# TODAY'S BEST IT/TECH CERTIFICATIONS: A COMPLETE GUIDE



Tech is a highly dynamic and ever-changing field. As the industry evolves, the required skills you need as employee evolves, too. To stay up to date with these new technologies, consider earning an IT certification!

IT certifications helps professionals stay competitive and knowledgeable about an ever-changing world. IT certifications offer many benefits throughout your career, especially if you are:

- Searching for or starting a new position
- Vying for a promotion

Finding the best IT certifications for beginners can even mean moving into a high-paying and important position earlier than you expected.

But with all of the currently available options, how do you know where to get started? Luckily, we've put together this complete guide to IT certifications, including the best ones to earn in 2021.

Read on or jump right into the certification list!

## What is an IT/tech certification?

An IT certification is a designation that demonstrates specific competency in a certain field of technology. Some are very general and perfect for beginners (such as the CompTIA Network+ and Security+) and some require years of real-life work experience before you can sit them, like the ITIL®

Master.

To earn an IT certification, you'll normally follow an educational course and take a test or review that proves you meet the governing body's rigorous standards. Some certifications require case studies and even panel presentations…but there are plenty of great resources to help you succeed.

IT certifications can cover any specialty or niche, from service management and customer service to cybersecurity, app development, and data science and engineering.

# Why earn an IT certification?

According to CompTIA, the largest vendor-neutral certifying group, here are some stats about IT certifications:

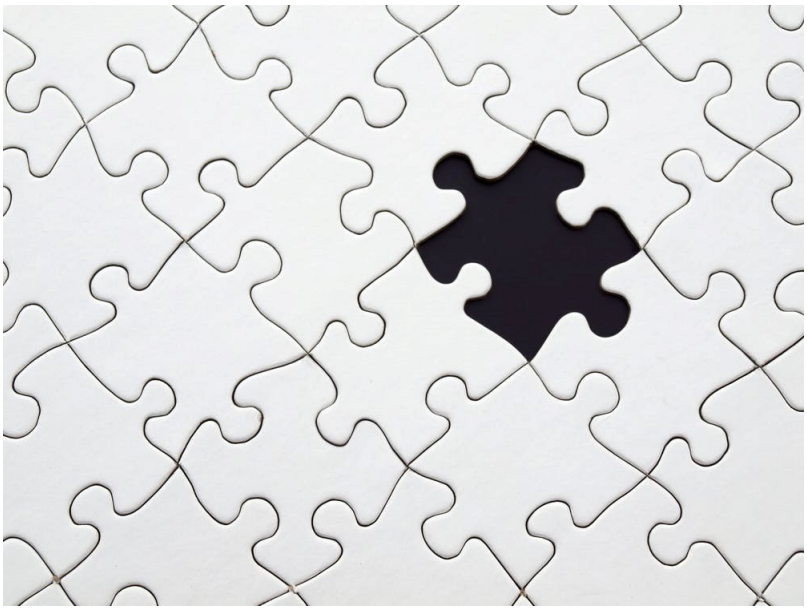
- 91% of employers believe IT certifications play a key role in the hiring process and that IT certifications are a reliable predictor of a successful employee.
- 98% of HR professionals use certifications to confirm a candidate's subject-matter knowledge and expertise.
- 97% of HR pros use certifications to differentiate between otherwise equally qualified candidates.

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

## Staying relevant

Continuing education is important in any industry, but it's crucial in a field like technology. IT is a field that changes drastically from year to year. That's why continued professional development is necessary in order to keep the certifications (and your knowledge) up to date.

IT certifications help professionals to stay relevant in your specialty. Just like you attend conferences, participate in webinars, take classes, or write for publications sharing your subject matter expertise, IT certifications are one piece of the career development puzzle.



## Ramping up your skills

Whether you are looking for a new position entirely or to move up through promotions, many people apply for jobs that allow them to further their growth, even if that means they don't have all the requisite skills just yet.

Obtaining an IT certification through classes and online training modules allows you to gain the skills needed to meet your career goals. This knowledge can be immediately applied on the job and provides instant advantages.

## Investing in yourself

New knowledge and education are never wasted. By getting a certification, it shows both to your employer—and yourself—that:

- You are invested in your career
- 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 didn't know you're passionate about.

# Best IT certifications to earn

Here are some of the most prestigious, comprehensive, or top paying IT certifications to earn, organized by IT specialty. For more, explore all our certification articles.




# Entry-level IT certifications

*Learn more about entry-level IT certifications.*

## Microsoft Technology Associate

**Average salary:** $55,00

The Microsoft Technology Associate certification is an entry-level IT certification that covers the fundamentals of infrastructure, databases, and development.

The MTA is another certification designed for:

- Students
- Those interested in changing their careers

Microsoft is a leading global technology company whose services are widely used. Costing between $75 and $100, this is an excellent certificate to make the jump into the world of IT.

## CompTIA ITF+

**Average salary:** $54,500

The CompTIA ITF+ 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 $120 and consists of around 75 multiple-choice questions.

## ITIL® Foundation

**Average salary:** $98,000

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 future ITIL certifications.

