



Tech Career Roadmap

The Beginner's Guide to Landing Your First IT Job

Need help getting started?

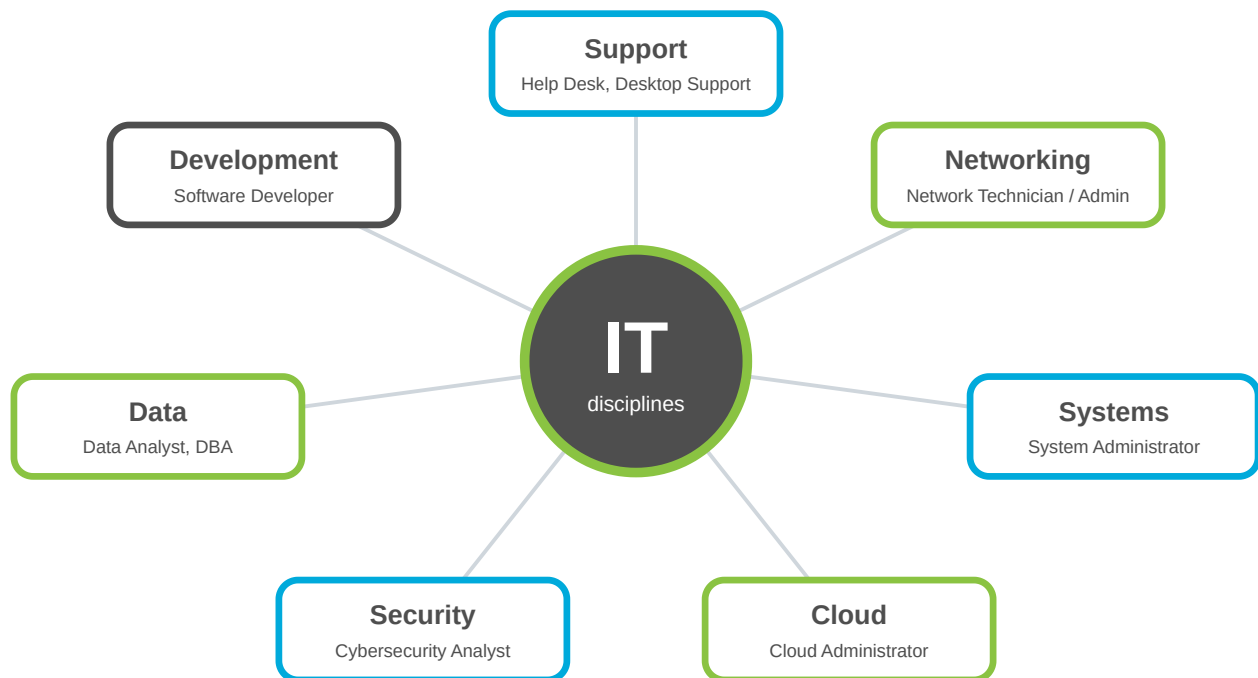
Reach out to info@svhec.org and we will help you take your first steps.

Part 1: Understand the Landscape

What Is IT?

IT (Information Technology) covers any technology used to secure, move, or access digital information. That can be as simple as using your smartphone or as complex as managing servers in a datacenter.

Because IT is so broad, it has many subfields. Within each one, roles range from individual contributor (you own your technical work) to manager (you lead a team).



IT has many disciplines. Most people start in support and branch out over time.

Explore Roles in IT

Here are common job titles and what each person does day to day. Most roles expect some baseline knowledge, even entry-level ones, and having it makes you more competitive.

