Best cloud certifications in 2026: AWS, Azure, Google Cloud and vendor-neutral options

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Short answer: take the certification for the cloud your employer or target employer runs on. AWS, Microsoft Azure and Google Cloud each have a clear ladder from foundational to associate to professional or expert. For cloud security, ISC2's CCSP is the best-known vendor-neutral option; CompTIA Cloud+ covers vendor-neutral cloud operations. For architects who design across clouds, a credential that tests design judgement rather than one provider's services, such as IICTP's CAP, complements a provider certification.

TL;DR The short version

- Take the certification for the cloud your employer or target employer runs on.
- AWS, Azure and Google Cloud each have a ladder from foundational to associate to professional or expert.
- For vendor-neutral options, ISC2's CCSP covers cloud security and CompTIA Cloud+ cloud operations; provider exams test that provider's services, not general design judgement.

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Which cloud first?

- Look at job adverts in your market and count which provider appears most.
- If your employer already runs on one cloud, choose that one: you can practise on real work.
- Skills transfer well. Once you know one cloud deeply, a second is mostly learning new names for familiar ideas.

The provider ladders

- **Foundational:** cloud concepts and the provider's main services. Useful for non-engineers and complete beginners; experienced engineers can usually skip it.
- **Associate:** the core certifications for working engineers: solutions architect, administrator, developer or engineer tracks.
- **Professional or expert:** advanced architecture, DevOps, security and data tracks for experienced practitioners.
- **Specialty:** networking, security, machine learning and data, once you work in that area.

By role

- **Cloud or solutions architect:** the provider's associate then professional architect track; IICTP CAP for design judgement across providers.
- **Cloud administrator or operations:** the provider's administrator or SysOps track; CompTIA Cloud+ if you want vendor-neutral.
- **Developer:** the provider's developer track, then Kubernetes certifications.
- **Security:** the provider's security specialty and ISC2 CCSP.
- **DevOps:** see best DevOps certifications.

What provider exams do not test

Provider exams prove you know that provider's services. They test less of the judgement that crosses providers: when not to use the cloud at all, how to avoid lock-in, how to control cost and how to design for failure. See multi-cloud architecture and lock-in and FinOps for engineers.

Related answers

- Best IT certifications by role
- Are IT certifications worth it?
- Vendor-neutral certifications for software engineers

Before you book

Certification bodies rename, update and retire exams often. Check each issuer's own page for current versions, prerequisites and fees before you book.

> Related credential: Cloud Architecture Practitioner. Explore the exam facts and syllabus.

Sources and further reading

1. AWS. AWS Certification. aws.amazon.com/certification.
2. Microsoft. Microsoft Credentials. learn.microsoft.com/credentials.
3. Google Cloud. Google Cloud certification. cloud.google.com/learn/certification.
4. ISC2. CCSP. isc2.org.
5. CompTIA. Cloud+. comptia.org/certifications.
6. IICTP. Exam facts, eligibility and blueprints. iictp.org/certifications/exam-facts.

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