

**FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
PERSONNEL**

**Personnel**

**Part 223 Employment**

**Chapter 12 Category Rating**

**223 FW 12**

**12.1 What is the purpose of the chapter?** The purpose of this chapter is to:

**A.** Describe the Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) policy concerning the use of category rating in a delegated examining environment, and

**B.** Provide examples that human resources professionals can use to apply category rating principles.

**12.2 What is the Service policy for category rating?** We must follow the Department of the Interior's (Department) policy on alternative rating and ranking procedures described in Personnel Bulletin Number 05-06 and the guidance in this chapter.

**12.3 What are the authorities for this chapter?** The authorities for this chapter are:

**A.** Chief Human Capital Officers Act of 2002 (5 U.S.C. 1402);

**B.** Alternative Ranking and Selection Procedures (5 U.S.C. 3319);

**C.** Examining System (5 CFR Part 337 Subpart C); and

**D.** Department of the Interior, Personnel Bulletin Number 05-06, August 18, 2005.

**12.4 What is category rating?** Category rating is:

**A.** Part of the competitive examining process.

**B.** An alternative ranking and selection procedure that increases the number of eligible candidates from which a selecting official may choose while preserving veterans' preference rights.

**C.** Optional when processing recruitment actions under delegated examining procedures. Human resources professionals and selecting officials may use traditional numerical ranking or category rating procedures.

**12.5 What is the scope of this chapter?** This policy:

**A.** Applies only to the recruitment actions we process under delegated examining procedures. These are positions that we advertise that are open to all U.S. citizens regardless of the geographic area where they reside.

**B.** Includes:

**(1)** Applicants outside of the Federal workforce applying for jobs.

**(2)** Current Federal employees who do not have competitive service status and are applying for jobs.

**(3)** Federal employees with competitive service status applying for jobs.

**C.** Does not apply to the recruitment actions we process under merit promotion procedures or excepted service procedures (e.g., the Federal Career Intern Program or the Student Educational Employment Program).

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**12.6 Who is responsible for managing category rating?**

**A. The Assistant Director – Budget, Planning and Human Resources** ensures that there is policy in place to give human resources professionals and selecting officials the information they need to use category rating as an alternative ranking and selection procedure.

**B. The Chief, Division of Human Capital:**

**(1)** Develops category rating policy and procedures and ensures this information is up-to-date, and

**(2)** Assists human resources professionals in the Regional Human Resources Offices with questions they may have about category rating.

**C. The human resources professionals** in Regional Human Resources Offices, in consultation with the selecting officials, decide on a case-by-case basis whether or not to use category rating procedures.

**12.7 How do human resources professionals evaluate applicants using category rating?** Human resources professionals:

**A.** Determine which applicants meet the basic qualification requirements established for the position and grade level(s) advertised. Those applicants who do not meet the basic qualification requirements established for the position and grade level(s) advertised are ineligible and receive no further consideration.

**B.** Assess eligible candidates' job-related competencies or knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs); and

**C.** Place eligible candidates in one of two or more pre-defined quality categories instead of ranking them in numeric score order.

**12.8 How do human resources professionals refer eligible candidates and how do the selecting officials select the candidates using category rating?**

**A. The human resources professional:**

**(1)** Refers the names of all eligible candidates in the highest quality category on the certificate of eligibles, or equivalent form, to the selecting official for consideration without regard to the rule-of-three procedures.

**(2)** Places the preference eligible candidates ahead of all non-preference eligible candidates within each quality category. (See sections 12.15 through 12.18 for more information.)

**B. The selecting official:**

**(1)** Selects from among the eligible candidates in the highest quality category and is not limited to the top three eligible candidates.

**(2)** Understands that veterans' preference is absolute within each quality category.

**12.9 What are the overall requirements for using category rating?**

**A.** An agency must have a category rating policy. (See Department of the Interior, Personnel Bulletin Number 05-06.)

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**B.** The human resources professional:

- (1) Must define quality categories prior to announcing the job;
- (2) Must establish a minimum of two quality categories; and
- (3) May not establish a “not qualified” category.

**12.10 What are some factors to consider when defining quality categories?**

**A.** You should define quality categories to:

- (1) Reflect requirements to perform the job successfully, and
- (2) Distinguish differences in the quality of candidates’ job-related competencies/KSAs, including:
  - (a) Breadth and scope of competencies/KSAs,
  - (b) Increased levels of difficulty or complexity of competencies/KSAs,
  - (c) Successful performance on the job, and
  - (d) Level of the job.