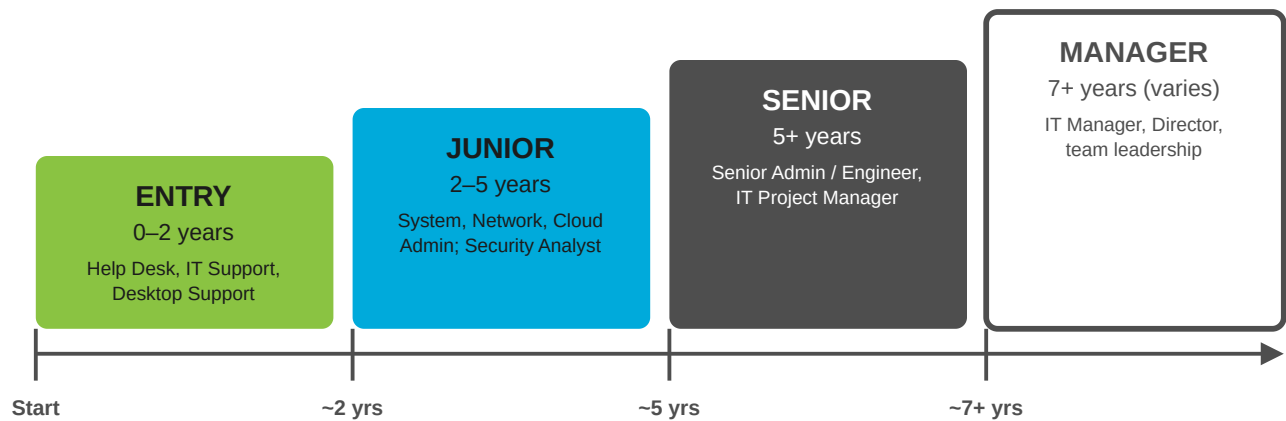
Experience levels are rough estimates and vary by company and specialty:

- **Entry:** little to no professional experience
- **Junior:** about 2 to 5 years
- **Senior:** 5+ years

★ START HERE

Roles marked **Entry** (highlighted in green below) need little to no professional experience. **Help Desk Technician** and **IT Support Specialist** are popular first jobs, and most skills in Part 2 map directly to them.

Title	Description	Level
Help Desk Technician	Helps users solve common computer, software, and account problems	Entry
IT Support Specialist	Provides technical support for computers, software, devices, and users	Entry
Desktop Support Technician	Sets up, maintains, and troubleshoots computers and peripherals	Entry
IT Technician	Handles hands-on tasks with computers, networks, devices, and software	Entry
Network Technician	Installs and troubleshoots network equipment, cables, and wireless	Entry
Security Technician	Helps configure and maintain security tools and controls	Entry
Data Analyst	Uses data and reports to help organizations understand information	Entry
Network Administrator	Maintains networks, including switches, routers, and wireless systems	Junior
System Administrator	Maintains servers, operating systems, user accounts, and IT services	Junior
Cloud Administrator	Manages cloud-based computers, storage, networks, and services	Junior
Cybersecurity Analyst	Monitors systems and investigates potential security threats	Junior
Database Administrator	Maintains databases, backups, permissions, and performance	Junior
Software Developer	Creates, tests, and maintains software applications	Junior
IT Project Manager	Plans and coordinates technology projects	Senior
IT Manager	Oversees IT staff, systems, services, and daily operations	Senior

