

IT CERTIFICATIONS: A BEGINNER'S GUIDE



Information technology is a highly dynamic and ever-changing field. As the industry evolves, so do the required skills needed for strong employees. In order to stay up-to-date with these new technologies, as well as competitive in general, it is important to regularly continue your education. One of the best ways to do this is by getting an IT certification.

IT certifications can offer many benefits throughout your career, especially if you are searching for a new position or vying for a promotion. But with all of the current available options, how do you know where to get started? We put together a complete guide on IT certifications as well as a list of the top IT certifications of 2019 to help you begin this journey.

What is an IT certification?

An IT certification is a designation that demonstrates specific competency in a certain field of technology. IT certifications are typically obtained following an assessment, educational courses, or a review and prove that you met rigorous standards set forth by a governing body. They cover a wide range of topics, including infrastructure, [cybersecurity](#), and development, to name a few.

Why should I consider an IT certification?

According to [CompTIA](#), the largest vendor-neutral certifying group, [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.

In fact, according to another [study](#), 98% of HR professionals use certifications to confirm a candidate's subject-matter knowledge and expertise, while 97% use them to differentiate between otherwise equally qualified candidates.

While getting hired is obviously the first step in the process, and a huge benefit of an IT certification, there are many other advantages to them throughout the entire course of your career.

Stay Relevant

Continuing education is important in any industry, but it's crucial in a field like technology. IT certifications help professionals stay relevant in their specialty, requiring you to attend conferences, participate in webinars, take classes, or write for publications sharing your subject matter expertise.

Ramp Up Your Skills

Whether you are looking for a new position entirely, or are looking at moving up through promotions, many people apply for jobs that allow them to further their growth, typically without having the necessary skills required at the time of hire. By obtaining an IT certification through classes and online training modules, it allows you to gain the skills needed in order to meet your career goals. This knowledge can be immediately applied on the job and provides instant advantages.

Invest in Yourself

New knowledge and education are never wasted. By getting a certification, it not only shows to your employer (current or future) that you are invested in your career, but it also proves that you are a lifelong learner that never wants to stop improving. Obtaining an IT certification only furthers your knowledge and could move you in a different direction that you are passionate about.

What are the top IT certifications?

[Global Knowledge](#) recently published the 15 top-paying IT certifications in 2019 based on the results of their [2019 IT Skills & Salary Report research](#). These reveal the current philosophy shifts and tech trends impacting IT departments in the United States, with most emphasizing cloud computing, project management, cybersecurity, and networking.

[Google Certified Professional Cloud Architect](#) - \$139,529

This certification allows IT professionals to certify as a cloud architect on the Google Cloud Platform. It demonstrates the ability to design, develop and manage a secure, scalable and reliable cloud architecture using GCP technologies.

While there are no questions dedicated to specific usage of the product, it is necessary for the exam taker to understand what solutions work best for various scenarios. The certification exam must be taken in-person at a Kryterion testing center location.

[PMP® - Project Management Professional](#) - \$135,798

PMP was created and is administered by the Project Management Institute (PMI®) and is considered the most important industry-recognized certification for project managers. This certification provides

assurance that the holder has both the content knowledge and field experience to effectively define, plan and deliver their projects.

The full PMP certification requires project management experience as well as success on the exam. Individuals must have 35 hours of PMP-related training with 4,500 hours of project management experience. To become certified, you need to apply at the PMI website, and then once your application is approved, you can sign up for the actual exam via Prometric. In order to maintain PMP certification, 60 professional development units are required every three years.

Certified ScrumMaster® - \$135,441

Created and managed by the Scrum Alliance, obtaining a Certified ScrumMaster certificate proves that you are well-versed in both understanding the Agile Scrum methodology as well as putting it into practice. Typically, a Certified ScrumMaster will lead a team and help them learn the Scrum framework while performing to the best of their abilities. Attaining this certification gives you a two-year membership to the Scrum Alliance.

In order to achieve this certification, you must attend the two-day Certified ScrumMaster® Workshop course and pass the exam at the culmination. The certification is valid for two years from the original certification date and required 40 Scrum Education Units in order to renew.

AWS Certified Solutions Architect - Associate - \$132,840

The AWS Certified Solutions Architect Associate-level exam demonstrates an individual's expertise in designing and deploying scalable systems on AWS. With further market need for skilled and certified AWS solutions architects as cloud continues to grow, this certification will also continue to be in-demand.

For certification, you must first have at least six months of hands-on experience with AWS. The exam itself is computer-based and is offered at PSI testing centers. It covers a range of topics including selecting the correct AWS service for a provided scenario, designing on AWS, and estimating costs. This is the prerequisite step to achieving the AWS Certified Solutions Architect – Professional certification.

AWS Certified Developer – Associate - \$130,369

The AWS Certified Developer - Associate certification validates technical expertise in developing and maintaining applications on AWS as well as being able to efficiently use AWS SDKs to interact with services from within applications and write code that optimizes AWS application performance.

For certification, you must first have at least six months of hands-on experience with AWS as well as with one or more programming languages. The exam itself is computer-based and is offered at PSI testing centers. It covers a variety of different content including coding security for access to AWS services, using SDKs, choosing the correct service for a certain situation, and creating code that optimizes performance within an application.

Microsoft Certified Solutions Expert (MCSE): Core Infrastructure - \$121,288

This certification validates that you have the skills needed to run a highly efficient and modern data center, identity management, systems management, virtualization, storage, and networking. Earning an MCSE: Core Infrastructure certification qualifies you for such jobs as administrator, architect, computer support specialist, and information security analyst.