**B.** Table 12-1 illustrates examples of quality categories:

<b>Table 12-1: Examples of Quality Categories</b>		
<b>Example 1</b>	<b>Example 2</b>	<b>Example 3</b>
Highly Qualified	Best-Qualified	Best-Qualified
Qualified	Qualified	Well-Qualified
		Qualified

**12.11 What procedures must the human resources professional follow when using numerical scores to develop quality categories?**

**A.** When defining quality categories using numerical scores, you must:

- (1) Be consistent with the technical standards in the *Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures* (see 29 CFR part 1607, section 14) with respect to the development of any assessment procedures, and
- (2) Comply with the requirements for merit selection (see 5 U.S.C. 2301 and 2302).

**B.** Table 12-2 illustrates examples of how you can define quality categories using numerical scores.

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<b>Table 12-2: Examples of Quality Categories Using Numerical Scores</b>	
<b>Category</b>	<b>Score</b>
Best-Qualified	Between 90 and 100
Well-Qualified	Between 80 and 89
Qualified	Between 70 and 79

**C.** You refer the names of all eligible candidates in the highest quality category (Best-Qualified) on the certificate of eligibles to the selecting official **without** any reference to their assigned numerical scores.

**12.12 How do human resources professionals define quality categories?** You may define quality categories in one of two ways—*possession only* of the competencies/KSAs **or** specific *level of proficiency* for each competency/KSA. Following are examples that are specific to the Fish and Wildlife Service:

**A. Example 1 - Possession Only:** Tables 12-3 and 12-4 illustrate how to use category rating when the eligible candidates' specific level of proficiency does not matter. The human resources professional identified the five KSAs through the job analysis process to be job-related.

<b>Table 12-3: Example 1 - Possession Only</b>	
<b>KSAs for Office Assistant (Office Automation), GS-0303-05</b>	
1.	Ability to prepare, route, and distribute correspondence and other documents.
2.	Skill in using computers.
3.	Ability to maintain office files, records, reference materials, and tickler systems.
4.	Knowledge of travel and training regulations.
5.	Ability to communicate orally.

<b>Table 12-4: Example 1 (continued)</b>	
<b>Office Assistant (Office Automation), GS-0303-05</b>	
<b>Category</b>	<b>KSAs</b>
<b>Best-Qualified</b>	Eligible candidates who demonstrate possession of the following:  1, 2, 3, 4, 5
<b>Well-Qualified</b>	Eligible candidates who demonstrate possession of the following:  1, 2, 3, 5
<b>Qualified</b>	Eligible candidates who meet the basic qualification requirements established for the position, but fail to meet the benchmark definition for the Well-Qualified category.

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**B. Example 2 of Possession Only.** Tables 12-5 and 12-6 further illustrate how to use category rating when the eligible candidates' specific level of proficiency does not matter. The human resources professional identified the four KSAs through the job analysis process to be job-related.

<b>Table 12-5: Example 2 – Possession Only</b>	
<b>KSAs for Biological Science Technician, GS-0404-04</b>	
1.	Knowledge of the principles and techniques of biological sciences.
2.	Knowledge of biological data collection and field identification.
3.	Knowledge of computer operations and various software programs.
4.	Ability to communicate in writing.

<b>Table 12-6: Example 2 (continued)</b>	
<b>Biological Science Technician, GS-0404-04</b>	
<b>Category</b>	<b>KSAs</b>
<b>Best-Qualified</b>	Eligible candidates who demonstrate possession of the following:  1, 2, 3, 4
<b>Well-Qualified</b>	Eligible candidates who demonstrate possession of the following:  1, 3, 4
<b>Qualified</b>	Eligible candidates who meet the basic qualification requirements established for the position, but fail to meet the benchmark definition for the Well-Qualified category.

**C. Example 1 - Specific Level of Proficiency:** Tables 12-7 and 12-8 illustrate how to use category rating when the eligible candidates' specific level of proficiency does matter. The human resources professional identified the four KSAs through the job analysis process to be job-related.

