Note

Pay figures are approximate US averages from industry salary surveys — actual pay varies by market, experience, and role. Exam prices are current public list prices.

Disclaimer note block for salary sheet

The Heavy Hitters

CISSP	approx $130K-$160K, exam $749. Best for senior security roles, management track; needs 5 yrs experience
Google Cloud Profes-sional Architect	approx $140K-$160K, exam $200. Best for cloud architects going all-in on GCP
AWS Solutions Architect Associate	approx $130K-$155K, exam $150. Best for the most broadly demanded cloud cert
CKA (Kuber-netes Admin)	approx $125K-$150K, exam $395. Best for DevOps and platform engineers

Heavy Hitters block for salary sheet

Best ROI for Beginners

Security+ (SY0-701)	approx $95K-$115K, exam $404. The entry ticket to cybersecurity, DoD 8570 approved
CCNA (200-301)	approx $85K-$100K, exam $300. Still the most respected associate-level cert
Network+ (N10-009)	approx $75K-$90K, exam $404. Networking fundam-entals before the CCNA
Linux+ (XK0-006)	approx $80K-$100K, exam $404. The underrated one; Linux runs the cloud

Best ROI block for salary sheet

The Math That Matters

Exam cost vs first-year pay	a $404 Security+ exam against a ~$100K salary is 0.4% of year one
Experience multiplies	certs open the door; 2-3 years of experience moves you up the ranges
Stack, don't collect	Security+ to CySA+ to CISSP is a ladder; random certs are a pile
Cheapest entry	A $9.99 practice simulator + a $404 exam is the lowest-cost career change in tech

Math block for salary sheet

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