

Guidance on Business Related Coursework for the GS-1102 Contracting Series

This resource provides guidance to human resources professionals, current federal employees, and applicants on qualifying coursework to satisfy the 24-semester hour education requirement in business related fields for the GS-1102 Contracting series at the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

This resource does not replace the [Office Personnel Management \(OPM\) Qualification standard](#), non-NIH guidance including operating divisions within HHS, or the [Federal Acquisition Institute requirements for contracting certification](#). Additionally, vacancy announcement language may contain specific information or instructions, which supersedes this guidance where there is conflicting information.

Education Requirements

In addition to specialized experience requirements, applicants must also meet the education requirements. Applicants must reference the vacancy announcement for the specialized experience requirements.

[Education requirements, not including mandatory training](#)

| Grade Levels | Education Requirements |
|---------------------------|--|
| GS-5 through GS-12 | 4 year degree OR 24 business related semester hours |
| GS-13 and Above | 4 year degree AND 24 business related semester hours |

- 4 Year Degree** is the completion of a 4-year course of study leading to a bachelor's degree with a major in any field. *Reference the Educational and Training Provisions or Requirements section of the OPM Qualification Policy for more information on qualifying education <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/classification-qualifications/general-schedule-qualification-policies/#url=e4>.*
- 24 Business Related Semester Hours** is the completion of at least 24 semester hours in any combination of the following fields: accounting, business, finance, law, contracts, purchasing, economics, industrial management, marketing, quantitative methods, or organization and management.

Interpreting the 24 Business Related Semester Hours Requirement

OPM gives each agency latitude in interpreting what is qualifying to meet the 24 business related semester hours requirement. OPM provides this flexibility, in part, because it is not administratively feasible for organizations to explicitly state what courses in particular are qualifying. Educational institutions are free to design and title courses as they see fit. For

example, one university may place a quantitative methods course in their business school while another university may place that same course in the mathematics college. Therefore, human resources professionals must evaluate each course independently based on the content. In many cases, human resources professionals require the full course description before making an official determination.

Two Test Requirement

Based on the guidance provided by OPM in the Qualification Standard, human resource professionals use two tests to determine if a course is qualifying. If the course satisfies both tests, then it is qualifying.

- 1) Does the course reasonably fit within the general subject area represented by one of the 11 fields of the education requirement (i.e., accounting, business, finance, law, contracts, purchasing, economics, industrial management, marketing, quantitative methods, or organization and management)?

AND

- 2) Does the majority of the course content provide the individual with business related knowledge to perform the functions of a contract specialist, which is to negotiate and execute business relationships on behalf of the government?

Reference the [OPM Position Classification Standard for Contracting Series, GS-1102](#) for a more in-depth description of the common functions. This standard will assist with determining if a course is qualifying. The Series Coverage section of the standard defines the common functions:

Positions in this series are concerned with: (1) soliciting, evaluating, negotiating, and awarding contracts with commercial organizations, educational institutions, nonprofit organizations, and State, local or foreign governments for furnishing products, services, construction or research and development to the Federal Government; (2) administering contracts by assuring compliance with the terms and conditions of contracts, including resolution of problems concerning the obligations of the parties; (3) terminating contracts by analyzing, negotiating, and settling claims and proposals; (4) analyzing and evaluating cost or price proposals and accounting systems data; (5) planning, establishing, or reviewing contracts, programs, policies, or procedures; (6) formulating and administering policies and procedures to insure achievement of Federal socioeconomic goals, such as those affecting small business, labor surplus areas, and disadvantaged business firms; (7) developing acquisition strategies and directing or managing procurements; and (8) providing staff advisory services in one or more of the specializations in this occupation.

Examples of Qualifying and Non-Qualifying Coursework

The following are a few examples of qualifying and non-qualifying coursework. This is not an exhaustive list.