<b>Table 12-7: Example 1 of Specific Level of Proficiency</b>	
<b>KSAs for Information and Education Specialist, GS-1001-09</b>	
1.	Ability to design and develop environmental education programs.
2.	Ability to communicate ideas and information orally to various audiences.
3.	Ability to communicate ideas and information in writing to various audiences.
4.	Ability to design and develop a volunteer and docent cooperative program at a National or State urban wildlife refuge; environmental education center; nature center; or park.

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<b>Table 12-8: Example 1 of Specific Level of Proficiency (continued)</b>		
<b>Ability to design and develop environmental education programs.</b>		
<b>Category</b>	<b>Benchmark</b>	<b>Benchmark Definition</b>
<b>Best-Qualified</b>	<b>5</b>	<p>Eligible candidates who have demonstrated that they have performed the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Designed and developed environmental education programs at a National or State urban wildlife refuge; environmental education center; nature center; or park.</li> <li>▪ Implemented environmental education programs at a National or State urban wildlife refuge; environmental education center; nature center; or park.</li> <li>▪ Organized and implemented high-profile special events on environmental education at a National or State urban wildlife refuge; environmental education center; nature center; or park.</li> </ul>
<b>Well-Qualified</b>	<b>3</b>	<p>Eligible candidates who have demonstrated that they have performed the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Assisted others in designing and developing environmental education programs at a National or State urban wildlife refuge; environmental education center; nature center; or park.</li> <li>▪ Assisted others in implementing environmental education programs at a National or State urban wildlife refuge; environmental education center; nature center; or park.</li> <li>▪ Assisted others in organizing and implementing events on environmental education at a National or State urban wildlife refuge; environmental education center; nature center; or park.</li> </ul>
<b>Qualified</b>	<b>1</b>	Eligible candidates who meet the basic qualification requirements established for the position, but fail to meet the benchmark definition for the Well-Qualified category.
<b>Ability to communicate ideas and information orally to various audiences.</b>		
<b>Category</b>	<b>Benchmark</b>	<b>Benchmark Definition</b>
<b>Best-Qualified</b>	<b>5</b>	<p>Eligible candidates who have demonstrated that they have performed the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Met with members of the press to answer questions on relevant legislation, policies, guidelines, or directives on</li> </ul>

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<b>Table 12-8: Example 1 of Specific Level of Proficiency (continued)</b>		
		<p>natural resource conservation and management at a National or State urban wildlife refuge; environmental education center; nature center; or park.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Used a variety of methods and techniques in achieving communication goals for environmental education through such means as radio and television interviews, personal appearances, news conferences, or public meetings.</li> <li>▪ Conducted tours, walks, hikes, and auditorium slide shows in support of environmental education programs at a National or State urban wildlife refuge; environmental education center; nature center; or park.</li> <li>▪ Established and maintained effective working relationships with representatives of print or broadcast media and national organizations interested in environmental education programs.</li> </ul>
<b>Well-Qualified</b>	<b>3</b>	<p>Eligible candidates who have demonstrated that they have performed the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Met with members of the press to answer questions on natural resource conservation and management at a National or State urban wildlife refuge; environmental education center; nature center; or park.</li> <li>▪ Presented information to visitors on environmental education through such means as audio-visual presentations, exhibits, displays, tours, or lectures.</li> <li>▪ Conducted tours, walks, hike, or auditorium slide shows in support of environmental education programs at a National or State urban wildlife refuge; environmental education center; nature center; or park.</li> <li>▪ Established and maintained effective working relationships with representatives of print or broadcast media and local organizations interested in environmental education programs.</li> </ul>
<b>Qualified</b>	<b>1</b>	<p>Eligible candidates who meet the basic qualification requirements established for the position, but fail to meet the benchmark definition for the Well-Qualified category.</p>

**D. Example 2 - Specific Level of Proficiency:** Tables 12-9 and 12-10 further illustrate how to use category rating when the eligible candidates' specific level of proficiency does matter. The human resources professional identified the four KSAs through the job analysis process to be job-related.

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<b>Table 12-9: Example 2 -Specific Level of Proficiency KSAs for Natural Resource Specialist, GS-0401-13</b>	
1.	Ability to analyze, evaluate, and interpret relevant Federal and State legislation and related problems, policies, guidelines, and directives concerning natural resource management and conservation.
2.	Ability to negotiate in an effective and persuasive manner with representatives at various levels within the public and private sectors, who may have competing interests concerning natural resource conservation and management programs, policies, or activities.
3.	Ability to communicate in writing in an effective manner with representatives at various levels within the public and private sectors concerning natural resource conservation and management programs, policies, or activities.
4.	Ability to communicate orally in an effective and persuasive manner in order to provide advice and guidance to diverse audiences concerning natural resource conservation and management programs, policies, or activities.

