



The Veteran's Guide to Starting a Career in IT



Overview

This guide is designed for Veterans who are interested in using the GI Bill to help them start a career in the Information Technology field. The aim of this guide is to:

1. Help you understand the career pathways available in IT.
2. Help you develop an IT education plan.
3. Give you information on the GI Bill and tips for maximizing your benefits.
4. Give you real world tips and ideas for how to secure a job in IT and ensure future advancement opportunities.

About the Author

My name is Scott Galloway and I have been in the IT Career Field for 20 years. My first job in IT was doing technical support on the phone for Gateway computers. After graduating from BYU with degree in Business and Information Systems, I founded, developed, and eventually sold the largest onsite computer repair company in Idaho. Later in my career I managed a 24/7 IT Operations company where I oversaw a large team of IT engineers. We supported small businesses, government offices, and several Fortune 100 companies. In my current role I am the director of LeapFox Learning, an IT school where we provide training on nearly every IT skill imaginable.



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IT Career Pathways

First things first, let's narrow down that career pathway(s) in IT you might be interested in. In this section we will take a brief look at each major career field. One or more of the fields on the list might jump out at you immediately as an interest or as a definite no. Or perhaps nothing will jump out at you; in which case you would be fairly normal. The goal is to educate and give you a context for the various career fields that are available in IT.



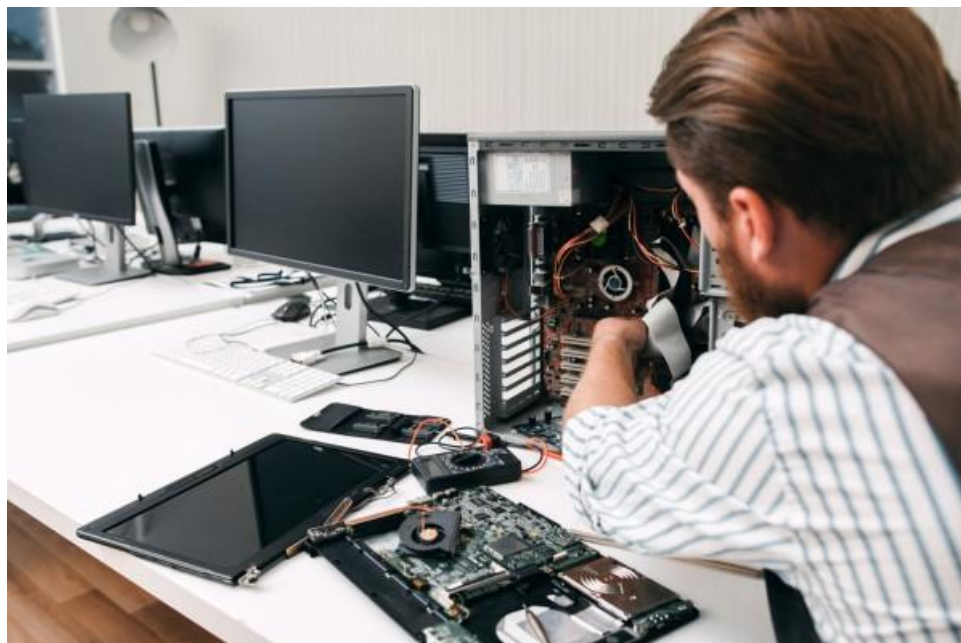
Additional Resources



Check out my 6-minute video and PDF Chart on IT Career fields <https://leapfox.net/career-training/counselor-resources/>. The video covers each career field including:

- Available certifications
- Job descriptions
- Wages earned

Helpdesk



Description. Helpdesk staff provides technical support to end users. I got my IT start in the helpdesk capacity as do many first-time technicians. Depending on the nature of the helpdesk team you are on, you could either provide support via phone, remote connection, in person, or possibly all the above.