| Course | Course Description | Determination |
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| Real Estate Law | A study of the basic elements of construction, development, and permanent financing that uses real estate as security for the financing. This course will examine the real estate finance transaction from a practitioner's viewpoint and will cover the laws governing and normal documentation utilized in a real estate finance transaction, negotiation skills, title insurance, remedies, and other facets of a real estate secured loan. | Qualifying. This course fits into the law category. The content is also business related and will prepare someone for the duties of the contracting specialist position. Most law courses dealing with accounting, business, contracts, estates, finance, legal writing, meditation, patents, tax, trusts, wealth management and others alike are qualifying. |
| Sports Law | Review of legal background of sports and recreation, analyzing torts, contracts, anti-trust issues, constitutional and labor law. | Qualifying. Even though the focus of the course is the sport industry, it is still related to analyzing contracts and thus negotiating and executing business relationships as well as planning, establishing, or reviewing contracts, program policies or procedures. |
| Evidence Law | Course is a study of the problems of proof in civil and criminal trials, including coverage of the important rules of evidence and the impact of the Federal Rules of Evidence. The manner of examining witnesses and presenting evidence is considered, and the effects of such sometimes inconsistent goals as the presentation of all important, relevant information to the trier of fact and the exclusion of evidence on grounds such as unreliability, privilege and undue prejudice are examined. | Not qualifying. Even though the course fits into the law category, it does not meet the second test. The course content is not business related and it does not reasonably prepare someone for the duties of the contracting position. This is also the case for most criminal justice classes and other course work that is primarily focused on the legal system, history, or process. |
| Advanced Business Writing | A comprehensive, project-based study of applied business writing. The aim is to develop documents appropriate to audience and purpose that are well argued and conform to standards to business writing. Topics include context, purpose, audience, style, organization, format, results, technologies, and strategies for persuasion in typical workplace messages. In addition to shorter assignments, a substantial formal report that incorporates research and support for conclusions or recommendations is required. | Qualifying. This course fits into the business category. The content is business related and will prepare someone for the duties of the contracting specialist position. This course will prepare the individual to negotiate and execute business relationships on behalf of the government. |
| Music Management and Intermediaries | The role of the intermediary in advising, representing, and furthering the careers of artists, focusing on the establishment of mutually beneficial working relationships. Topics include the mechanics of talent booking and contracting, union and government regulations, fee/commission structures, contractual considerations, fiduciary duties, budgeting, the development of a client base, and finding success through honesty and fair dealing | Qualifying. Even though the focus of the course is the music industry, it is still tied to management and it is business related. The course does not need to be associated with traditional government contracting in order to be qualifying. For example, a restaurant business course could be qualifying. |

| Course | Course Description | Determination |
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| Information Management – Databases | Data management, including database development, access, and administration. The focus is on issues and principles of managing organizational data. Students will get extensive experience in developing data models, creating relational databases, and formulating and executing complex queries | Not qualifying. Even though the class has the title of management, and databases are used in business, the primary objective of the course is managing data from a technical perspective. The focus and intent of this course is for students to learn the fundamentals of database systems such as creating tables and normalizing them to fit an organization's needs. If the focus was on requirements gathering, cost/benefit analysis, or system selection it could be creditable. |
| Introduction to Statistics | A comprehensive introduction to the use of statistics in business decision-making. This course provides the analytical tools needed for making informed business decisions using data. The focus is on decision making using the tools of statistics. Topics include graphical and numerical summaries of data, probability distributions, hypothesis tests of mean and proportion, the chi-squared test of statistical independence and simple linear regression. The use of computing tools in statistical analysis is emphasized heavily | Qualifying. This course fits into the quantitative methods category. Quantitative methods emphasize objective measurements and the statistical, mathematical, or numerical analysis of data collected through polls, questionnaires, and surveys, or by manipulating pre-existing statistical data using computational techniques. Most statistics, business math, or related courses would be creditable. Other mathematics courses that primarily deal with operations and process such as algebra, geometry, calculus are not creditable. |
| Calculus I | This course is an introduction to differential calculus. Students explore limits and continuity. They examine the basic concept of differentiation and practice differentiation techniques. Students develop competence applying differentiation to solve problems. Students also examine simple antiderivatives. | Not qualifying. This course does not fit into the quantitative methods category and does not provide content that would prepare an individual for a position in contracting. The primary focus of the course is on operations and equations rather than how to make sound business decisions. If the course prepared someone on how to calculate discounted pricing over the course of the performance period or rate escalations, then it could be creditable. |
| Logic of Analysis | This course examines the major sociological perspectives in conjunction with an instruction in the logic and procedures of gathering information about social phenomena. | Not qualifying. This course may fit into the quantitative methods category, but it does not meet the second test. The course content is not business related and it does not reasonably prepare someone for the duties of the contracting position, which is to negotiate and execute business relationships on behalf of the government. |
| New Product Development | This course introduces students to the interdisciplinary issues related to developing new products. These issues include creativity and innovation, idea generation, product design, prototyping, market testing, financial analysis, and managing the process for productivity, efficiency, | Qualifying. This course fits into the marketing category even though marketing is not in the title of course. This course is also tied to business and will prepare the individual for a position in marketing as market research and |