<b>Table 12-10: Example 2 - Specific Level of Proficiency (continued)</b>		
<b>Ability to negotiate in an effective and persuasive manner with representatives at various levels within the public and private sectors, who may have competing interests concerning natural resource conservation and management programs, policies, or activities.</b>		
Category	Benchmark	Benchmark Definition
<b>Best-Qualified</b>	<b>5</b>	<p>Eligible candidates who have demonstrated that they have performed the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Developed, maintained, and enhanced communications and relations with representatives at various levels within the public and private sectors to address and resolve issues concerning natural resource conservation and management programs, policies, or activities. This experience required familiarity with the history, culture, political issues, or community dynamics of a particular area.</li> <li>▪ Established and maintained effective liaison relationships with high level officials at various levels within the public and private sectors, who may have conflicting view points, to defend own position, resolve differences, negotiate change on project proposals, and coordinate work efforts to meet project deadlines concerning natural resources conservation and management programs, policies, or activities.</li> <li>▪ Used persuasion to change decisions, opinions, attitudes, and behaviors of staff members, high level management officials, peers, internal and external customers, and stakeholders concerning natural resource conservation and</li> </ul>

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<b>Table 12-10: Example 2 - Specific Level of Proficiency (continued)</b>		
		<p>management programs, policies, or activities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Brought opposing groups or individuals together to reconcile differences and accomplish goals concerning natural resource conservation and management programs, policies, or activities.</li> </ul>
<b>Well-Qualified</b>	<b>3</b>	<p>Eligible candidates who have demonstrated that they have performed the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Dealt tactfully and effectively with others in stressful situations to gain confidence, acceptance, and understanding concerning natural resource conservation and management programs, policies, or activities.</li> <li>▪ Established and maintained on-going consultative and collaborative relationships with natural resource specialists and other professionals for the purpose of maintaining current information on natural resource conservation and management programs, policies, or activities.</li> <li>▪ Worked with members of the community to facilitate programs and partnerships for natural resource conservation and management programs, policies, or activities.</li> </ul>
<b>Qualified</b>	<b>1</b>	<p>Eligible candidates who meet the basic qualification requirements established for the position, but fail to meet the benchmark definition for the Well-Qualified category.</p>
<p><b>Ability to communicate in writing in an effective manner with representatives at various levels within the public and private sectors concerning natural resource conservation and management programs, policies, or activities.</b></p>		
<b>Category</b>	<b>Benchmark</b>	<b>Benchmark Definition</b>
<b>Best-Qualified</b>	<b>5</b>	<p>Eligible candidates who have demonstrated that they have performed the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Drafted, edited, or revised policy memoranda and/or briefing papers concerning natural resource conservation and management programs, policies, or activities.</li> <li>▪ Drafted, edited, or revised complex or unique legislative proposals concerning natural resource conservation and management programs, policies, or activities.</li> <li>▪ Drafted, edited, or revised Federal/State guidelines concerning natural resource conservation and management programs, policies, or activities.</li> <li>▪ Drafted, edited, or revised press releases, speeches, or scripts (e.g., for videotaped, television, or radio</li> </ul>

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<b>Table 12-10: Example 2 - Specific Level of Proficiency (continued)</b>		
		presentations) concerning natural resource conservation and management programs, policies, or activities.
<b>Well- Qualified</b>	<b>3</b>	<p>Eligible candidates who have demonstrated that they have performed the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Drafted, edited, or revised program plans concerning natural resource conservation and management programs, policies, or activities.</li> <li>▪ Drafted, edited, or revised routine legislative proposals concerning natural resource conservation and management programs, policies, or activities.</li> <li>▪ Composed, reviewed, edited, and issued letters and other forms of correspondence responding to inquiries concerning natural resource conservation and management programs, policies, or activities.</li> </ul>
<b>Qualified</b>	<b>1</b>	Eligible candidates who meet the basic qualification requirements established for the position, but fail to meet the benchmark definition for the Well-Qualified category.

