Best cybersecurity certifications in 2026: entry level to security leadership

20 November 2026 · 7 min read · blogs.iictp.org/best-cybersecurity-certifications-2026

Short answer: CompTIA Security+ is the most common entry point; ISC2 CISSP and ISACA CISM are the established choices for experienced security professionals and managers; OffSec's OSCP and GIAC certifications are respected for hands-on technical work; and cloud providers' security certifications prove skill on one platform. Engineers who are not security specialists but own security decisions in their systems may want a broader technical credential that includes security, such as IICTP's CTP.

TL;DR The short version

- CompTIA Security+ is the common entry point, and ISC2 CISSP and ISACA CISM are the established choices for experienced professionals and managers.
- OffSec's OSCP and GIAC certifications are respected for hands-on work, since practical exams are closer to the job.
- Senior certifications usually require documented experience, and engineers who own security decisions may prefer a broader credential such as IICTP's CTP.

Read online, listen to it, or change the text size: https://blogs.iictp.org/best-cybersecurity-certifications-2026

By career stage

- **Getting started:** CompTIA Security+, or ISC2's entry-level Certified in Cybersecurity (CC).
- **Security analyst and blue team:** CompTIA CySA+ and GIAC certifications in detection and response.
- **Penetration testing and red team:** OffSec's OSCP, which uses a hands-on practical exam, and EC-Council's CEH, which is widely listed in job adverts.
- **Cloud security:** ISC2 CCSP and the security specialty from your cloud provider.
- **Security management and leadership:** ISC2 CISSP and ISACA CISM, both of which require several years of experience.
- **Audit, risk and governance:** ISACA CISA and CRISC.

Hands-on vs multiple choice

Practical exams, where you attack or defend a live environment, are closer to the job. Multiple-choice exams cover more breadth. Many security professionals hold one of each type.

Security for engineers who are not security specialists

Most security decisions are made by developers, platform engineers and tech leads, not by the security team. For them, the useful knowledge is least privilege, zero trust, the OWASP Top 10, DevSecOps and secrets management. IICTP's CTP tests these within its Infrastructure & Security domain, alongside architecture and delivery.

Check the experience rules

Senior security certifications usually require documented years of experience in defined areas, and some allow you to pass the exam first and become fully certified once you have the experience. Read the issuer's current rules before you book.

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: Certified Technical Practitioner. Explore the exam facts and syllabus.

Sources and further reading

1. CompTIA. Certifications. comptia.org/certifications.
2. ISC2. Certifications. isc2.org/certifications.
3. ISACA. Credentialing. isaca.org/credentialing.
4. OffSec. OSCP. offsec.com.
5. GIAC. Certifications. giac.org.
6. EC-Council. CEH. eccouncil.org.
7. IICTP. Exam facts, eligibility and blueprints. iictp.org/certifications/exam-facts.

Published by IICTP, an independent technical credential body, on 20 November 2026. The current version of this post is at https://blogs.iictp.org/best-cybersecurity-certifications-2026. More guides: blogs.iictp.org.