

b. *Qualifying Education or Training*

The following table shows the amount and level of education typically required for each grade for which education alone can be qualifying. At GS-13 and above, appropriate specialized experience is required for *all* positions.

Grade	Qualifying Education
GS-1	None
GS-2	High school graduation or equivalent
GS-3	1 academic year above high school 2 academic years above high school,
GS-4	OR Associate's degree 4 academic years above high school leading to a bachelor's degree,
GS-5	OR Bachelor's degree Bachelor's degree with Superior Academic Achievement for two-grade interval positions,
GS-7	OR 1 academic year of graduate education (or law school, as specified in qualification standards or individual occupational requirements) Master's (or equivalent graduate degree such as LL.B. or J.D. as specified in qualification standards or individual occupational requirements),
GS-9	OR 2 academic years of progressively higher level graduate education Ph.D. or equivalent doctoral degree, OR 3 academic years of progressively higher level graduate education,
GS-11	OR <i>For research positions only</i> , completion of all requirements for a master's or equivalent degree (See information on research positions in the qualification standard for professional and scientific positions .)
GS-12	

Grade**Qualifying Education**

For research positions only, completion of all requirements for a doctoral or equivalent degree (See information on research positions in the qualification standard for [professional and scientific positions](#).)

- c. *Academic year*-- An academic year is computed as follows:
- At the undergraduate level, successfully completed education that has not led to possession of a degree is credited based on its relationship to 120 semester hours or 180 quarter hours. For example, 30 semester hours or 45 quarter hours is comparable to 1 year of undergraduate education. Four years of progressive study or 120 semester hours meets the degree requirements. *Additional credit cannot be given for duplicate course work.*
 - For study at a business or technical school, 36 weeks of study (20+ classroom hours per week) is comparable to 1 academic year above high school.
 - An academic year of graduate education is considered to be the number of credit hours that the school attended has determined to represent 1 academic year of full-time study. This determination is made based on normal course loads for a full year of study in the graduate program. If that information cannot be obtained from the school, 18 semester hours or 27 quarter hours should be considered as satisfying the 1 year of full-time study requirement. Part-time graduate education is creditable in accordance with its relationship to a year of full-time study at the school attended.
 - When academic credit is expressed in contract months, units, or other terms that differ from conventional semester or quarter hours, it is the responsibility of the applicant to provide an interpretation of such credits from the appropriate institution in order to equate them to the semester or quarter hours specified in the standard.
- d. *College or university education* -- Educational course work may be at either the undergraduate or graduate level. Successful completion of graduate level courses will be accepted as evidence that an applicant also possesses the knowledge taught in courses at lower levels in the same field.

Applications can be accepted from students who expect to complete qualifying education within 9 months from the date of application. However, agencies must verify that the education was completed successfully before the applicant can be appointed.

Generally, courses in the same or a related major taken at one institution can be assumed to be progressively more difficult and, thus, credited at full value. However, the educational record of applicants who have changed majors, attended several different institutions, or taken courses only sporadically should be reviewed closely. Course titles and numbers may help determine level. (Courses entitled "Introduction to..." or with numbers beginning with A or 1 are almost always lower level courses.) Transcripts noting the level of the student, e.g., freshman or junior, when the courses were taken may help also. If the level of an applicant's courses is not clear, the degree to which the courses relate to each other should be considered in determining whether the education meets the requirements of the position being filled.

When qualifying applicants on the basis of years of graduate education in lieu of an advanced degree, care must be exercised in determining credit for post- baccalaureate education. Such education must show evidence of progress through a set curriculum or program leading to an advanced degree. Extra credit for graduate education should not be given because a person has taken longer than the usual time to complete the educational program. It is OPM's intent that 2 years of graduate study be substantially equivalent to a master's degree, and 3 years be substantially equivalent to a Ph.D. degree. Graduate-level credit should not be given for undergraduate level course work unless it is a requisite part of the graduate-level curriculum. If an applicant had to complete under-graduate course work as a prerequisite for pursuing an advanced degree, that undergraduate-level study should not be credited as graduate education.

- e. *Crediting education in one-grade interval occupations* -- For one-grade interval occupations, when education is used to meet specialized experience requirements at grade GS-5, the level of the course work must have been equivalent to at least the junior- and senior-year levels of a baccalaureate program. (See paragraph [\(d\)](#) above for discussion of level of education.)
- f. *Superior academic achievement (S.A.A.)* -- This provision covers advanced trainee positions that provide opportunities for advancement upon attaining required job skills and knowledge, require no prior experience, and have work classified at two-grade intervals. It recognizes students who have achieved superior academic standing as evidenced by one of the three methods described below. In order to be creditable under this provision, superior academic achievement must have been gained in a curriculum that is qualifying for the position to be filled.

