

Pass the CompTIA Security+ Exam First Try

CompTIA

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****I am keeping these walkthroughs as part of my Projects & Labs as it has helped many of my colleagues and fellow students.****

I passed the CompTIA Security+ exam with a **781/900** Below are the steps I took to pass confidently, and if even one person finds this information helpful, then I've achieved my goal in this post.

Foundational Knowledge

My journey originally started with my university coursework, which provided a strong foundation in networking and cybersecurity concepts. At the same time, I was introduced to the Sec+ certification by working through the official CompTIA Security+ (SY0-701) study guide while also completing all of the hands-on labs that paired with it. These labs helped tie the theory I was diving into with practical application, which was huge for retention and gaining a real-world understanding.

Prof Messer's free YouTube playlist I watched all of Professor Messer's SY0-701 video series on YouTube and took detailed notes throughout. His teaching style is incredibly concise and always makes complicated topics more digestible, and revisiting my notes later was crucial during review.

Acronyms and Port Numbers

Instead of blindly memorizing acronyms and what they stand for, it is extremely important to truly understand what each one stands for and how it can be applied in real-world context. Anytime you encounter an acronym for the first time, write it down; every time after that, say it out loud. This method is super helpful for memorization and understanding for myself. With this in mind, it is important to do the same — or something similar — for common port numbers (SSH, DNS, DHCP, HTTP, NTP, HTTPS, etc.).

Practice Exams

Practice exams are not to be skimmed over, how you practice is how you play. I went through all three of Professor Messer's practice exams and reviewed every single question, whether I got it right or wrong. I read all the answer explanations carefully, which helped me understand the reasoning behind each question and identify weak areas to revisit, or re-watch Messer videos on. It is also important to understand how CompTIA exams are set up beforehand and become comfortable with the formatting, and Messer's practice exams are very similar. Note, although it is not necessary to time yourself on every practice exam you take, it is important to get practice on a timer, to get a feel for the time management you will face during the real deal.

Practice Questions Although not every study source is as accurate as something like Professor Messer's exams, it's still beneficial to get as much practice as possible. That's why I used a variety of YouTube channels that covered Security+ practice questions. Some helpful ones included MLA Tech, Technical Institute of America, and Computer Networks Decoded, among others.

PBQs Performance-based questions are a significant part of the exam — even if you only get three. Preparing for them not only helps you answer those questions correctly, but also reinforces theoretical knowledge for the multiple-choice portion. The best practice I found — other than the Messer exams — came from two YouTube channels, with one standout. Cyberkraft offers a Security+ PBQ playlist that's decent for understanding question formats and reinforcing key topics. However, the real hidden gem was a channel called MLA Tech. Their extensive PBQ playlist was by far the most helpful and accurate resource I used to prepare for the performance-based section of the exam.

Confidence and Strategy

By the time exam day came, I felt prepared and confident. I stuck to my plan and trusted in the time and effort I had put into studying. Do not second-guess yourself or panic, just focus and execute. Also, you will never feel "ready" to take the exam, just go for it when you build enough confidence and you will excel.

Bonus Tips

Rotate Practice Exam Sources

Don't rely on just one set of practice questions. Mixing up your practice exam sources prevents you from memorizing patterns and helps you adapt to different styles of questioning. I only used Messer as I was already confident enough in my ability.

Build a Home Lab (If You Can) Although not a necessity, hands-on practice always reinforces learning. Even a simple home lab setup using virtual machines can help you understand topics like networking, permissions, and logging on a deeper level.

USE AI Using AI tools such as ChatGPT is incredibly helpful during the study process. Whether I needed quick explanations, simplified breakdowns of complex topics, or help understanding why I got a practice question wrong, AI was a resource I could always consult. It is especially useful for reinforcing concepts in your own words and getting additional context when other resources are not making sense.

