

First IT Job Checklist

A practical path into IT support, NOC, field tech, or junior network work. This is not a magic formula. It is a way to build proof, apply to realistic roles, and avoid bad advice.

THE HONEST VERSION

A cert can help you get noticed. It does not guarantee an interview. What gets you hired is a mix of proof, communication, troubleshooting process, customer-service maturity, timing, and applying to roles that match your current level.

Start With Your Lane

Pick the shortest credible path from where you are now.

- **No tech background:** A+ plus Windows, M365, ticketing basics, and a small lab.
- **Networking focus:** Network+ for fundamentals, CCNA when you can commit to deeper networking.
- **Already hands-on:** Document real projects, repairs, scripts, labs, or support work.
- **Customer service background:** Translate it into user support, triage, documentation, and escalation.

Roles To Target

Do not only search for one job title.

- Service desk or help desk technician
- Desktop support or field technician
- NOC technician, Tier 1
- MSP support technician
- ISP support or network support technician
- Data center technician
- School district, local government, or small business IT

1

Build Proof Before You Apply Everywhere

Create 2 or 3 small projects you can explain clearly: a Windows support lab, a basic network lab, a ticket write-up, a backup/restore test, a VLAN/DHCP/DNS troubleshooting scenario, or a documented repair workflow.

2

Put Lab Work Under Projects, Not Employment

Do not list a home lab as a fake job. Use a Projects or Lab Work section with topology, tools used, what broke, how you found the cause, and what you learned.

3

Apply With Evidence, Not Just Keywords

Match the job posting language, but back it up. If the job mentions ticketing, M365, Active Directory, DNS, VPN, printers, imaging, or Wi-Fi, your resume should show where you touched or practiced those things.

RESUME CHECKLIST

- One page unless you have a real reason for more.
- Put certs and current study near the top.
- Group skills by category: Support, Networking, Systems, Tools.
- Use a Projects or Lab Work section for home lab work.
- Show customer-facing wins: de-escalation, documentation, accuracy, reliability.
- Do not claim production experience you do not have.
- Do not list every technology you have watched one video about.

PROOF PROJECTS THAT WORK

- Build a Windows VM, create users, break login, fix it, document it.
- Set up a small network with DHCP, DNS, VLANs, and a default gateway.
- Write a ticket for a no-internet issue, including checks and resolution.
- Use Wireshark or tcpdump to prove DNS, DHCP, or TCP behavior.
- Create a simple topology diagram and keep configs in a private repo.

INTERVIEW TOPICS

- How DHCP works, including DORA and lease renewal.
- DNS basics: records, resolver, cache, and what failure looks like.
- Default gateway, subnet, private IP, public IP, and NAT.
- TCP versus UDP, including the fact that some modern web traffic uses QUIC over UDP.
- How you troubleshoot a user who says "the internet is down."
- When to escalate and what information to include.

WHAT TO SAY ABOUT NO EXPERIENCE

Be direct. Say you have not supported production systems yet, then point to specific practice: "I have not owned production tickets yet. What I have done is build and troubleshoot a small lab with DHCP, DNS, VLANs, and Windows support scenarios. I know I need to follow your process, document my work, and escalate cleanly when I am out of scope."

FIRST 90 DAYS ON THE JOB

FOCUS

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

WHAT TO AVOID

Ticket quality

Clear notes, user impact, steps tried, evidence, next action.

"Fixed" with no notes or screenshots.

Escalation

Escalate with logs, scope, exact error, affected user/device, and what changed.

Throwing tickets over the wall.

Learning

Keep a private runbook of commands, fixes, and patterns.

Asking the same question without notes.

Trust

Be accurate, calm, honest, and easy to work with.

Overselling or hiding mistakes.

CERT GUIDANCE WITHOUT THE HYPE

CERT	BEST USE	REALITY CHECK
A+	Entry-level support, service desk, desktop support.	Strong starter signal for support roles, especially if you have no IT background.
Network+	Networking fundamentals, NOC, MSP, network support.	Good vendor-neutral foundation. CompTIA recommends A+ plus hands-on experience first for many candidates.
CCNA	NOC, network support, junior networking, serious network path.	Stronger networking signal than Network+ for many network teams, but it takes more time and depth.

Do not collect certifications to avoid applying. One relevant cert plus evidence and applications beats a pile of unfinished study plans.

SALARY REALITY

Do not treat national numbers as a promise. Your market, shift, company size, clearance, overtime, and location matter. Use BLS, local postings, and recruiter conversations together.

BENCHMARK	MAY 2024 MEDIAN
Computer user support specialists	\$60,340
Computer network support specialists	\$73,340
Network and systems administrators	\$96,800

RED FLAGS

- Unpaid trial work or vague contract terms.
- "Junior" role requiring senior ownership with no support.
- No training plan, no escalation path, and no documentation.
- On-call expectations without clear pay or rotation.
- MSP role with impossible ticket volume and no mentoring.
- Resume advice that tells you to fake titles or fake experience.

WEEKLY APPLICATION LOOP

- Pick 10 to 15 targeted roles, not 100 random one-click applications.
- Adjust the top third of your resume for the role category.
- Track company, title, date, contact, status, and follow-up.
- Find one human connection when possible: alumni, Discord, LinkedIn, local meetup, MSP owner, recruiter, or friend of a friend.
- Keep building proof while applying. Every lab, ticket write-up, and interview miss should improve the next attempt.

Sources for labor-market and certification context: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Outlook Handbook, CompTIA A+ and Network+ certification pages, and Cisco CCNA exam overview.