

## Chapter 17

### Research Position Evaluation System (RPES)

The Research Position Evaluation System (RPES) is the ARS system used for evaluation and position classification of permanent research scientist (Category 1) positions. The RPES is based on the person-in-the-job concept, providing open-ended promotion potential based on a research scientist's personal contributions to science and technology (and resultant stature and recognition), which can change the complexity and responsibility of their position.

The standardized case writeup format required by Manual 431.3-ARS is an important feature in assuring consistent and equitable evaluation throughout ARS.

Panelists must have information in sufficient detail to make fair and equitable classification decisions. Information on individual positions and incumbents will be submitted according to the attached checklist which is compatible with the format of the Research Grade-Evaluation Guide (RGEG).

Case material will be reviewed for adherence to format. Inaccurate, incomplete, or improperly prepared, or otherwise noncompliant, writeups cannot be accepted and will be returned for revision.

Acronyms: See [Chapter 22](#) for a comprehensive list of commonly used acronyms.

References: [P&P 431.3](#) - ARS-Research Position Evaluation System  
[Manual 431.3](#) - ARS-RPES Case Writeup Preparation and Guidance for Panelists  
[Form ARS 229](#) - Special Form - RGEG Factor 4, Level F Criteria  
[Form AD 332](#) - Position Description Cover Sheet  
[Form ARS 514](#) - Research Position Evaluation Case Writeup Cover Sheet  
[Form ARS 570](#) - Indepth Reviewer Contact Sheet

Cross References: [Chapter 10](#) - Human Resources

Web Site: RPES Home Page: <http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/rpes/>, especially  
Online Presentations  
RPES Brochures Online  
**Note:** The RPES Home Page takes you to the most recent Issuance of 431.3-ARS.

Attachment 1 “Notice of Case Writeup” letter from Area Office with the “Mandatory Position Review Notice” from Headquarters plus the attachments that go with the initial notice.  
 (Note: These contain pertinent submission information. Also note reference to the RPES Home Page: [www.afm.ars.usda.gov/rpes](http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/rpes) is an invaluable source of information.)

Points of Contact:

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<p><b>Headquarters</b>          Merle Cole          Head, Research Position Evaluation Staff          USDA-ARS-HRD-RSB          5601 Sunnyside Avenue          Beltsville, MD 20705-5107          Telephone: (301) 504-1563          Fax: (301) 504-1586          E-Mail: <a href="mailto:merle.cole@ars.usda.gov">merle.cole@ars.usda.gov</a></p>	<p><b>RPE Staff contact</b>          Pat Humphrey          Human Resources Assistant          USDA-ARS-HRD-RSB-RPE Staff          5601 Sunnyside Avenue          Beltsville, MD 20705-5107          Telephone: (301) 504-1565          Fax: (301) 504-1586          E-Mail: <a href="mailto:pat.humphrey@ars.usda.gov">pat.humphrey@ars.usda.gov</a></p>

## **Subjects Contained in Policies and Procedures 431.3-ARS**

This policy and procedure establishes policy for the ARS RPES. It contains abbreviations and cross-references in the Glossary, followed by exhibits on Peer Groups, Filling Vacant Research Positions, and Panel Decision Options. This revision incorporates policy decisions made and announced since the 2006 version was published.

In addition to the usual explanations for authority, forms, definitions, coverage, and purpose, the other important topics that are covered are:

- Panel Administration
- Panel Review Requirements
- Panel Composition
- Confidentiality Requirement
- Panel Decision Options
- Preparation and Submission of Evaluation materials
- Supergrade Evaluation Panels
- Panel Review Records
- Summary of Responsibilities

## **Material Contained in Manual 431-3-ARS**

This manual provides detailed guidance for (1) preparing case writeups for panel review, and (2) determining the grade level of positions covered by the ARS RPES. This revision incorporates policy decisions made and announced since the 2006 version was published.

In Part I (Case Writeup Preparation), along with the introduction, references, and general guidance, detailed information is provided on the format outline, preparation of case writeups, and a submission checklist.

In Part II (Evaluation Guidance), information is provided on:

- Panel Operating Procedures
- Ad Hoc Panels
- Conducting an Indepth Review
- RGEG and Additional Evaluation Guidance
- Additional Evaluation Guidance
- Glossary



United States Department of Agriculture  
Research, Education and Economics  
Agricultural Research Service

January 10, 2011

SUBJECT: Notice of Case Writeup

TO: , Lincoln

THROUGH: Kenneth Vogel, RL, Lincoln  
W. H. Blackburn, AD, Fort Collins /s/

FROM: Michael R. McGuire, Associate Area Director /s/

The following is the current Area-wide procedure to be followed in submitting your case writeup for panel review. Please refer to Manual 431.3. Some of the procedures have been changed again as of FY 2011.

**Initial Draft** – Submit by e-mail the case and ARS-570 in Word, the ARS-514, AD-332, and exhibits in PDF, to Carol Durflinger by **April 22, 2011**. If the attachments are more than 50 mb, you should send them in two separate e-mails.

After your RPES case writeup has been reviewed by the Area Office and returned to you by e-mail with comments on content and format, you need to revise your case writeup accordingly.

