

ENTRY-LEVEL IT CERTIFICATIONS: A PRIMER



The technology sector is infamously difficult and competitive to get into due to its endless evolution over time as new technologies are developed and systems grow in size and complexity. IT has long been considered a top career path for individuals who want to find consistent and lucrative work throughout their lives.

Training for a job in IT is nearly as complex as the field of IT itself, thanks to the vast number of different disciplines and specialties within the massive field of Information Technology. Certifications play an important role in the IT profession due to the complexity of the sector and its constantly evolving nature. Acquiring certifications can be a difficult and expensive process—especially if you start down the path of certifications without a specific direction in mind.

Those starting off in IT should keep their sights on entry-level certifications that will set them on the path towards their career goals.

Why are IT Certifications Necessary?

It's important to understand why certifications are so important in the IT field before we dive into specific entry-level certifications. Certifications may not be mandatory for all jobs in the IT field, but they have become so popular as to be an expectation and a primary differentiating factor recruiters use to choose from their large pools of candidates. [According to CompTIA](#), "91% of employers believe IT certifications play a key role in the hiring process and that IT certifications are a reliable predictor of a successful employee."

IT certifications play a vital role in the hiring process because they are one of the best ways for ensuring that a job candidate has the prerequisite skills and knowledge necessary for providing value to their employers. Hiring managers are often not experts in specialized IT fields and, as such, their ability to distinguish between suitable and unsuitable candidates often comes down to what certifications are held by the candidates.

Certifications show not only that IT professionals have competency in specific areas, they also show that candidates have invested in their continued advancement in their field. Due to the fact that the IT sector is in a constant state of change, continued learning is a key indicator that an IT professional will not only be a good hire for the next year or two but for many years to come. Keeping up with the changing landscape of the IT world requires continuous learning and mastery of related skills and tools.

Entry-level IT certifications show that aspiring IT professionals understand they need to keep developing their knowledge and skills even after they finish schooling. Certifications not only increase the chances of a candidate being hired for a job, but they are also positively correlated with higher salaries. While holders of entry-level IT certifications won't have access to the highest paid positions in the industry, they will have a jumpstart towards those positions and earning certifications will demonstrate their dedication to advancement within the industry.

What are the Best Entry-Level IT Certifications?

Entry-level IT certifications prove that job candidates have the baseline knowledge and expertise necessary to ensure new hires can hit the ground running. Deciding which entry-level IT certifications are best depends on the candidate's career goals and the desired path they wish to take. Here are some of the most popular and highest paying IT certifications currently:

Cisco Certified Network Associate (CCNA)

The [Cisco Certified Network Associate certification](#) is considered a foundational IT certification. Holders of this certification have demonstrated a strong understanding of IT fundamentals concerning networking technologies and software development skills. This certification is considered an excellent starting point for IT professionals who are just getting started in their careers and have yet to decide on any specific specialization.

The CCNA certification is a 90-minute written exam that costs around \$300 to take. Cisco offers a large variety of tools and resources that can help aspiring IT professionals prepare themselves for the CCNA certification including guided study groups, webinars, and self-study prep materials. While there are no formal prerequisites for the CCNA certification, candidates for the exam often have some experience implementing and administering Cisco solutions, a basic knowledge of IP addressing, and a good understanding of network fundamentals.

CompTIA IT Fundamentals (ITF+)

CompTIA offers a fair number of foundational IT certifications that will help aspiring IT professionals kick start their career and easily land their first jobs. The [CompTIA IT Fundamentals certification](#) is a "pre-career certification that helps students or career changers determine if they have a competency for information technology and if it is the right career path for them."

The CompTIA ITF+ is an excellent place to start for those who aren't entirely sure whether the IT field is a good fit for them. This certification focuses on essential IT skills and knowledge for entry-level IT professionals who are advanced end users. The CompTIA ITF+ certification exam costs roughly \$120 and consists of around 75 multiple choice questions.

Microsoft Technology Associate (MTA)

The [Microsoft Technology Associate certification](#) is an entry-level IT certification that covers fundamentals of infrastructure, databases, and development. The MTA is another certification designed for students or those interested in changing their careers. Microsoft is a leading global technology company whose services are widely used in fields such as database management and cloud architecture.

Certified Associate in Project Management (CAPM)

The [Certified Associate in Project Management certification](#) is perfect for IT hopefuls that are interested in working in the project management sector. The only prerequisite for the CAPM certification is a total of 23 hours of project management education which must be completed by the time you take the exam. The [PMI Project Management Basics online course](#) is sufficient as a prerequisite for the exam—allowing you to complete the educational hours and the exam completely online.

The IT industry is packed full of certifications with many acting as prerequisites for more specialized and detailed exams. Entry-level IT certifications are a great place to start for those looking to begin a new career in IT. For more general information on IT certifications, see our [Beginner's Guide to IT Certifications](#).