In order to obtain this certification, you must first earn an MCSA certification in Windows Server 2016 or Windows Server 2012. Once this is completed, you must pass the specific exam, which requires you to be able to define the appropriate infrastructure and platform solutions to meet the required

functional, operational, and deployment requirements through the solution lifecycle.

ITIL® Foundation - \$120,566

ITIL Foundation is the entry-level ITIL certification and provides a broad-based understanding of the IT service lifecycle. The newest version, ITIL 4, was released this year and introduces new ways of working, such as [DevOps](#), Agile and Lean IT.

To become certified, you must simply pass the exam; there are no other prerequisites for the Foundation exam. It is, however, a prerequisite for follow-on ITIL Intermediate courses.

CISM - Certified Information Security Manager - \$118,412

ISACA created and maintains the CISM certification which is aimed at professionals who manage organizations' IT security. This certification requires at least five years of hands-on experience in information security, with at least three of those as a security manager.

The exam itself is computer-based and is offered during designated testing windows each year. Continuing education credits are required each year to maintain your certification.

CRISC - Certified in Risk and Information Systems Control - \$117,395

ISACA also offers and manages this certification which focuses on risk management proficiency. CRISC certification proves professionals have the ability to help organizations understand their business risk as well as develop, implement, and maintain information systems controls.

To obtain CRISC certification, you must have at least three years of experience in two of the four domains the certification covers. The exam itself is only offered during designated testing windows each year and is computer-based. Continuing Professional Education (CPE) credits are also required each year to maintain your certification.

CISSP - Certified Information Systems Security Professional - \$116,900

Offered by the International Information Systems Security Certification Consortium (ISC)² as a vendor-neutral credential, CISSP is designed to prove security expertise, and is one of the most sought-after certifications in cybersecurity. The exam covers a variety of domains, including areas such as security and risk management, communications and network security, software development security, asset security, security architecture and engineering, identity and access management, security assessment and testing, and security operations.

In order to get this certification, you must have five years of full-time, paid experience in at least two of the eight CISSP domains. The exam is offered at Pearson Vue Testing centers. To remain certified, CISSPs must earn Continuous Professional Education (CPE) credits every year.

CEH - Certified Ethical Hacker - \$116,306

The International Council of E-Commerce Consultants (EC-Council) created and manages the Certified Ethical Hacker certification, whose goal is to demonstrate ethical hacking methodologies that can be used in penetration testing.

Passing the CEH exam is the only step needed to certification. The exam is designed to test a candidate's abilities to find weaknesses and vulnerabilities in a company's network defenses using techniques and methods that hackers typically employ. It covers topics like analysis and assessment, security, tools and programs used, procedures and methodologies, regulation and policy, and ethics. The CEH certification is valid for three years and can be renewed by earning 120 continuing education credits within the three-year period.

Citrix Certified Associate - Virtualization (CCA-V) - \$113,442

The Citrix Certified Associate - Virtualization certification is entry-level and demonstrates the basics of managing, maintaining, monitoring and troubleshooting. In order to gain certification, hands-on experience and passing the exam is required.

CompTIA Security+ - \$110,321

CompTIA Security+ is an intermediate-level certification that demonstrates mastery of security topics like data, application, host, network, physical and operational security.

Ideal candidates for the Security+ exam have at least two years of experience in IT administration with a focus on security, and day-to-day technical information security experience. A CompTIA Network+ certification is also recommended along with an understanding of encryption, access control, hardening and secure software development.

CompTIA Network+ - \$107,143

The CompTIA Network+ focuses on foundational networking skills, including installation, maintenance and troubleshooting of networks, protocols for both the LAN and WAN, and the importance of network security.

Passing this exam proves that you have knowledge related to network infrastructure and network protocols. The CompTIA IT Fundamentals certification and CompTIA A+ certification are prerequisites for this certification.

Cisco Certified Networking Professional (CCNP) Routing and Switching - \$106,957

The Cisco Certified Networking Professional (CCNP) Routing and Switching certification is an advanced certification that ensures network engineers and administrators have the skills to plan, implement, verify and troubleshoot local and wide area enterprise networks. It also shows that these professionals are able to work collaboratively with specialists on advanced security, voice, wireless and video solutions.

To obtain this certification, you should have at least a year of networking experience and the ability to work independently on complex network solutions. There are three exams in total – one for routing, one for switching, and one for troubleshooting.

How do I get an IT certification?

The first step in getting certified is to decide which certification is right for you. [CompTIA's IT Certification Roadmap](#) outlines which certifications – CompTIA and otherwise – align with which career paths. So, if you work in information security and want to grow in your career, you can see which certifications can help you get to the intermediate, advanced or expert level.

You'll also want to choose a certification that's right for your level of experience. Some certifications are designed to help people get into IT careers while others are meant for those with several years of hands-on experience in the field. You don't want to sit for an exam that is well beyond your abilities and not be able to pass.

Once you choose the certification you want to earn, it's time to prepare.

- Learn all about the certification process – for example, where and how will you take the test, how much will it cost, how do you register, are there prerequisites and will you need any special supplies or equipment.
- Choose your training option. Will you take a class, use a self-paced e-learning tool or study on your own? Decide which makes the most sense for you based on your learning style and

timeline.

- Become familiar with the exam by downloading official exam objectives and sample questions and by reading what other IT pros have said about the exams.
- Register and pay for your exam and mark your calendar! Give yourself ample time to study so you can go in confidently and ace your test.

Conclusion

Getting an IT certification can validate your skills to employers and help you stay up to date on the latest developments in your field. Whether you're a new IT pro or a seasoned veteran, there's a certification out there for you.