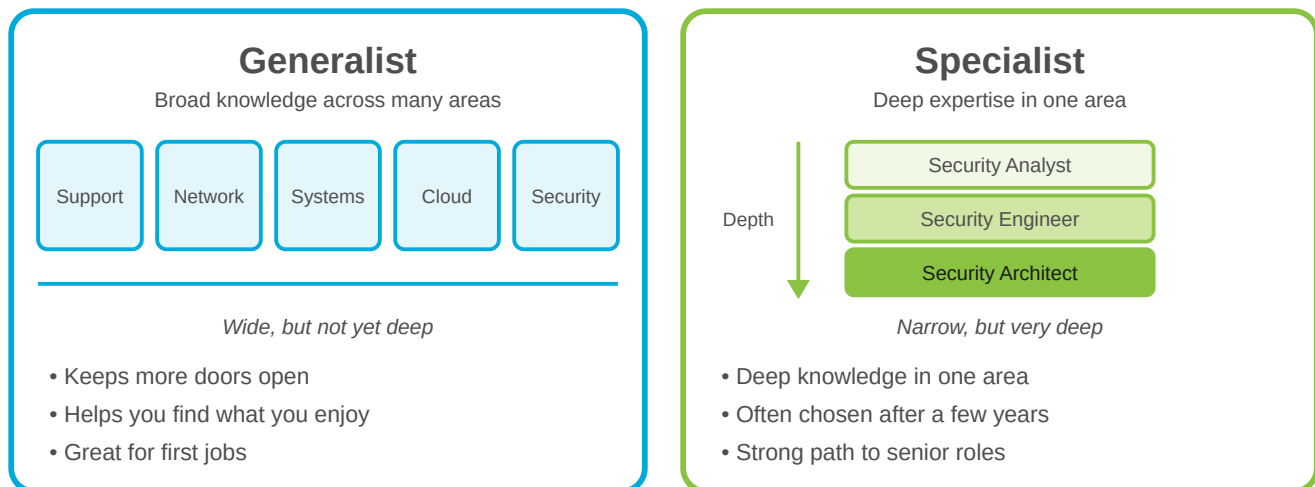


Typical years of experience at each level. Timelines vary by company and specialty.

Watch the video: [Every Tech Career Explained in 8 minutes](#)

Specializing vs. Generalizing

You can specialize in one area or be a generalist with knowledge across several. When you're starting out, being a "jack of all trades, master of none" is a strength as it helps you find what you enjoy and keeps more doors open. Later, you can choose an area to focus on.



Most people start as generalists and choose a specialty later.

Part 1 Checklist

- ☐ Circle 3 entry-level roles from the table that interest you
- ☐ Read 2 real job postings for each of those roles
- ☐ Write down the 3 most common skills you see across the postings
- ☐ Decide whether you want to start as a generalist or aim for a specialty

HOMEWORK CHALLENGE

Watch one "day in the life" video for each of your 3 roles on YouTube. Write 3 sentences on which one sounds most like you and why.

Part 2: Build Your Foundation

Developing Technical Skills

You don't need a degree to start. You need a handful of core skills and proof you can use them.

MEET ALEX

Alex works part-time at a grocery store and has never held an IT job. Every evening, Alex spends 30 minutes on free Professor Messer videos. Soon, family members start asking for help: Grandma's laptop is crawling, a cousin can't connect to Wi-Fi, and Mom's printer keeps going offline. Alex fixes each one, writes down the steps, and after a month has a list of 12 solved problems. None of it was a job, but it's real practice, and it's the start of Alex's resume.

Core skills to learn first

- **Hardware:** how computers are built and what each part does
- **Operating systems:** Windows, macOS, and basic Linux
- **Networking:** IP addresses, DNS, Wi-Fi, routers, and switches
- **Troubleshooting:** a repeatable process for finding and fixing problems
- **Ticketing:** how support requests are tracked and documented

Free and low-cost ways to learn

- Professor Messer (free CompTIA video courses)
- YouTube tutorials
- Coursera and Udemy
- TryHackMe (beginner-friendly hands-on labs)
- Community college courses

Build a simple home lab

- Install a free virtual machine program (like VirtualBox) on your computer
- Set up Windows and Linux, break things on purpose, then fix them
- Take apart and rebuild an old PC
- Set up a home network and change router settings

Document what you learn. Keep notes or a simple blog of projects and fixes. This becomes resume material and interview stories.

Certifications That Open Doors

Certifications show employers you know the basics, which matters most when you have no IT experience yet. In many cases, certifications plus hands-on experience in projects at home or in class can help you land an entry-level job.