**Final Version** – Forward by e-mail your final case and 570 in Word, exhibits in PDF if there were changes, by **May 13, 2011**. We will already have the copies of the 332 and 514 here. The Area Office will review all and forward to the RPES section.

If you have any questions, please contact Carol Durflinger or me. Also, please feel free to contact Merle Cole or Pat Humphrey (HQ RPES) at 301-504-1563.

Attachments: (4)

Mandatory Position Review Notice (includes format change)

Checklist (including format change)

Web Address for Manual 431.3-ARS

Additional Guidance: Enhancing Impact Statements in Case Writeups



January 10, 2011

SUBJECT: Mandatory Position Review Notice

TO: Kenneth Vogel, Research Leader, Lincoln, NE

THROUGH: Wilbert Blackburn, Director, NPA /s/

FROM: Pat Humphrey, RPE Staff /s/

Scientist	Peer Group Affiliation	Final Case Writeup Due in Area Office
	Plant Health (PHL)*	May 13, 2011
<i>* Please notify us immediately if this is incorrect or if scientist wishes to change affiliation.</i>		

#### Case writeup preparation

Detailed guidance is provided in **Part I of Manual 431.3-ARS**, available online at <http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/ppweb/PDF/431-3M-ARS.pdf>

Pay particular attention to **Chapter 6**, which provides extensive samples for preparing Demonstrated Accomplishments under Factor 4 (to include research, team research, special assignments/projects, technology transfer, systems research and integration, and leadership accomplishments) and information on typical exhibits

#### Draft case writeup submission

Your Area Office may require submission of a draft writeup for review by the Area Director prior to finalization. If so, the Area will advise you of those procedures.

#### Supervisor's responsibility

Carefully review the writeup and discuss it with the scientist to ensure accuracy and completeness.

**Ensure the writeup complies with the instructions. Area Offices are not authorized to accept noncompliant cases, and must return them.**

## **Caution**

If the scientist has received a performance rating of less than Fully Successful on a Critical Element, or will receive such a rating before the case is reviewed, or if other performance-related action is being considered, **please notify the Area Director and this office immediately.**

## **Final case writeup submission**

Final case writeup is due in the Area Office by the date shown above. **Your Area Office will explain how they wish you to submit final case materials to them.**

## **Updating writeups**

Scientists may update their writeup up to the day the panel meets (approximately 2 months after the cutoff date).

Updates are to be **emailed** directly to this office, with a copy to the Area Director.

## **Questions**

If you have any questions, please contact me on 301-504-1565 or [pat.humphrey@ars.usda.gov](mailto:pat.humphrey@ars.usda.gov)

**CHECKLIST FOR RPES CASE WRITEUPS**  
Using Manual 431.3-ARS

This checklist is to be used as a guideline only. Details for each item may be found on the page numbers indicated.

(Factors 1-3B) constitute official position description and must not exceed 3 single-spaced pages)

- Factor 1      Research Assignment (p.8)**  
(Official Job Description – Use Gender Neutral Terms)
- A.      Assigned Responsibility (p.8)**  
(Identify specific National Program(s) supported)
  - B.      Research Objectives and Methodology (p.9)**  
(Specific research objectives; methodology; distinguish between personal and team research objectives)
  - C.      Expected Results (p.9)**  
(Expected results and impact on science or technology)
  - D.      Knowledge Required (p.9)**  
(Limit to a brief list of specific, directly applicable disciplines and skills needed to perform the current research assignment)
  - E.      Supervisory Responsibilities (p.9)**  
(Title and grade of ARS employees supervised; nature of supervision given; EEO statement)
- Factor 2      Supervisory Controls (p.10) (Use Gender Neutral Terms)**
- A.      Assigned Authority (p.10)**  
(Summarize freedom to do research within scope of assignment)
  - B.      Technical Guidance Received (p.10)**  
(Describe general technical supervision received)
  - C.      Review of Results (p.10)**  
(Describe supervision (freedom given) to analyze, interpret and report results)
  - D.      General Supervision (p.10)**  
(Describe broad supervision received)

**Factor 3 Guidelines and Originality (p.11)**

- A. Available Literature (p.11)**  
(Indicate extent to which literature applies to assigned area, objectives, and methodology)
- B. Originality Required (p.11)**  
(Indicate difficulty identifying objectives, hypotheses, or expected results)
- C. Demonstrated Originality (p.11) (BEGIN ON NEW PAGE)**  
(Describe originality and creativity considered the best evidence of originality related to the current assignment; ½ page limit)

**Factor 4 Contributions, Impact, and Stature (p.12)**

(Under each sub element, include only relevant information and select limited numbers of entries considered the most significant over incumbent's entire career)

- A. Demonstrated Accomplishments (p.12)**
- No more than 3 for GS-11 & below; 5 for GS-12; 8 for GS/GM-13 and above
  - Leadership accomplishment encouraged if applicable
  - What was done, not how it was done
  - If team effort, incumbent's exact contribution to total accomplishment
  - Why significant (impact on science; adoption; economic importance)
  - Chronological order
  - Must not exceed ½ page in length
  - Accomplishments since last promotion (or entry on duty with ARS) identified with an asterisk.
  - Must be written using accomplishment/role/impact subheadings
  - Maximum of 2 exhibits per accomplishment
  - Maximum of 3 supporting statements can be bundled with AD memo (and thereby counted as a single exhibit)