*(Check out our ITIL 4 Foundation study guide.)*

## Citrix Certified Associate – Virtualization (CCA-V)

**Average salary:** $117,069

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

# Infrastructure & networking certifications

## CompTIA Network+

**Average salary:** $86,340

The CompTIA Network+ focuses on foundational networking skills, including:

- Installation, maintenance, and troubleshooting of networks
- Protocols for both the LAN and WAN
- 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.

## Microsoft Certified Solutions Expert (MCSE): Core Infrastructure

**Average salary:** $91,107

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
- Information security analyst

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.

## Cisco Certified Networking Professional (CCNP) Routing and Switching

**Average salary:** $107,293

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 can 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.

# Cybersecurity certifications

## CompTIA Security+

**Average salary:** $84,000

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.

## CISM – Certified Information Security Manager

**Average salary:** $148,622

ISACA created and maintains the CISM certification which is aimed at professionals who manage enterprise IT security. This certification requires:

- At least five years of hands-on experience in information security
- 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.

## CISSP – Certified Information Systems Security Professional

**Average salary:** $141,452

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:

- 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
- Security operations

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.

*(Read our full explainer of the CISSP certification.)*

## CRISC – Certified in Risk and Information Systems Control

**Average salary:** $146,480

ISACA offers and manages this certification which focuses on risk management proficiency. CRISC certification proves professionals can 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.

## CEH – Certified Ethical Hacker

**Average salary:** $104,813

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 for 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 years.



# Cloud certifications

With dedicated cloud computing roles emerging, cloud certifications are some of the most in demand today.

## Microsoft Certified Azure Fundamentals

**Average salary:** $127,000

The Microsoft Certified Azure Fundamentals is for those working with cloud concepts, Azure services, Azure workloads, and security and privacy within the Azure space. This foundational exam is to show that candidates are competent and capable of managing technical concepts within the Azure ecosphere while also offering them a path to prepare for further examinations in the Azure role-based or specialty certifications.

In addition to technical support, the Azure Fundamentals examination also expects candidates to be comfortable with managing pricing and support. Technical concepts, networking, storage, compute, and application support/development are all tested in the Microsoft Certified Azure Fundamentals 6-part course.

*(Explore more Azure certifications.)*

## AWS Certified Cloud Practitioner

**Average salary:** $131,465

The AWS Certified Cloud Practitioner certificate is designed for those working with the AWS Cloud and have an explicit technical knowledge of getting the best out of the platform. Understanding architectural principles, value propositions, use cases, and security and compliance regulations are all necessary for successfully sitting this exam.

Before sitting the exam, Amazon recommends that you spend 6 months working with the AWS Cloud in a technical, managerial, sales, purchasing, or financial role, in addition to having a basic understanding of IT services and how they interact with the AWS Cloud platform.

## AWS Certified Developer – Associate

**Average salary:** $130,272

The AWS Certified Developer – Associate certification validates technical expertise in:

- Developing and maintaining applications on AWS
- 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
- 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.

## AWS Certified Solutions Architect – Associate

**Average salary:** $149,446

The AWS Certified Solutions Architect Associate-level exam demonstrates an individual's expertise in designing and deploying scalable systems on AWS. With the further market need for skilled and certified AWS solutions architects as the 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
- Estimating costs

This is the prerequisite step to achieving the AWS Certified Solutions Architect – Professional certification.

## Google Certified Professional Cloud Architect

**Average salary:** $175,761

This certification allows IT professionals to certify as cloud architects 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, the exam taker must understand what solutions work best for various scenarios. The certification exam must be taken in-person at a Kryterion testing center location.

*(See what to expect on the GCP Cloud Architect exam.)*

# Project management certifications

## PMP® – Project Management Professional

**Average salary:** $143,493

The 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 assures 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
- 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. To maintain PMP certification, 60 professional development units are required every three years.

## Certified ScrumMaster®

**Average salary:** $92,298

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
- 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.

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 to renew.

# Explore more IT certifications

Browse all the articles that BMC Blogs has on IT certifications:

## IT certifications

- Entry-Level IT Certifications
- Top Paying IT Certifications

## Service management (ITSM) certifications

- ITSM Certifications: A Beginner's Guide
- Customer Service Certifications

## Security certifications

- IT Security Certifications
- Certified Information Systems Auditor (CISA)
- Certified Information Systems Security Professional (CISSP)

## Cloud certifications

- Cloud Certifications
- AWS Certifications
- Azure Certifications
- GCP Cloud Architect Certification

## DevOps & Agile certifications

- DevOps Certifications
- Agile Certifications
- Docker Certifications
- Kubernetes Certifications

## Big data certifications

- MongoDB Certifications
- Hadoop Certifications

# 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 Career Roadmap outlines which certifications 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. 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. Here are some tips:

- **Learn all about the certification process.** You need to know where and how you will take the test, how much it will cost, how you register, the 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.
- **Understand the exam.** Downloading official exam objectives and sample questions and reading what other IT pros have said about the exams is an excellent way to build up your knowledge about what is in the exam and how best to tackle it. Technique can be just as important as knowledge in some of these examinations!
- **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.

## Get IT certifications

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.

## Related reading

- BMC Business of IT Blog
- IT Best Practices: The Best Introduction
- Top IT Security, InfoSec & CyberSecurity Conferences Today
- Best Conferences To Attend for Programming & Software Development
- BMC Certifications