**12.13 What is an example of an inappropriate quality category?**

**A.** Following is an example of an inappropriate quality category:

*A manager is seeking to fill a job that requires an employee to lift 40 pounds. Candidate A can lift 70 pounds and Candidate B can lift 45 pounds. Because both candidates have the necessary strength to meet the lifting requirements of the job, they are indistinguishable with respect to this factor.*

**B.** You should not put Candidate A into a higher quality category than Candidate B because Candidate A can lift more weight.

**12.14 What are the job announcement requirements under category rating?**

**A.** You must:

**(1)** Use the “Basis of Rating” section in the job announcement to explain to applicants that you will use category rating and selection procedures.

**(2)** Clearly describe how veterans’ preference is applied under category rating procedures.

**(3)** Describe each quality category in the job announcement (see 5 CFR part 337, subpart C). You are not expected to disclose crediting plans and/or rating schedules with scoring keys.

**B.** Describe quality categories in the job announcement by simply naming the categories, such as “Best-Qualified, Well-Qualified, and Qualified.”

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**12.15 What is the process for ranking eligible candidates under category rating?**

**A. Step 1:** After you determine which applicants meet the basic qualification requirements established for the position and grade level advertised, place the eligible candidates in the appropriate quality category based on the job-related assessment tool or tools used.

**B. Step 2:** You may list the names of all eligible candidates in any order (e.g., alphabetical order).

**12.16 What is the process for applying veterans' preference under category rating?** After you place all eligible candidates in the appropriate quality category:

**A. Step 1:** Identify all preference eligibles.

**B. Step 2:** Place preference eligibles above non-preference eligibles within each quality category (you do not assign points when using category rating).

**C.** Table 12-11 illustrates how you place preference eligibles with a compensable-service connected disability of 30% or more (CPS) and those with a compensable service-connected disability of more than 10% but less than 30% (CP).

<b>Table 12-11: Placement of Preference Eligibles</b>	
<b>For scientific and professional positions at the GS-09 level or higher...</b>	Place qualified CPS and CP preference eligibles above non-preference eligibles within the same quality category. CPS and CP preference eligibles do not "float" to the highest quality category.
<b>For all other positions (series) and grade levels...</b>	Place qualified CPS and CP preference eligibles at the top of the highest quality category regardless of the quality category in which they were placed. CPS and CP preference eligibles "float" to the highest quality category.

**D.** Following are two examples that illustrate the steps to follow when referring eligible candidates to a selecting official. The first example is for a professional position and the second one is for an administrative position.

**(1) Example: Fish and Wildlife Biologist, GS-0401-12:**

**(a)** The human resources professional, in consultation with the selecting official, developed three quality categories: Best-Qualified, Well-Qualified, and Qualified.

**(b)** Tables 12-12 and 12-13 illustrate how to refer eligible candidates to a selecting official under category rating.

<b>Table 12-12 Professional Position at the GS-12 Level</b>	
<b>Step 1</b>	Place eligible candidates in the appropriate quality category (Best Qualified, Well-Qualified, and Qualified)
<b>Step 2</b>	Identify preference eligible candidates.
<b>Step 3</b>	Apply veterans' preference prior to issuing the certificate of eligibles.

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<b>Table 12-12 Professional Position at the GS-12 Level</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Table 12-13 illustrates that a preference eligible candidate with a service-connected disability of 30% (CPS) and a preference eligible candidate with tentative preference (TP) who meet the requirements for the Well-Qualified category are identified and placed at the top of the Well-Qualified category. Because of the series and grade level in this example, the preference eligible candidate with a service-connected disability of 30% (CPS) does not “float” to the top of the Best-Qualified category.</li> <li>• Table 12-13 further illustrates that a preference eligible candidate with tentative preference (TP) who meets the requirements for the Qualified category is identified and placed at the top of the Qualified category.</li> </ul>