Certification	Best for	What it covers
CompTIA Tech+	Absolute beginners	IT fundamentals, basic hardware, software, networking, security
CompTIA A+	Entry-level support roles	Hardware, operating systems, troubleshooting, mobile devices, security basics (two exams)
CompTIA Network+	Next step after A+	Networking concepts and troubleshooting
CompTIA Security+	Next step after A+	Core security skills
Google IT Support Certificate	Beginners wanting a guided course	Support fundamentals, networking, systems, security
Microsoft AZ-900 / MS-900	Cloud and Microsoft 365 awareness	Cloud and Microsoft 365 basics

CompTIA certifications: <https://www.comptia.org/en-us/certifications/#all>

Exam Tips

- **Consider starting with Tech+ if you're new to IT.**
 - It's a great confidence builder and covers the fundamentals of hardware, software, networking, and security.
 - If you already know the basics, many people skip it and go straight to A+.
 - Not sure which fits? Skim the exam objectives for each and see how much already looks familiar. You can find exam objectives on the vendor's website (e.g., [comptia.org](https://www.comptia.org)).
- **Check pricing before you book.**
 - Visit CompTIA's site for current exam prices, since they change.
 - Look for student discounts, academic pricing, and bundles (for example, a voucher paired with a retake option or study materials).
 - A+ requires passing two exams, so budget for both.
 - Consider taking a course through a CompTIA Academy Partner. Training providers often bundle the cost of exam vouchers into the overall tuition for the class and you can often receive financial aid to help lower your out-of-pocket costs.
- **Use the official exam objectives as your study checklist.**

- Download the free objectives PDF from CompTIA's site for your exam.
- Mark each topic as "know it," "shaky," or "never seen it," and spend most of your time on the last two.
- **Take practice exams before booking the real one.**
 - Take one early to find your weak spots, then retake after studying to measure progress.
 - Review every wrong answer and understand why the right one is right.
 - Aim to score consistently well on practice tests before you schedule the real thing.
- **Set an exam date to stay motivated.**
 - A date on the calendar turns "someday" into a deadline.
 - Pick a date far enough out to study properly, but close enough to keep you focused.
 - If you're not ready as it approaches, check the reschedule policy before the cutoff.
- **Prepare for exam day.**
 - Know whether you're testing at a center or online, and review the ID and testing-environment requirements ahead of time.
 - Read each question carefully, since some will include extra detail that isn't needed.
 - Flag hard questions, move on, and come back to them so you don't burn your time.

Typical timeline: Tech+ in 6 to 10 weeks, A+ in 3 to 4 months

Soft Skills That Get You Hired

IT is a people job. Employers often hire for attitude and train for the rest. Technical skills get you the interview, but soft skills are often what get you the offer and the promotion.

- **Communication: explain technical problems in plain language**
 - Practice explaining a concept (like DNS or a VPN) to someone with no IT background.
 - Match your explanation to the person. A manager needs the impact and timeline, while a coworker may want the details.
 - Confirm understanding by asking, "Does that make sense?" or summarizing next steps.
- **Customer service: stay patient and kind with frustrated users**
 - Remember that users are usually stressed about a deadline, not upset with you.
 - Listen first, acknowledge the frustration, then move to solving the problem.
 - Follow up to make sure the issue is actually fixed.
- **Problem-solving: stay calm and work through issues step by step**
 - Ask what changed, reproduce the issue, and test one thing at a time.
 - Start with the simple, likely causes before the complex ones.
 - Write down what you tried so you don't repeat steps or lose your place.
- **Time management: juggle multiple tickets and priorities**

- Prioritize by impact and urgency. One server down matters more than ten password resets.
- Set expectations with users about timelines, and update them if things change.
- Know when to escalate instead of sitting on a ticket too long.
- **Documentation: write clear notes others can follow**
 - Record the problem, the cause, and the fix in plain steps.
 - Write notes so a coworker could follow them without calling you.
 - Good documentation saves your team time and shows you think beyond the single ticket.
- **Teamwork and curiosity: ask questions, admit what you don't know, keep learning**
 - Saying "I'm not sure, let me find out" builds more trust than guessing.
 - Share what you learn with teammates.
 - Stay curious about new tools, and build a home lab or follow tech news to keep growing.