Helpdesk technicians will be expected to know how to configure, support, and troubleshoot:

- Computers, laptops, printers, and mobile devices
- Microsoft Office and email
- Software specific to an organization (Line of Business software)
- Operating systems (Windows 10, Windows 7, Macintosh, Linux)

Job Titles: Computer Technician, Desktop Support, Technical Support, Help Desk, Computer User Specialist

Key Certifications

CompTIA A+ certification

Wages

\$14-20/hr

You might enjoy helpdesk if:

You enjoy using and playing with computers and technology

You enjoy solving problems, you enjoy finding out how things work

You enjoy helping other people

You are just getting started in IT

You want to transition to infrastructure, networking, or cyber security

Infrastructure



Description. Members of the infrastructure team maintain the servers, storage, and virtualization of a company or government office. Infrastructure technicians will work with vendor technologies such as Microsoft, VMware, and Citrix. Members of the infrastructure team are the ones who implement the strategic IT plan for how to deliver data and software services to the company. Individuals who work on the IT Infrastructure team may have some off-hours work depending on the company policy of acceptable downtime during the day.

Job Titles System Administrator, Server Administrator, Server Engineer, Virtualization Specialist

Key Certifications

Microsoft Certified Systems Associate MCSA (Desktop, Server, Cloud)
Vmware VCP

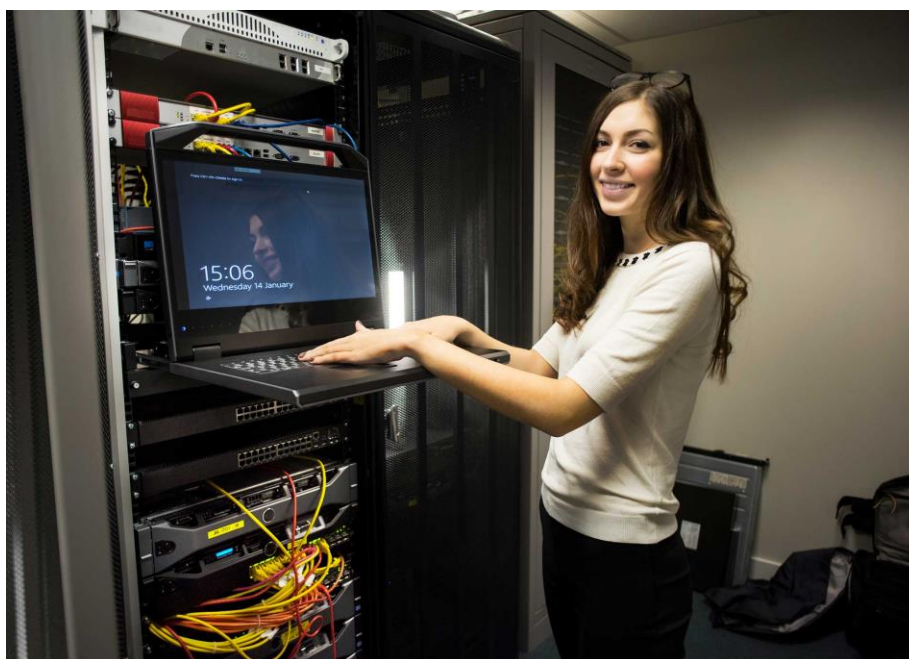
Wages

\$18-\$25 entry level
\$25-\$50 experienced

You might enjoy Infrastructure-related work if:

- You like computers and technology
- You enjoy solving problems
- You enjoy working on projects
- You don't mind working off hours on occasion
- You can work independently as well as on teams
- You like education and are interested in obtaining new certifications

Network



Description. Network Engineers are in charge of the connectivity at an organization. This includes:

- Configuring wired and wireless networks
- Network security
- Virtual private networks VPN
- Wide area networks WAN
- Internet bandwidth

Job Titles Network Administrator, Network Technician, Cisco Engineer

Key Certifications

CompTIA Network+

Cisco Certified Network Associate CCNA

Wages

\$18-\$25 entry level

\$25-\$50 experienced

You might be a good Network Engineer if:

You enjoy designing and implementing networks

You understand subnetting

You enjoy completing projects

You can pay close attention to detail

Cyber Security



Description. Cyber Security Professionals help defend and protect the network and infrastructure from outside and inside attacks. In a smaller organization the infrastructure and networking individuals would be expected to understand Cyber Security basics. In a larger organization there are several levels of Cyber Security jobs that range from analyst to ethical hacker.