<b>Table 12-13 Fish and Wildlife Biologist, GS-0401-12</b>		
<b>Step 1</b>	<b>Step 2</b>	<b>Step 3</b>
<u>Best-Qualified</u>  Gloria Crawley John Smith David Wolff	<u>Best-Qualified</u>  Gloria Crawley John Smith David Wolff	<u>Best-Qualified</u>  Gloria Crawley John Smith David Wolff
<u>Well-Qualified</u>  Mary Ann Fletcher Alvin Leamons Joy Thomas Rod Umino	<u>Well-Qualified</u>  Mary Ann Fletcher Alvin Leamons (TP) Joy Thomas Rod Umino (CPS)	<u>Well-Qualified</u>  Rod Umino (CPS) Alvin Leamons (TP) Mary Ann Fletcher Joy Thomas
<u>Qualified</u>  Leo Eckenrode Mary Gauthier Michael Gill Jim Yale Gary Wilson	<u>Qualified</u>  Leo Eckenrode Mary Gauthier Michael Gill Jim Yale (TP) Gary Wilson	<u>Qualified</u>  Jim Yale (TP) Leo Eckenrode Mary Gauthier Michael Gill Gary Wilson

**(2) Example: Human Resources Specialist, GS-0201-12:**

**(a)** The human resources professional, in consultation with the selecting official, developed three quality categories: Best-Qualified, Well-Qualified, and Qualified.

**(b)** Tables 12-14 and 12-15 illustrate how to refer eligible candidates to a selecting official under category rating.

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<b>Table 12-14 Administrative Position at the GS-12 Level</b>	
<b>Step 1</b>	Place eligible candidates in the appropriate quality category (Best Qualified, Well-Qualified, and Qualified).
<b>Step 2</b>	Identify preference eligible candidates.
<b>Step 3</b>	Apply veterans' preference prior to issuing the certificate of eligibles. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Table 12-15 illustrates that a preference eligible candidate with tentative preference (TP) who meets the requirements for the Well-Qualified category is identified and placed at the top of the Well-Qualified category.</li> <li>• Table 12-15 further illustrates that a preference eligible candidate with a service-connected disability of 30% (CPS) who meets the requirements for the Qualified category is identified and placed at the top of the Best Qualified category. Because of the type of position, the CPS must "float" to the top of the Best-Qualified category.</li> </ul>

<b>Table 12-15 Human Resources Specialist, GS-201-12</b>		
<b>Step 1</b>	<b>Step 2</b>	<b>Step 3</b>
<u>Best-Qualified</u>  Ben Franklin Thomas Jefferson	<u>Best-Qualified</u>  Ben Franklin Thomas Jefferson	<u>Best-Qualified</u>  Cameron Rules (CPS) Ben Franklin Thomas Jefferson
<u>Well-Qualified</u>  Joyce Rogers George Washington	<u>Well-Qualified</u>  Joyce Rogers George Washington (TP)	<u>Well-Qualified</u>  George Washington (TP) Joyce Rogers
<u>Qualified</u>  Preston Foster Cameron Rules	<u>Qualified</u>  Preston Foster Cameron Rules (CPS)	<u>Qualified</u>  Preston Foster

**12.17 What is the order of certification under category rating?** For most jobs and grade levels under category rating, you list eligible candidates in the following order:

- A. Interagency Career Transition Assistance Program (ICTAP) eligibles,
- B. Eligibles who lost consideration due to erroneous certification, and
- C. Eligible candidates in the highest quality category. You must include the names of all eligible candidates in the highest quality category when providing a certificate of eligibles to a selecting official.

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**12.18 Can you merge quality categories under category rating? Yes.**

**A. How to Merge Categories.** If there are fewer than three eligible candidates in the highest quality category, the human resources professional, in consultation with the selecting official, may merge the highest quality category with the next lower quality category. The selecting official may make a selection from the newly merged category.

- (1) The newly merged category is the new highest quality category.
- (2) You place preference eligible candidates ahead of non-preference eligible candidates in the newly merged quality category.
- (3) As long as a preference eligible candidate remains in the merged category, the selecting official may not select a non-preference eligible candidate unless he/she obtains approval to pass over the preference eligible candidate in accordance with 5 U.S.C. 3318.

