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For Additional Information: 703-696-6301, Staffing & Development, DEU Oversight DSN 426-6301

Q1: What is Category Rating?

A1: Category rating is a process of evaluating eligible applicants by quality categories rather than by assigning numeric scores. Applicants are assessed against job-related criteria and then placed into a pre-defined category with individuals with similar levels of job related competencies.

Q2: What are the advantages of using category rating?

A2: Use of category rating furnishes hiring managers with a larger pool of qualified applicants from which to choose. Category rating streamlines the application review process by ranking applicants based solely on the quality of their experience and/or educational credentials, versus numerically scoring applicants and ranking them based on both quality and veterans' preference points. Veterans' preference rights continue to be protected under category rating procedures. Veterans' preference eligibles are placed at the top of the appropriately ranked quality category with the exception of those preference eligibles with a compensable service-connected disability of 10 percent or more (CP and CPS) who are placed at the top of the highest quality category.

Note: See question/answer number 9 for a discussion on ranking preference eligibles with a compensable service-connected disability of 10 percent or more when the position being filled is professional or scientific at the GS-09 level or above.

Q3: Who has authority to use category rating procedures?

A3: The Presidential Memorandum – Improving the Federal Recruitment and Hiring Process issued on May 11, 2010, requires agencies to use the category established under Title 5, United States Code, Section 3319 and may only be used by agencies that have delegated examining authority under Title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.), Section 1104(a)(2). The Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Civilian Personnel Policy [memorandum](#) of July 19, 2004, outlined Department of Defense (DoD) policy and procedures for use of category rating.

Q4: How are individuals selected when using category rating?

A4: A selecting official may select candidates from the highest quality category or, if fewer than three candidates have been assigned to the highest quality category, a selecting official may select from a merged category consisting of the highest and second highest quality categories.

Note: A selecting official has the option to merge the top quality categories if there are fewer than three eligible candidates in the highest quality category.

A selecting official may not pass over a veterans' preference eligible to select a non-veterans' preference eligible in the same quality category, unless the requirements of 5 U.S.C. 3317(b) or 3318(b), as applicable, are satisfied. Under 5 U.S.C. 3317(b), a selecting official must consider a veterans' preference eligible three times for selection before passing over the individual to select a non-veterans' preference eligible. Under 5 U.S.C. 3318(b), the appointing authority or the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), as appropriate, must sustain the written reasons for pass over of a veterans' preference eligible.

Q5: What are quality categories?

A5: Quality categories are groupings of individuals with similar levels of job-related competencies or knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs.) Category rating is a process of evaluating qualified eligibles by quality categories rather than assigning individual numeric scores. The agency assesses candidates against job-related criteria and then places them into two or more pre-defined categories. Some factors to consider when developing categories may include: grade level of the job; breadth and scope of KSAs or competencies; increased level of difficulty or complexity; and requirements for successful job performance.

Q6: Is there a minimum or maximum number of quality categories that agencies can establish to assess applicants via category-based rating procedures?

A6: DoD has established the requirement to use three quality categories (Best Qualified, Highly Qualified, and Qualified) to assess applicants for employment consideration.

Q7: Are DoD Components required to define each quality category?

A7: Yes. Each quality category must be defined through a job analysis that conforms to the "Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures," as referenced in Title 29, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 1607, and 5 CFR Part 300. This analysis includes distinguishing factors that differentiate one quality category from the other.

Q8: Is it permissible to merge quality categories?

A8: Merging is optional. However, when quality categories are merged, the highest and the second-highest quality categories may be merged only when there are fewer than three candidates assigned to the highest quality category. After merging has occurred, veterans' preference eligibles from the second highest group will be placed at the top of the merged category, along with any veterans' preference eligibles that were already in the highest group.

Q9: How are candidates ranked when using category rating?

A9: Candidates are ranked according to veterans' preference eligibles and non-veterans' preference eligibles within each quality category. Veterans' preference must be applied as prescribed in Section 3319(b) and (c) (2) of Title 5, U.S.C. Veterans' preference points, per 5 CFR part 337, are not applicable under category rating procedures.