Job Titles Security Analyst, Ethical Hacker, Penetration Tester, Security Manager

Key Certifications

CompTIA Security+

Certified Ethical Hacker CEH

CompTIA Advanced Security Practitioner

Certified Information Systems Security Professional CISSP

Wages

\$20-\$25 entry level

\$25-\$60 experienced

You might be a good Cyber Security professional if:

You like computers and technology

You enjoy solving problems

You enjoy working on projects

You like education and are interested in obtaining new certifications

You like the idea of protecting things from the bad guys

You are interested in hacking

Database



Description. Data professionals use tools like SQL, Report Builder, and Business Intelligence to create reports, dashboards, and other useful information-sharing tools for the organization. Larger sized organizations and government departments will have teams of data professionals. There is some crossover between database and developer as database skills are essential to higher level developers.

Job Titles: Database Developer, Database Administrator, Data Analyst

Key Certifications

MCSA Database Developer
MCSA Database Admin
MCSA Business Intelligence Development

Wages

\$18-\$25 entry level
\$25-\$50 experienced

You might be a Database Developer if:

You like to solve problems, puzzles
You have a good eye for detail
You like learning new things
You work well individually and on teams

Software Developer



Description. A software developer plays a key role in the design, installation, testing, and maintenance of software systems. A developer may be responsible for writing and coding individual programs or providing an entirely new software resource. Every size of organization, including many small business, are likely to have developers on the team.

Job Titles: Developer, Coder, Microsoft Developer, Web Developer

Key Languages/Skills: C#, Javascript, Java, HTML, CSS, SQL

Key Certifications

MCSA App Builder

Wages

Entry Level, \$20-26/hr

Experienced, \$27-50/hr

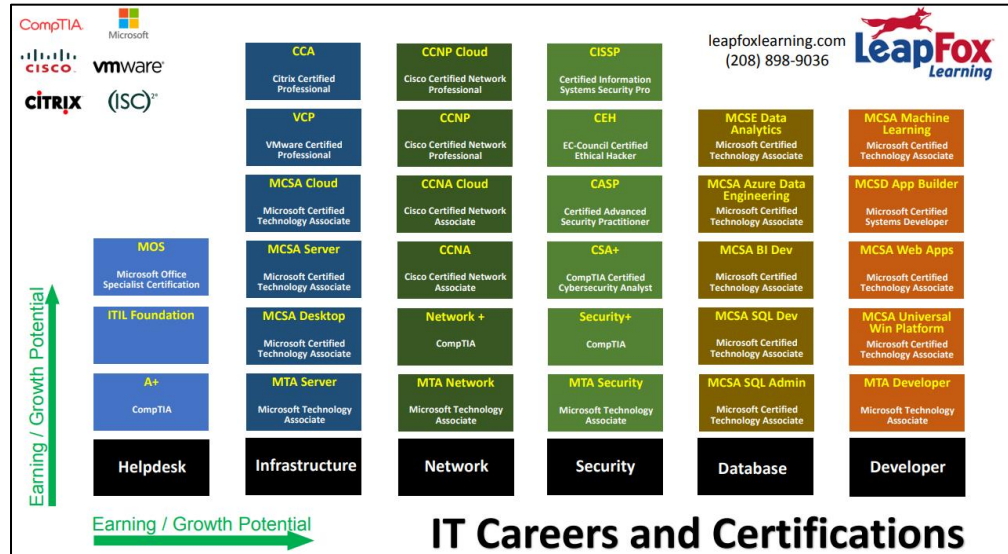
You might be a good Developer if:

- You like to solve problems, puzzles
- You like or are particularly good at math
- You have a good eye for detail
- You like learning new things
- You work well individually and on teams



Tips to Choosing a Career Pathway

1. Learn about the various career paths and understand the certification pathway. Use the chart below to help plot your career pathway and certifications. The full chart below can be downloaded here <https://leapfox.net/career-training/counselor-resources/>.



