

Your IT Career Roadmap

Help desk → Sysadmin → Network/Security/Cloud — the classic ladder, 1–3 yrs per rung

Pick ONE lane by year 2: security, cloud, or networking — generalists stall, specialists get paid

Certs get interviews; projects get offers — build a home lab and document everything

GitHub + LinkedIn matter: hiring managers Google you before the interview

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Which Cert First?

Start: CompTIA A+ (hardware/OS basics) or Google IT Support — no experience needed

Then: Network+ (networking fundamentals) → Security+ (DoD-approved, biggest ROI early)

Cloud lane: AWS CLF-C02 → SAA-C03 | Microsoft lane: AZ-900 → AZ-104

One cert at a time — stacked half-finished certs impress nobody

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Home Lab Under \$100

VirtualBox or Proxmox (free) — run 3–4 VMs on any 16GB laptop

Build: a Windows Server DC, a Linux box, a pfSense firewall — learn AD, DNS, DHCP hands-on

TryHackMe / HackTheBox free tiers for security reps; AWS free tier for cloud

Document builds on a blog or GitHub — your lab IS your experience section

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Interview Prep Essentials

STAR method: Situation, Task, Action, Result — every behavioral answer uses it

"Tell me about yourself" = 60-second pitch: who you are, what you've built, where you're headed

Always have 3 questions ready: team structure, on-call expectations, growth path

Follow up within 24h — a short thank-you email beats 90% of candidates

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30-Day Exam Sprint

Weeks 1–2: learn — one domain per day, take messy notes, lab everything

Week 3: drill — 50+ practice questions daily, log every miss in a weak-spot list

Week 4: simulate — full timed practice exams, review only your misses

Exam day: sleep > cramming; flag hard questions, answer easy ones first

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Resume & USAJobs Tips

One page per 10 years of experience — quantify everything (users supported, tickets closed, uptime)

Mirror the job posting's keywords — ATS filters kill resumes before humans see them

Federal jobs: USAJobs resumes can run 3–5 pages; spell out GS-level eligibility clearly

Clearance = pay bump: Secret adds ~10–15%; start the process early, it takes months

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