Qualified veterans' preference eligibles are listed ahead of all non-preference eligibles within each quality category. However, qualified veterans' preference eligibles with a compensable service-connected disability of 10 percent or more (CP and CPS) are listed at the top of the highest quality category, except for those professional and scientific positions listed in OPM's Operation Manual, *Qualification Standards for General Schedule Positions*, at the GS-09 level and above. These positions have positive education requirements that an applicant must possess in order to be considered minimally qualified.

Q10: When filling multiple vacancies from one certificate, and there is an insufficient number of candidates in the highest quality category, can the examining office refer candidates from the next lower quality category?

A10: Yes, however if quality categories are not merged, selecting officials must exhaust the highest quality category listing before selecting from the next lower quality category.

Q11: Can DoD Components announce a position under two separate announcements using category rating procedures and the rule of three?

A11: No. Components must use category rating.

Q12: What is an assessment tool?

A12: Assessment tools are to determine an applicant's qualification level and their placement in a quality category. Assessment tools may be in the form of (a) tests; (b) an assessment center; (c) a work sample; (d) structured interview; or (e) a crediting plan/rating schedule. The subject matter expert and the human resources office establish indicators of proficiency (a source of evidence that the applicant possesses job-related KSAs/competencies.) Indicators of proficiency include, but are not limited to: (a) education; (b) experience; (c) professional activity; (d) professional certification; and (e) agency certification.

The following is an example of an assessment tool using a crediting plan/rating schedule:

Create quality categories based on the specific level of proficiency in each KSA/Competency. (Applicants have to demonstrate a specific level of the KSA/Competency.) Oral Communication (this is one of three KSAs)		
Category	Benchmark	Benchmark Definition
Best	5	Communicates or explains <i>complex</i> ideas or information clearly (e.g., explains new regulations; presents technical information at conferences).
Highly	3	Communicates or explains <i>moderately</i> complex ideas or information clearly (e.g., explains changes in regulations; describes available services to individuals).
Qualified	1	Communicates or explains <i>basic ideas</i> or information clearly (e.g., explains non-technical procedures or routine information).

Q13: What do DoD Components consider when selecting an assessment tool?

A13: The Component must consider many factors when selecting an assessment tool. The most appropriate assessment tool (or combination of assessment tools) depends on such factors as: (a) the grade level of the position; (b) the work requirements of the job; (c) the anticipated number of people applying for the job; (d) the competencies/KSAs to be measured by the assessment(s); (e) the cost of hiring a poor performer; (f) the resources available to purchase or develop and administer the assessment; and (g) time available to fill the position. As with any assessment, meeting professional standards (ensuring the legal defensibility of an assessment strategy) is also important in selecting an assessment tool.

Q14: Has OPM placed any restrictions on an agency's choice of assessment tools?

A14: Agencies must ensure that any tool used must meet the requirements in the "Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures" in 29 CFR part 1607. These guidelines can be found at http://ecfr.gpoaccess.gov/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=ecfr&sid=39d58123a060e03a93f0a6f869082136&tpl=/ecfrbrowse/Title29/29cfr1607_main_02.tpl

Q15: Where can I find more information on candidate assessment techniques?

A15: More detailed information on candidate assessment techniques can be found in the OPM's Delegated Examining Operations Handbook, (<http://www.opm.gov/deu>).

Q16: Can category rating be used to fill excepted service positions?

A16: No. Only offices with delegated examining authority to fill positions through competitive examining procedures may use category rating. However, consistent with 5 CFR part 302, DoD organizations that routinely examine for such positions may develop procedures similar to category rating.

Q17: Can category rating be used to fill temporary/term positions?

A17: Yes. Category rating procedures may be used to fill any competitive service position, including time-limited positions.

Q18: Can category rating procedures be used for rating and ranking wage grade positions?

A18: Yes. The law does not prohibit the use of category rating for wage grade positions.

Q19: Can category rating be used to fill positions covered under the *Luevano* consent decree?

A19: Yes. Category rating procedures may be used to fill positions covered under the *Luevano* consent decree.