Steps I Took to Pass the CompTIA Network+ Exam on My First Try

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I passed the CompTIA Network+ exam with a **805/900** about a month after earning my Security+ certification — and this time, I approached things with more clarity, more confidence, and a better sense of what works. And similar to the path I took with Security+, this wasn't about cramming or rushing — it was about showing up consistently, learning from my mistakes, and building a true understanding of the material. While I've already shared a step-by-step breakdown for how I approached the Security+ exam, I wanted this post to reflect what was **different** this time around.

Getting grounded in Networking

Unlike Security+, where I was learning a lot from scratch, Network+ felt more structured. It helped that I already had some exposure to network fundamentals through coursework, labs, and studying for Sec+. Still, this exam goes much deeper, as it's not just about knowing what an IP address is or how to subnet, it is more about understanding how everything connects, routes, and works together.

Like with any CompTIA exam I have prepared for, I started by watching **Professor Messer's playlist for N10-009**. He was my go-to for Security+, and as always, his content delivered. I followed along, took many key notes by hand, and paused often to make sure I really understood concepts like cabling, the OSI model, subnetting, VLANs, etc.

Subnetting, Ports, and Acronyms

For Security+, I picked up acronyms and port numbers along the way. With Network+, it has to be more intentional. There's more emphasis here on truly understanding how protocols and services interact (such as DHCP, DNS, NAT, and others listed in the exam objectives). I used repetition and wrote things out over and over, and if something didn't make sense I forced myself to slow down and work through it step by step until it clicked.

Exam Objectives This time around, I made it a point to manually go through the official **CompTIA Network+ exam objectives** line by line. I treated them like a weekly checklist making sure I could confidently explain each topic or identify anything I hadn't fully covered yet. It helped me stay focused and avoid wasting time on areas I already understood. This approach gave me a much clearer view of what CompTIA actually expects you to know and made my review and practice exam sessions way more efficient.

Practice Exams

This time, I intentionally diversified more when it came to practice material. And these are the main ones I used:

Andrew Ramdayal's free test on YouTube: This was the first practice test I completed, and it's an easy starting point and a great confidence booster to get the ball rolling. It helps you get comfortable seeing terms, acronyms, and other topics in a multiple-choice format. Great low-pressure setting.

Jason Dion's practice exams: Tougher than the real thing? Definitely, but in a good way. These helped me think more critically about the way questions are asked and also forces you to decipher the tricky wording you will see on the actual exam. I started on Dion's exams shortly after finishing the **Messer playlist** and scored "poorly" on most of them (high 60s/low 70s). At first, that stung, however those low scores showed me exactly where I needed to improve. I reviewed every explanation, filled in gaps with my notes, utilized AI to explain content, — such as ChatGPT — and circled back to Messer videos when needed. To jump forward a bit — a few days before the exam, I retook the Dion practice tests to make sure I could score higher than before and, more importantly, to confirm I wasn't just relying on memorization.

Cyber James' practice sets: Solid, clean, and honestly closer to the exam's style — but not difficulty, as James' practice exams tend to be easier. These helped reinforce knowledge and acronyms without overwhelming me. What really stood out is how well they cover the full range of exam objectives. Unlike Dion's exams, which tend to skip over a few areas, James' tests touched on terms and topics I hadn't seen elsewhere, helping me cover all the ground I needed.

PBQs Studying PBQs for this exam was more challenging, since there's far less material available compared to Security+. For that reason, ChatGPT became my go-to resource and it was incredibly helpful and interactive. It allowed me to break down concepts, walk through scenarios, and lock in the information in a way that stuck. I went over PBQs such as routing tables, ACL configurations, troubleshooting steps, and command-line familiarity. Surprisingly, I felt super prepared and confident because of this when test day came.

Confidence and Strategy

Something I've learned through both certs is that "feeling ready" is an illusion. I didn't walk into the exam room thinking I knew everything. I just trusted my prep and kept my mindset grounded. With that, I had no entirely different strategies this time around and approached it nearly the same way.