2. Get hands-on education in the different career paths so you can see what the work is like.
3. Talk with individuals who work in different domains of IT. Find out what they enjoy doing.
4. Play to your strengths. If you are logical, like to solve puzzles, and pay close attention to detail, then consider developer and database. If you enjoy doing hands-on projects and getting your hands dirty, then look at Infrastructure, Networking, and Security.
5. Move around, keep learning. Once you develop a base level of knowledge you can easily move to other related career fields.



Choosing an Education Pathway



When it comes to getting an IT education, there are a namely two education options:



In this guide I will review each option and hopefully provide you with some ideas and questions that will help you shape an education plan.

Going to College: Pros



Pros. There are a lot of great reasons to go to college:

1. **Young.** When you are young and getting your start in life, college is a great opportunity to get out of the house and live on your own. If you only have yourself to support, there is no rush to finish school and start earning a higher wage.
2. **Fun.** Parties, Late nights out with friends, going to football games and cheering in the student section. College can be a lot of fun.

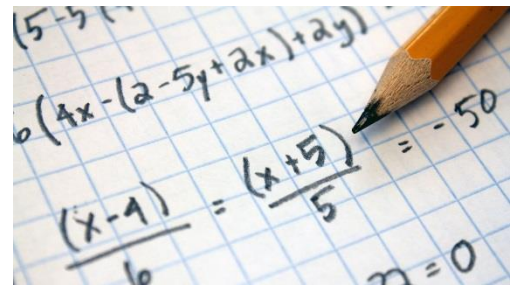


3. **Interesting**—There are a lot of interesting courses you can take at college. Some of my favorites include: Volleyball, Medieval French Literature, Food Science Nutrition, and Religion throughout the Dark Ages.
4. **Tradition.** In some families it is a tradition for everybody to attend college. My mom, dad, and siblings all attended and graduated from college. If I didn't go to college as well, then I would be breaking the family tradition.
5. **Required for your profession.** Some professions require college and further schooling. For example; if you want to become a dentist, a doctor, a lawyer, or a college professor, then college is required.

My Journey. I started my IT career with a Bachelor's degree in Business and Information Technology from BYU. I had a great time at college and have fond memories of the experience.

Going to College: Cons

- Five Years!** The average American student will take 5.1¹ years to complete a Bachelor’s degree. That’s half a decade in school! If you start an IT degree at a college, then by the time you finish 4-5 years later the technology landscape will have completely changed. Your skills and knowledge will be **out of date before you even start!** Even if you were to get an industry IT Certification (Such as CompTIA or Microsoft) in college, these only have a shelf life of three years before they expire. Your cert will expire and need to be renewed long before you are able to use it to get your first IT job.
- General Education Credits.** The typical American college degree requires that 40%-50% of the complete education be composed of general education credits. This means in a four-year degree program you will spend up to two years studying Math, English, Humanities, etc... For some people this is a great opportunity, others will be frustrated to have to study so many subjects not related to their eventual career field.
- Missed Wages.** Getting a Bachelor’s Degree could cost you \$182,400 in missed wages. The idea behind attending college to get your Bachelor’s Degree is your earning potential is higher than not attending college. However, when you compare the earning potential of a college graduate with that of an IT technical or trade school graduate, the earning potential is similar. Look at the following chart to compare estimated earnings in five years.



Working part time at \$12/hr to help pay the bills while going to school full time.

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total
4 Year IT Degree	\$11,520	\$11,520	\$11,520	\$11,520	\$11,520	\$46,080
6 Month IT Cert Training	\$25,000 ²	\$50,000	\$52,000	\$55,000	\$58,000	\$240,000
					Difference	\$182,400

Taking 6 months to earn an entry-level IT certification. In this example the Security+ Certification and earning industry average for a first-year technician is \$24/hr.

By the time the degree candidate is ready to make industry wage, he/she has missed out on \$182,400 of potential earnings.

¹ <https://nscresearchcenter.org/signaturereport11/>

² Security Plus Wages listed here are near bottom of national average <http://resources.infosecinstitute.com/security-salary/#gref>

Technical School: Pros and Cons

Pros

Technical schools, such as LeapFox Learning, that offer IT Certification training can be a great education choice for starting a career in IT.