How to show these skills to employers

- On your resume, use real examples with results instead of just listing skills (for example, "Resolved 20+ customer issues per day while maintaining high satisfaction").
- In interviews, answer with short stories: the situation, what you did, and the result.
- Don't discount past jobs. Retail, food service, and other customer-facing roles build many of these skills.

Part 2 Checklist

- ☐ Pick one free learning resource and complete your first lesson
- ☐ Install VirtualBox (or similar) and create your first virtual machine
- ☐ Install Windows or Linux inside the virtual machine
- ☐ Open your computer's settings and find your IP address
- ☐ Choose your first certification (Tech+ or A+)
- ☐ Put an exam date on your calendar
- ☐ Start a notes document or blog for your projects
- ☐ Write down 3 times you solved a problem or helped someone at work or school

HOMEWORK CHALLENGE

Complete a mini home lab project: build a virtual machine, break something on purpose (like a network setting), and fix it. Write up what happened in 5 sentences: the problem, what you tried, and how you fixed it. This is your first interview story.

HOMEWORK CHALLENGE: BONUS

Explain how the internet works to a friend or family member in under 2 minutes, with no jargon. Ask if it made sense.

Part 3: Get in the Game

Building Your Resume Without Experience

- Keep it to one page
- Order: contact info, summary, skills, certifications, projects, work history, education
- Translate past jobs: "Resolved customer issues under pressure" counts
- List home lab projects and coursework like jobs
- Use keywords from job postings (many companies use software that scans resumes)
- Avoid typos, long paragraphs, and vague phrases like "hard worker"

BEFORE AND AFTER: RESUME BULLETS

Show actions and results, not vague traits. Swap in your own real numbers.

WEAK

Helped customers with problems.

STRONG

Resolved 20+ customer issues per day while maintaining a 95% satisfaction rating.

WEAK

Worked on computers at home.

STRONG

Built a Windows 11 virtual machine, diagnosed a DNS misconfiguration, and documented the fix.

WEAK

Hard worker and team player.

STRONG

Trained 4 new coworkers on the register system, cutting onboarding time by a day.

Finding and Reading Job Postings

Where to look

- LinkedIn, Indeed, and Dice
- Company career pages
- Local staffing agencies
- Government job sites (USAJobs, state and local)

Search keywords: help desk, IT support, desktop support, IT technician, service desk, datacenter technician, field technician

How to read a posting

- *Required* skills are the core. *Preferred* skills are a bonus.

- If you meet about 60 to 70% of the requirements, apply anyway.
- Look for repeated skills across postings and learn those.

Set up alerts

- Save your searches on LinkedIn and Indeed
- Turn on daily or instant email alerts
- Track every application in a simple spreadsheet (company, role, date, status, follow-up)

Networking and Job Fairs

Many jobs are filled through people, not postings.

- Update your LinkedIn with a clear photo, headline, and certifications
- Connect with recruiters, IT pros, and classmates
- Join local meetups and online communities (Reddit, Discord, LinkedIn groups)
- Ask IT professionals for a 15-minute chat about their career

Job fair checklist

- Bring printed resumes and a notepad
- Research attending companies ahead of time
- Prepare a 30-second introduction
- Ask about entry-level openings
- Collect contacts and send a thank-you within 24 hours

SAMPLE 30-SECOND INTRODUCTION

"Hi, I'm [Name]. I'm studying for my CompTIA A+ and I've built a home lab where I practice troubleshooting Windows and network problems. In my last job at [company], I helped 30+ customers a day, which taught me to stay calm and explain things clearly. I'm looking for an entry-level help desk or IT support role. What does your team look for in new hires?"