| Course | Course Description | Determination |
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| | and success. Through classroom and experiential learning activities, students will learn the concepts and skills of new product development and complete a new product project. Creative, critical, and analytical skills will be emphasized and cultivated. | new product development is a part of the occupation. |
| Social Media in the Business Place | This course will introduce students into how to use the various marketing applications available. Students will get hands on experience using Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and Instagram | Not qualifying. Even though this course fits into the marketing category, it does not prepare an individual for a position in contracting. The focus of the course is related to how to use various social media platforms. If the course was designed to analyze ROI then it could be credited. |
| Consumer Behavior Analysis | An examination of the buying behavior of individual and organizational buyers with regards to the decision process utilized when purchasing goods and services and the resulting consequences in the development of marketing strategies by business firms, and other organizations. | Qualifying. This course provides the individual with business/marketing related knowledge, which relates to the responsibilities of a contract specialist. |
| Economics of Poverty and Discrimination | Study of the causes of poverty. How poverty and discrimination are interrelated. An analysis of existing and proposed programs to alleviate poverty and discrimination. | Not qualifying. Even though the course fits into the economics category, it does not meet the second test. The course content is not business related and it does not reasonably prepare someone for the duties of the contracting position, which is to negotiate and execute business relationships on behalf of the government. |

Responsibilities of the Applicant

Applicants must understand that determining what coursework is qualifying can be subjective. In many cases, the title of the course is not enough information to make a determination. Therefore, in addition to adhering to the instructions in the job opportunity announcement, applicants are responsible for providing as much information as possible to assist with the determination process. Along with their transcripts, applicants are encouraged to provide the full description of all the coursework they feel is qualifying at the time of application. This is especially important for coursework that is not overtly business related. Human resources professionals will make a decision on your qualifications based on the information you provide in your application.

An applicant is entitled to one appeal if they disagree with the qualifications determination. The applicant must submit their appeal in writing (e.g., email) to the contact listed on the job opportunity announcement before a selection is made. Once the appeal is received, a secondary and final review will be conducted and communicated to the applicant. Appeals typically take five to seven working days, depending upon volume.

Questions and Answers

The following is a list of frequently asked questions regarding the 24 semester hour education requirement in business related fields at NIH. Reference [OPM's Questions and Answers Concerning Revised 1102 Qualification Standard](#) for additional information as this is not an exhaustive listing.

1. Question: Where did the two-test requirement come from?

Answer: NIH developed the two-test requirement as a method to evaluate coursework consistently across applicant pools. We based this method on the Question and Answer section of the OPM standard:

The qualification standard identifies eleven fields for the 24-hour coursework requirement. Does this mean an acceptable course must have a course number identifying one of the fields (for example, an "economics" course might be "ECN 401")?

The answer to this question first requires an understanding of the purpose of the 24-hour coursework requirement, which is to provide a person with a minimum amount of business knowledge. This is particularly important because the primary function of contract specialists is to negotiate and execute business relationships on behalf of the Government.

2. Question: Are classes from the Defense Acquisition University creditable?

Answer: Not unless a college actually gives you credit under its curriculum. In order to get college credit, a university must accept the course work and have it added onto your transcripts. The same applies to the USDA Grad School, non-credit courses, and other training programs.

3. Question: I am currently a Contract Specialist at another agency; does my education have to be evaluated by NIH?

Answer: Yes. No matter where you are employed, even if it is within HHS or NIH, your education must be evaluated.

4. Question: If I meet the education requirements for the 1102 series, does that mean I automatically meet the education requirements for the Federal Acquisition Certification in Contracting (FAC-C)?

Answer: No. Even though the education requirements are similar, they are independent of one another and reviewed by different departments or approving officials. Meeting the requirements of one does not automatically mean you will meet the other.

5. Question: Is an internship creditable towards the 24-semester hour requirement?

Answer: If college credits were given and the internship meets the two-test requirement then yes. However, applicants are strongly encouraged to provide a thorough description of the internship to assist with the evaluation process.

6. Question: Am I allowed to submit additional documentation if I appeal my qualifications?

Answer: Upon appeal, an applicant may only submit additional documentation to support that they have met the education requirements. Applicants may not submit any other documentation (e.g., cover letter, resume, CV) after the closing date of the announcement to support their qualifications.

7. Question: According to a [memo from the Office of Management and Budget](#), Computer Science, Data Entry, Automated Systems Input, and Systems Engineering courses are creditable, is that correct?

Answer: No. These courses are generally not creditable. This memo should not be used for the purposes of determining qualifications for the 1102 series.

8. Question: How do quarters work if my university does not use semester hours?

Answer: Quarter hours will be prorated based on the credit hour system used by the university. Typically, semester credits are worth 1.5 times more than quarter credits. Thus, a 120 credit-hour bachelor degree under the conventional system is equal to a 180 credit-hour degree under the quarter credit system.

*Example calculation: $3 * 1.5 = 4.5$*