The superior academic achievement provision applies to both initial appointment and inservice placement actions. It is to be used to determine eligibility for applicable GS-7 level positions of persons who have completed (or expect to complete within 9 months) all the requirements for a bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university.

Senior students can apply for positions prior to graduation and be considered for a GS-7 appointment based on their grades at the time of application. However, some applicants may not receive their final grades in a timely fashion after graduation. Therefore, agencies can either:

- Require that senior students provide evidence that they maintained the required grades during their senior year prior to entry on duty; or
- Appoint applicants based on their claimed academic achievement, pending verification of final grades. Agencies should inform such applicants that if the required grades were not maintained through their senior year, there is a possibility that they may not be able to retain either the GS-7 grade or the position.

S.A.A. is based on (1) class standing, (2) grade-point average, or (3) honor society membership.

1. *Class standing* -- Applicants must be in the upper third of the graduating class in the college, university, or major subdivision, such as the College of Liberal Arts or the School of Business Administration, based on completed courses.

2. *Grade-point average (G.P.A.)*-- Applicants must have a grade-point average of:
 - a. **3.0 or higher out of a possible 4.0 ("B" or better)** as recorded on their official transcript, or as computed based on 4 years of education, or as computed based on courses completed during the final 2 years of the curriculum; or
 - b. **3.5 or higher out of a possible 4.0 ("B+" or better)** based on the average of the required courses completed in the major field or the required courses in the major field completed during the final 2 years of the curriculum.

Grade-point averages are to be rounded to one decimal place. For example, 2.95 will round to 3.0 and 2.94 will round to 2.9.

The G.P.A should be credited in a manner that is most beneficial to the applicant. For example, applicants may list their G.P.A. as recorded on their final transcript, or they may choose to compute their G.P.A. The specific provisions are detailed below:

- G.P.A. as recorded on the final transcript. The final transcript must cover the period being used to determine G.P.A., i.e., all 4 years or last 2 years.
- G.P.A. including course work after bachelor's degree. Undergraduate course work obtained after an applicant has received a bachelor's degree can be credited in computing the G.P.A. of applicants who need those courses to meet minimum qualification requirements, i.e., the courses are required by the standard or by the individual occupational requirement. They are treated as described in the following example:
 - An applicant for a Biologist position has a bachelor's degree that included no biology course work, but has taken 24 semester hours in undergraduate biology courses after obtaining the bachelor's degree. The grades earned in the biology courses should be included in the computation to determine this applicant's eligibility for GS-7 under the Superior Academic Achievement provision. These courses should be counted in determining (1) the overall grade-point average, (2) the average obtained during the final 2 years of the undergraduate curriculum, and/or (3) the average in the major field of study. For purposes of this example, biology would be considered the major field of study.
- G.P.A. excluding pass/fail courses. Applicants usually cannot claim credit based on their *overall* G.P.A. if more than 10 percent of their total credit was based on pass/fail or similar systems rather than on traditional grading systems. However, if they can document that only their freshman-year courses (25 percent or less of their total credit) were credited on a pass/fail or similar system, they can use their overall G.P.A. to claim Superior Academic Achievement. If 10 percent or fewer credits or only freshman-year courses were based on pass/fail or similar systems, such credits can be ignored and the G.P.A. computed on the graded courses. Applicants can, however, still claim credit based on their last 2 years if 10 percent or fewer credits were based on pass/fail or similar systems. Applicants who cannot claim credit under the G.P.A. requirements may claim credit for superior academic achievement only on the basis of class standing or honor society membership.

3. *Election to membership in a national scholastic honor society* -- Applicants can be considered eligible based on membership in one of the national scholastic honor societies listed below. These honor societies are listed by the [Association of College Honor Societies](#). Agencies considering eligibility based on any society not included in the following list must ensure that the honor society meets the minimum requirements of the Association of College Honor Societies. Membership in a freshman honor society cannot be used to meet the requirements of this provision.