Part 3 Checklist

- ☐ Draft a one-page resume
- ☐ Rewrite 3 past job duties as IT-relevant bullet points
- ☐ Add one home lab project to your resume
- ☐ Set up 3 job alerts (LinkedIn, Indeed, and one more)
- ☐ Create a job search tracking spreadsheet
- ☐ Update your LinkedIn photo, headline, and certifications
- ☐ Write and practice your 30-second introduction
- ☐ Register for one job fair or IT meetup

HOMEWORK CHALLENGE

Apply to 5 jobs this week. For each one, highlight the keywords in the posting and make sure they appear in your resume. Log every application in your tracker.

HOMEWORK CHALLENGE: BONUS

Send 3 LinkedIn connection requests to IT professionals with a short, friendly note. Ask one of them for a 15-minute chat about their career.

Part 4: Land the Offer

Interview Skills

What to expect

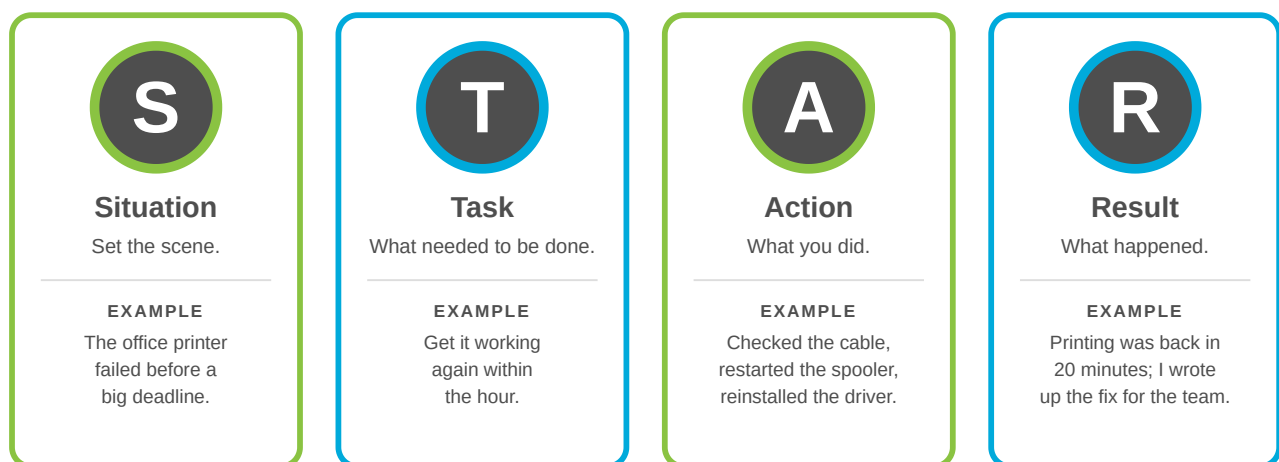
- **Phone screen:** a short conversation about your background and interest
- **Technical interview:** basic troubleshooting scenarios and IT concepts
- **Behavioral interview:** stories about how you handle situations

Common technical questions

- A user can't connect to the internet. What do you do?
- What's the difference between a router and a switch?
- How would you reset a forgotten password?

Behavioral answers with the STAR method

- **Situation:** set the scene
- **Task:** what needed to be done
- **Action:** what you did
- **Result:** what happened



Use STAR to structure answers to behavioral interview questions. Reference: [MIT CAPD, The STAR Method for Behavioral Interviews](#)

Practice

- Mock interviews with a friend, mentor, or career center
- Free online interview practice tools

- Record yourself answering and review it

Be ready to answer "Why IT?" Tell your story in 3 to 4 sentences.

Ask questions: What does a typical day look like? How does the team handle training? What does growth look like here?

Follow up with a short thank-you email within 24 hours.

ALEX'S MOCK INTERVIEWS

Alex's first mock interview with a career center volunteer goes badly. Alex freezes on "Tell me about yourself," rambles, and can't explain the difference between a router and a switch. The feedback stings but helps: use the STAR method, keep answers under two minutes, and practice out loud. Over the next week, Alex records answers on a phone, writes three STAR stories (including the family laptop fixes), and drills the common technical questions. In the second mock interview, Alex answers calmly, tells a clear story about fixing a printer, and gets the feedback: "I would hire you."