**Additional Accomplishments (p.29)**

- Remains optional
- Same format as Demonstrated Accomplishments
- Must not exceed ½ page in length
- Limited to a maximum of 2 entries
- Must illustrate impact equal to that of the Demonstrated Accomplishments
- Exhibits not permitted

**B. Stature and Recognition (p.29)**

1. **Honors and Awards (p.30)** (list 20 most significant)  
(Do not include civic or social awards, or performance awards, including Certificates of Merit for employee performance recognition)
2. **Special Invitations (p.30)** (list 20 most significant)
3. **Offices and Committee Assignments Held in Professional and Honorary Societies (p.31)** (list 20 most significant)
4. **Participation in Professional Meetings, Technical Conferences, Workshops, etc. (p.31)** (List each society separately)

**C. Advisory and Consultant Activities (p.32)**

1. **Professional Advisory and Consulting Activities (p.32)**  
(list 20 most significant)
2. **Special Assignments (p.33)** (list 20 most significant)

**D. Other (p.33)**

1. **Educational Background (p.33)**
2. **Research Experience (p.33)**
3. **Other Significant Information (p.34)**

**E. Publications (p.35) (BEGIN ON NEW PAGE)**

(Subdivide into 2 sections: 1. Peer Reviewed Journal Articles and Patents  
2. Additional Publications)

- List in chronological order
  - Continue the page numbering from the writeup
  - Scientific journal articles – list only those already published or accepted
  - Provide date accepted if not yet published
  - Identify other than scientific journal articles
  - Delineate by a dashed line across the page those materials published or accepted for publication since last promotion (in both sections)
  - Bold incumbent's name, italicize names of graduate students
  - Inclusion of abstracts or abstract list is not permitted
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ARS 514 – RPEC Writeup Cover Sheet (signatures required with first draft)

AD 332 - Position Description Cover Sheet (with immediate supervisor's signature)

ARS 570 – In-depth review Contact Sheet (include immediate supervisor)

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### General Guidance

In addition to studying Part 1, case writers should review the Research Grade Evaluation Guide to get an understanding of the evaluation objective of each factor.

In writing Factors 1, 2, and 3, use gender-neutral terms and style instead of saying “he,” “she,” “his,” or “her.” Begin sentences with action verbs (the subject is understood). Write brief narrative paragraphs following the outline shown above.

Undue detail, excess verbosity, and needless repetition may weaken rather than strengthen a case writeup.

United States Department of Agriculture  
Research, Education, and Economics

**ARS □ NIFA □ ERS □ NASS**  
*Manual*

**Title:** RPES Case Writeup Preparation and Guidance for Panelists

**Number:** Manual 431.3-ARS

**Date:** October 20, 2010

**Originating Office:** Research Position Evaluation Staff, REE Services Branch, Human Resources Division, AFM/ARS

**This Replaces:** Manual 431.3-ARS dated 9/24/08

**Distribution:** ARS Headquarters, Areas, and Locations (provide a copy to each ARS research scientist)

This Manual provides detailed guidance for (1) preparing case writeups for panel review, and (2) determining the grade level of positions covered by the ARS Research Position Evaluation System (RPES). This revision incorporates policy decisions made and announced since the 2008 version was published.

For reference go to:

<http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/ppweb/PDF/431-3M-ARS.pdf>

This is the most recent Manual, dated October 20, 2010.

Manuals with prior dates should not be used.

## Enhancing Impact Statements in Case Writeups

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Research scientist grade levels are determined by applying criteria of the OPM Research Grade Evaluation Guide (RGEG). The core value of the RGEG—and therefore of the ARS Research Position Evaluation System (RPES)—is the scientist’s *impact* in his or her field. Factor 4 is the RGEG’s driving force. It requires an aggregate evaluation of what a scientist has done across their career—with an emphasis on recency—and of how their contributions are used and recognized by ARS customers.

Impact, and the derived personal stature and recognition, are double-valued in Factor 4 of the RGEG rating scheme. *To attain maximum RGEG credit*, scientists must be able to demonstrate that their contributions have made a difference—that the work is being adopted by our stakeholders and other customers, are of economic or program importance, or contribute meaningfully to the scientific literature.

The “Impact” subheading of each Demonstrated Accomplishment statement must always clearly present the best *possible evidence* of the incumbent’s impact and recognition. Impact is best addressed in terms of invitations, consultations and advisory activities, grants received, honors, formal awards, patents issued, licensing agreements, technology transfer, and other typical evidence that the work described in the accomplishment statement is used, valued, or otherwise making a difference for ARS customers.

Submitted publications per se provide little evidence of tangible impact. Therefore it is not particularly beneficial to state, for example, “this research resulted in three senior-authored manuscripts” as evidence of impact. Ensure the *outcome*—not just the *output*—of each Demonstrated Accomplishment is clearly presented.

(July 2010)