1. **Short Programs.** Technical school training programs last from 2-12 months. This enables you to get trained and then get an industry-related job within a year of starting school.
2. **Competitive Wage.** Graduates of technical school can earn as much or more than an individual with a Bachelor's degree. For example, wage earners with the Security+ certification earn on average \$44,000-\$80,000. The average earning potential for the average college graduate is just under \$50,000³.
3. **Focused Curriculum.** No Math, English classes, or term paper writing here. Technical curriculum is direct from the best vendors in the industry—Microsoft, CompTIA, and Cisco. You study only the stuff that potential employers care that their IT staff know.



4. **IT Certifications.** 91%⁴ 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.
5. **Hands on Learning.** Studies show hands on learning is the best⁵ way to teach technology concepts. Technical schools tend to incorporate hands-on vendor learning much more than colleges, which are focusing on technology theory and on-technical concepts.

Cons

1. **Student Loans.** Technical schools are typically not accredited and do not qualify for subsidized government student loans.
2. **Advanced Degrees.** In order to attain an advanced degree (MBA, Masters of Accounting, etc) you have to first get a Bachelor's degree. Although there are plenty of advanced vendor certifications IT pros can earn to help them move up the career ladder.

³ <http://time.com/money/4777074/college-grad-pay-2017-average-salary/>

⁴ CompTIA HR Perception of IT Training and Certification Study: 2015

⁵ <https://news.uns.purdue.edu/x/2009a/090128DarkStudy.html>

Summary

Consider College if:

- You are just out of high school
- You don't mind making a lower wage for five years
- You haven't decided what you want to do in life
- You would like to have a degree, just because. Or you would like to have a degree because attending college is a family tradition
- You want to have some fun

Consider Technical School if:

- You are further along in life or have a family to support
- You want to start making a higher wage within a year
- You know that you want to work with technology
- You don't want to study GEs or write term papers
- Getting skills and a job are more important than having fun



GI Bill



What is the GI Bill

The term GI Bill refers to any Department of Veterans Affairs education benefit earned by members of Active Duty, Selected Reserve and National Guard Armed Forces and their families. The benefit is designed to help servicemembers and eligible veterans cover the costs associated with getting an education or training.

Are you Eligible?

If you have at least 90 days of aggregate active duty service after Sept. 10, 2001, and are still on active duty, or if you are an honorably discharged Veteran or were discharged with a service-connected disability after 30 days, you may be eligible for this VA-administered program.

What Benefits do you get?

- 36 months of in-state, public college education or \$65,911 of non-college education money to be used at technical or trade schools.
- Basic Housing Allowance (BHA) for every month you are in school full time. BHA is around \$1089/month.
- Book stipend of \$1000/year.

How to Use your GI Bill

1. First of all, make sure you have applied to use your benefits
<https://www.vets.gov/education/apply/#modal>.
2. Print a copy of your most recent DD214
3. Print of your certificate of eligibility form which can be found at
<https://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/>
4. Meet with the vet rep at the school you wish to attend.

Tips to Getting the Most out of Your GI Bill

1. **Full Time.** You only get your \$1089/mo of Basic Housing Allowance when you are attending school full time. The VA determines full time as 18 hours of school or more per week.
2. **Apply Early.** If you know where you want to go to school, then apply as early as the school allows. During the busy registration periods (at the start of college semesters) the waiting period for registration can be up to four weeks.
3. **15 Years to Use.** If you were discharged before Jan 1, 2013, then you have 15 years to use your GI Bill. If you don't want to use it, then your GI Bill benefits can be transferred to a spouse or child.
4. **Forever To Use.** If you were discharged after Jan 1, 2013, then you will have no time limit to use your GI Bill benefits. For more details visit
<https://www.military.com/education/2017/08/04/forever-gi-bill-details.html>.
5. **Online School.** If you do a 100% online school, the housing allowance is decreased to \$805.50/mo

Securing a Great Job

1. **Polish Your Resume.** Make sure your resume is polished, so you can put your best foot forward. This would include (but is not limited to) the following:
 - a. **Resume Translation.** You will want to swap out any military verbiage for civilian friendly terms. For example: Field Grade Officer = Executive or Manager.
 - b. **Eliminate gaps.** Make sure there aren't any big gaps in your work experience. This is a red flag to employers that something is missing.