Evaluating and Accepting Your First Offer

- Look at the whole package: pay, benefits, schedule, training, growth
- Ask about certification reimbursement and paths for promotion
- Red flags: vague job duties, constant turnover, pressure to accept immediately
- Negotiation basics: be polite, ask once, and focus on market data for your area

OFFER EVALUATION CHECKLIST

- ☐ **Pay:** hourly or salary is in line with local market data
- ☐ **Benefits:** health insurance, paid time off, retirement match
- ☐ **Schedule:** hours, shifts, on-call duty, remote or hybrid options
- ☐ **Training:** onboarding plan and a mentor or buddy
- ☐ **Certifications:** exam voucher or study reimbursement
- ☐ **Growth:** a clear path to junior-level roles
- ☐ **Red flags:** vague duties, constant turnover, pressure to accept immediately

Part 4 Checklist

- ☐ Write your "Why IT?" answer in 3 to 4 sentences
- ☐ Write 3 STAR stories from work, school, or your home lab
- ☐ Practice answering the 3 common technical questions out loud
- ☐ Prepare 3 questions to ask an interviewer
- ☐ Schedule one mock interview
- ☐ Draft a thank-you email template
- ☐ Review the Offer Evaluation Checklist

HOMEWORK CHALLENGE

Record yourself answering "Tell me about yourself," "Why IT?" and "Tell me about a time you solved a problem." Watch it back and note one thing to improve for each answer. Re-record once.

HOMEWORK CHALLENGE: BONUS

Complete a full mock interview with a friend, mentor, or career center. Ask for honest feedback on your answers and body language.

Part 5: Where to Apply

Common Employers Hiring Entry-Level IT Talent

Employer type	Why they hire	Example names
Managed service providers (MSPs)	Support many client companies	Rackspace Technology, Ntiva, plus local MSPs
Large tech and cloud companies	Large support and operations teams	Microsoft, Amazon, Google, Apple
Datacenter and colocation companies	Hardware and facility operations	Equinix, Digital Realty, Iron Mountain
Healthcare systems	Support clinical staff and devices	HCA Healthcare, Kaiser Permanente, Mayo Clinic
Banks and financial firms	Large offices and strict IT needs	Bank of America, Wells Fargo, Capital One
Government and contractors	Stable, benefits-focused roles	Federal, state, and local agencies; Leidos, Booz Allen Hamilton
Universities and school districts	Support students, faculty, and labs	Your local college or school district
Retail and large corporations	Support stores, offices, and systems	Walmart, Target, Home Depot
Staffing and consulting firms	Place people in contract roles	Robert Half, TEKsystems, Insight Global

TIP: CONTRACT AND STAFFING ROLES

Contract and staffing roles are a common way to get your first experience. **Example:** a 3 to 6 month desktop support contract through a staffing firm gives you real resume experience and can lead to a full-time offer. Ask the recruiter whether the role is **contract-to-hire**.

Part 5 Checklist

- ☐ List 10 employers near you (or remote-friendly) from at least 4 categories
- ☐ Visit each career page and bookmark the entry-level openings
- ☐ Create an account or upload your resume on 3 career sites
- ☐ Contact one local staffing agency or MSP
- ☐ Add each employer to your job search tracker

HOMEWORK CHALLENGE

Pick your top 3 employers. For each one, find a real entry-level posting, tailor your resume to it, and apply. Then find one employee on LinkedIn at each company and follow them or send a connection request.

HOMEWORK CHALLENGE: FINAL

Look back at your Part 1 checklist. Which role did you pick, and how close are you to being ready to apply? Write down your next 3 steps and a target date for your first interview.



Ready to take the next step? We can help.

If you want help getting started, reach out to info@svhec.org.

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