Alpha Chi
Alpha Delta Mu
Alpha Epsilon
Alpha Epsilon Delta
Alpha Kappa Delta
Alpha Kappa Mu
Alpha Phi Sigma
Alpha Pi Mu
Alpha Sigma Mu
Alpha Sigma Nu
Beta Gamma Sigma
Beta Kappa Chi
Beta Phi Mu
Chi Epsilon
Delta Epsilon Sigma
Delta Mu Delta
Delta Sigma Rho-Tau Kappa Alpha
Delta Tau Alpha
Eta Kappa Nu
Gamma Theta Upsilon
Kappa Delta Pi
Kappa Mu Epsilon
Kappa Omicron Nu
Kappa Tau Alpha
Lambda Iota Tau
Mortar Board
Omega Chi Epsilon
Omega Rho
Omicron Delta Epsilon
Phi Alpha Theta
Phi Kappa Phi
Phi Sigma
Phi Sigma Iota
Phi Sigma Tau
Phi Upsilon Omicron
Pi Alpha Alpha
Pi Delta Phi

Pi Gamma Mu
Pi Kappa Lambda
Pi Omega Pi
Pi Sigma Alpha
Pi Tau Sigma
Psi Chi
Rho Chi
Sigma Delta Pi
Sigma Lambda Alpha
Sigma Lambda Chi
Sigma Pi Sigma
Sigma Tau Delta
Sigma Theta Tau
Tau Beta Pi
Theta Alpha Kappa

- g. *Interpreting minimum educational requirements* Title 5 U.S.C. 3308 permits the establishment of minimum educational requirements only when OPM has determined that the work cannot be performed by persons who do not possess the prescribed minimum education. This includes instances where it would not be cost-effective for an individual to acquire, through on-the-job training, the KSA's necessary for successful performance of the critical duties within a reasonable period of time. In addition, education is sometimes required by law for a position because of the impact on public health and safety or national security.

The same minimum educational requirements apply to all applicants and employees, including employees detailed to an occupational series with minimum educational requirements.

It is important to recognize that on rare occasions there may be applicants who may not meet exactly the educational requirements for a particular series, but who, in fact, may be demonstrably well qualified to perform the work in that series because of exceptional experience or a combination of education and experience. In such instances, a more comprehensive evaluation must be made of the applicant's entire background, with full consideration given to both education and experience. To be considered qualified, the applicant's work experience must reflect significant full performance-level accomplishment directly applicable to the position to be filled, and be verified by a panel of at least two persons who have professional standing in the field. Such verification is necessary to insure that the applicant's background is compared to the appropriate duties and responsibilities required at the full performance level in the occupation. It is important that the comparison be based on a correctly classified position description or on OPM position classification standards or grade level criteria.

The following are examples of such situations:

- An applicant with a Ph.D. in mathematics applies for a GS-1701, Educational Research Specialist position at the GS-13 grade level. Since the qualification standard for GS-1701 requires courses in education or in a field appropriate to the work of the position, it

might appear that this person is not qualified for the GS-1701 position because the applicant's Ph.D. is in mathematics. However, a review of the applicant's 20 years of experience shows that previous positions held include the post of dean of academic affairs at a large university, as well as several years' experience in educational research comparable to the work of the position being filled. In this example, the applicant should be rated qualified, since it is obvious that the lack of the specific educational requirement is more than offset by the long history of successful, high-level, directly applicable experience.

- An applicant concluded his formal education at the end of the first semester of his senior year to pursue a research opportunity in his major field with a private company. The research led to advancement of the state of the art in his field. The applicant became a permanent employee with the company and worked there for 6 years, advancing to a senior position. During this time, the applicant took continuing education courses in his field.

The basic educational requirement specified in a standard is considered to be met if the applicant has (1) successfully demonstrated the ability to perform work at the full performance level in the appropriate professional field, and (2) demonstrated a good knowledge of the specialty field of the position to be filled and the related and underlying discipline comparable to at least a bachelor's degree.

- The qualification standard for the Microbiology Series, GS-403, requires 20 semester hours of microbiology plus 20 semester hours in the physical and mathematical sciences. An applicant has 23 semester hours in microbiology and 17 semester hours in the physical and mathematical sciences.

Since the applicant meets the 20-semester-hour requirement in microbiology, the primary requirement, the 3 hours in excess of 20 can be used to meet the 20-semester-hour requirement in the physical and mathematical sciences.

Applicants may be considered to have satisfied the minimum qualification requirements for a position if they can present evidence that clearly justifies a high evaluation of their competence, such as one of the following:

1. Registration as a professional engineer or architect; or
2. A substantial record of experience, achievement, and publications that demonstrates eminence in the appropriate professional/scientific field.