2. **Update LinkedIn.** Many employers will look at your LinkedIn Profile. Here are a few important things:
 - a. **Profile picture.** Use a headshot wearing professional clothing. No tank tops, no t-shirts. The photo should be of you and not your dog or a "couples photo".
 - b. **Complete profile.** Spend some time making sure your complete profile is filled out.
 - c. **Ask for references.** Ask former managers or mentors to write a reference for you on LinkedIn. You can pick and choose which references you want to show up on the profile settings.
3. **Clean up Facebook.** If you have a public-facing Facebook page, then make sure all photos that are publicly accessible are business and culturally appropriate.
4. **References.** Make sure you have 3-5 good business references. Do not bother listing the reference of family, friends, and co-workers; these make for weak references. Employers want to see managers and supervisors. If you don't have managers, then an instructor, coach or mentor may suffice.
5. **Hidden Jobs.** Great jobs aren't always advertised. If you want to work for a specific employer, contact the employer to find out who you should send your resume to.
6. **Follow Up.** Don't wait for the employer to follow up with you. Take initiative and follow up directly with the employer you want to work for.
7. **Talk to Your Network.** Let your personal network know you are wanting to get a job in IT.

Career Advancements

Up to You. How far you advance in your career is up to you, not your manager. Here are some ways to take your career advancement into your own hands:



1. **Ask for Responsibility.** Once you have a handle on your core job duties, ask for additional responsibility and projects. This shows your manager you are willing to work and will help you edge out the competition for promotions.
2. **Certifications.** Work on getting a new certification each year. Many employers have employee education funds you can use to get training and certifications. 90% of employers agree that IT-certified staff are more likely to be promoted. 88% of employers say that IT-certified employees are rewarded for obtaining IT certifications—e.g., pay increases⁶.
3. **Training.** Always be training! Sharpen your skill toolset by always seeking out training. There are vast amounts of training out there to fit every budget. A top-shelf IT professional will be doing 1-2 hours of ongoing training every week.
4. **Help Others.** Help your co-workers out. Share your knowledge, be a mentor. What goes around comes around.
5. **Be On Time.** This includes arriving on time and not leaving early. Be good to your employer and they will be good too to you.
6. **Ask for a Raise.** First do the all of the above items for a year or more. Then ask your boss for a raise. If you work hard and bring value to your employer, they will say yes more times than they will say no.
7. **Move on.** If you aren't progressing at your current job, then move on. Remember, you are in charge of your career advancements.

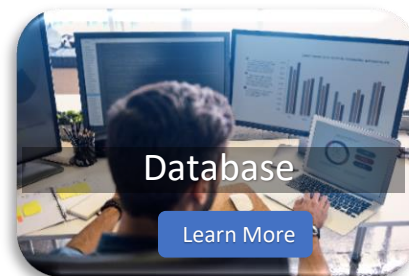
⁶ <https://certification.comptia.org/it-career-news/post/view/2017/05/31/4-reasons-employers-look-for-certified-staff>

LeapFox IT Training Programs

Leapfox Learning is a Technical School located in Meridian, Idaho. We focus on training Veterans with relevant IT skills, so they can get great jobs in IT. All of our learning programs feature:

- Hands on learning (at least 50% of each course is hands on)
- Small class sizes
- Friendly and knowledgeable instructors

We have three GI Bill approved training programs:



Software Developer

Six-month, fully immersive developer/coder program designed to help start a career as a developer. You will learn both front and back stack skills:

- Java
- CSS
- Javascript
- HTML
- C#
- SQL

IT Administrator

Twelve-month training designed to help Veterans start an exciting career as an IT Administrator. Includes the following certification training:

- CompTIA A+, Net+, Security+
- Cisco CCNA Networking
- Cybersecurity (CEH and CISSP)
- Microsoft Windows 10 MCSA
- Microsoft Server 2016 MCSA
- Cloud Computing

Database Developer

Three-month program that focuses on the skills needed to design, build, and query databases to start a career as a data professional. Participants will study to certify for the MCSA Database Designer certification from Microsoft.



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