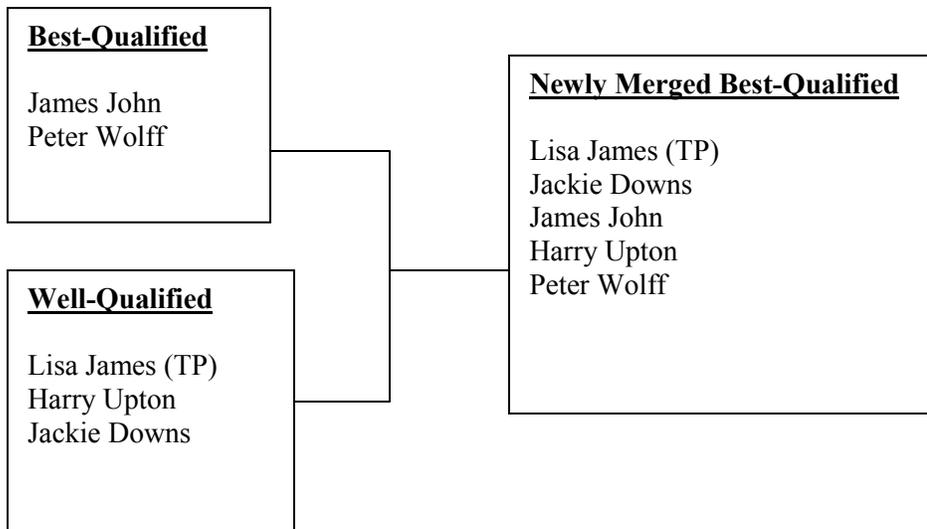
**B. When to Merge Categories.** You may merge quality categories at two places in the hiring process: (1) before issuing the certificate of eligibles, or (2) before selecting additional eligible candidates when you are filling more than one position. Following are examples of both:

**(1) Before issuing the certificate of eligibles:**

(a) The human resources professional, in consultation with the selecting official, may merge the highest quality category with the next lower quality category before issuing a certificate of eligibles if there are fewer than three eligible candidates in the highest quality category.

**(b) Example:**

(i) Figure 12-1 below illustrates how to merge quality categories before issuing the certificate of eligibles to the selecting official.



**Figure 12-1: Merging Categories Before Issuing a Certificate of Eligibles**

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(ii) If the highest quality category (Best-Qualified) has fewer than three eligible candidates, the human resources professional, in consultation with the selecting official, may merge the highest quality category (Best-Qualified) with the next lower quality category (Well-Qualified) before issuing the certificate of eligibles or equivalent form to the selecting official. The newly merged category is now the highest quality category (Best-Qualified) and includes the eligible candidates in alphabetical order from both categories. Since a preference eligible candidate was in the next lower quality category (Well-Qualified), the human resources professional must place the preference eligible candidate at the top of the newly merged category (Best-Qualified).

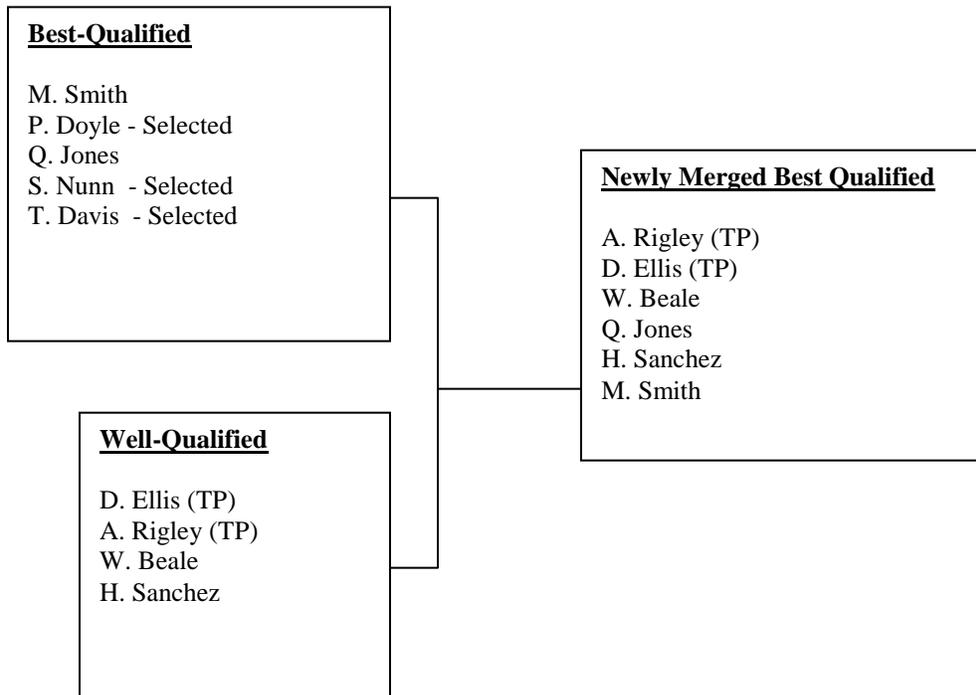
(2) *Before selecting an additional eligible candidate(s) when you are filling more than one position:*

(a) The selecting official, in consultation with the human resources professional, may merge the highest quality category with the next lower quality category only:

(i) After making a selection(s) from the highest quality category, and

(ii) If there are fewer than three eligible candidates in the highest quality category from which to make an additional selection.

