an ad hoc or infrequent basis, top management (director or deputy director) of the employing agency, service, major command, or comparable organization.

Purpose of Contacts

- a. To obtain or provide facts or information needed to produce visual products. Facts or information may range from easily understood to highly technical.
- b. To plan, coordinate, or advise on work efforts or resolve technical problems by influencing individuals or groups who are working toward mutual goals and are basically cooperative.

C O N T A C T S	P U R P O S E	
	a	b
1	30	60
2	45	75
3	80	110

FACTOR 8, PHYSICAL DEMANDS

NOTE: Regulations governing pay for irregular or intermittent duty involving unusual physical hardship or hazard are in Chapter 55, title 5, *United States Code*; and Part 550, title 5, *Code of Federal Regulations*.

Level 8-1 -- 5 points

The work can be done primarily while seated, as at a drawing board or computer keyboard, and requires no special physical demands.

Level 8-2 -- 20 points

The work requires some physical exertion, such as long periods of standing or recurring lifting of moderately heavy items. This is typical of work involving personal production or installation of exhibits, illustration work "on location", or on-site inspection or supervision of one or more phases of the production of a visual product.

Level 8-3 -- 50 points

The work requires considerable and strenuous physical exertion such as frequent climbing of tall ladders, crouching or crawling in restricted areas, or lifting heavy objects over 23 kilograms (50 pounds). This is typical of jobs involving hands-on efforts in the preservation of historic structures or reconstruction and installation of large scale museum artifacts such as historic aircraft.

FACTOR 9, WORK ENVIRONMENT

NOTE: Regulations governing pay for irregular or intermittent duty involving unusual physical hardship or hazard are in Chapter 55, title 5, *United States Code*; and Part 550, title 5, *Code of Federal Regulations*.

Level 9-1 -- 5 points

The work is typically performed in an adequately lighted and climate controlled office and requires no special safety precautions.

Level 9-2 -- 20 points

The work involves moderate risks or discomforts such as working with power tools or irritant or hazardous substances, and may require special safety precautions and the use of protective masks, gowns, goggles, gloves, or boots.