(b) Example: Figure 12-2 illustrates how to merge the highest quality category with the next lower quality category when the selecting official is trying to fill five positions.



**Figure 12-2: Merging Categories after Initial Selection**

(i) The selecting official selects three eligible candidates from the highest quality category (Best-Qualified) that includes five non-preference eligible candidates.

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(ii) The selecting official would like additional names to consider and, in consultation with the human resources professional, decides to merge the highest quality category (Best-Qualified) with the next lower quality category (Well-Qualified). The next lower quality category (Well-Qualified) includes two preference eligible candidates and two non-preference eligible candidates.

(iii) Merging the two categories produces a newly merged highest quality category (Best-Qualified) that now includes the two remaining non-preference eligible candidates from the highest quality category (Best-Qualified), and the two preference eligible candidates and the two non-preference eligible candidates from the next lower quality category (Well-Qualified).

(iv) The human resources professional places all preference eligible candidates ahead of all non-preference eligible candidates. The selecting official may not select a non-preference eligible candidate over a preference eligible candidate without submitting a pass over request and obtaining prior approval from the Service or the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) (see section 12.19 below).

(v) The eligible candidates who were selected in the first round of selections in the highest quality category (Best-Qualified) are removed from further consideration. The human resources professional must audit any selections made prior to or on the day the categories were merged.

(vi) The “three consideration” rule in 5 CFR 332.405 does not apply under category rating in a case examining environment.

**12.19 When using category rating, what is the procedure for a selecting official to pass over a preference eligible?**

**A.** The procedures for passing over a preference eligible under category rating are the same as those under traditional rule-of-three procedures. The selecting official may not select a non-preference eligible candidate over a preference eligible candidate unless he/she obtains the required approval to do so. The specific steps to pass over a preference eligible candidate are described in the OPM Delegated Examining Operations Handbook, Chapter 6, Section D.

**B.** Under category rating, OPM retains exclusive authority to approve or decline to approve passing over preference eligibles in the following two situations:

**(1)** Make medical determination pertaining to preference eligibles.

**(a)** The Regional Human Resources Officer must send his/her request, with supporting documentation, to pass over a preference eligible candidate to the Washington Office (WO) Division of Human Capital.

**(b)** The WO Division of Human Capital reviews the request and supporting documentation to determine whether or not the reasons are sufficient.

**(c)** If the reasons are sufficient, the WO Division of Human Capital sends the request and supporting documentation to the Department. If the Department finds the reasons are sufficient, the Department sends the request to OPM for final adjudication.

**(2)** Grant or deny any agency’s request to pass over a preference eligible candidate with a compensable service-connected disability of 30% or more.

**(a)** The Regional Human Resources Officer must send a completed Standard Form 62 (Agency Request to Pass Over a Preference Eligible or Object to an Eligible), with supporting documentation to the WO Division of Human Capital.

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**(b)** The WO Division of Human Capital reviews the request and supporting documentation to determine whether or not the reasons are sufficient.

**(c)** If the reasons submitted are sufficient, the WO Division of Human Capital sends the request and supporting documentation to the Department. If the Department finds the reasons are sufficient, the Department sends the request to OPM for final adjudication.

**12.20 What are the reporting requirements for agencies using category rating?** The Department must report annually to Congress and OPM about how we are using category rating and selection procedures. So that the WO Division of Human Capital can provide information to the Department:

**A.** Each Regional Human Resources Office that has used category rating must prepare a short report annually that includes the following information:

**(1)** The number of employees hired under category rating.

**(2)** The impact category rating has had on the hiring of veterans and minorities, including those who are American Indian or Alaska Natives, Asian, Black or African American, and native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islanders.

**(3)** The way in which managers were trained in the administration of category rating.

**B.** The WO Division of Human Capital will ask the Regional Human Resources Offices to send in their annual reports on the last day of the fiscal quarter following this policy's publication date, and then annually on the same day for three years.

/sgd/ Kenneth Stansell  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

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