✦ FREE SAMPLE PREVIEW ✦

✦ BOOK 1 — CAREER CHANGER SERIES ✦

CompTIA Security+

SY0-701

The Career Changer's Study Guide

Domain-by-Domain Exam Prep — Written for People Without an IT Background

- All 28 SY0-701 exam objectives covered domain-by-domain
- Hands-on labs & TryHackMe room mapping per domain
- Written for career changers with no IT background

13	240+	11	5
CHAPTERS	PRACTICE QS	DIAGRAMS	PBQ SIMS

Renu Sharma

THIRD EDITION — MARCH 2026

mycybersecuritypath.com

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CompTIA Security+ SY0-701: The Career Changer's Study Guide

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Domain-by-Domain Exam Prep — Written for People Without an IT Background

By Renu Sharma

MyCyberSecurityPath Career Changer Series — Book 1

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This guide contains AI-assisted content creation. All learning experiences, opinions, and career journey details are the author's own. Technical content has been verified against official CompTIA documentation, NIST publications, and industry-standard references.

Published by MyCyberSecurityPath mycybersecuritypath.com

About the Author

I'm **Renu Sharma** — a career changer in my forties, learning cybersecurity from scratch.

Before this, I worked in real estate in India, aged care in Adelaide, and delivery driving in Sydney. None of that sounds like a cybersecurity resume — and for a long time, I thought that was a problem. It isn't.

MyCyberSecurityPath.com is the guide I wished existed when I started. Every word comes from my own study notes, mistakes, and breakthroughs.

Technical Advisor: My husband, **Mohit Saxena**, reviews all technical content for accuracy. Mohit is a Senior Engineer with 17+ years at Cisco, Adobe, Capgemini, UNSW, and Australian government organisations. He brings deep expertise in software security, cloud architecture, and DevSecOps.

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Why This Book

I wrote this book because I needed it and it didn't exist.

When I decided to pursue Security+, I bought a Sybex study guide. It's a great book — thorough, accurate, and comprehensive. I opened it, read the first chapter, and immediately felt like I was drowning. It assumed I knew what the OSI model was. It assumed I understood how TCP/IP worked. It assumed I had spent years in IT and just needed to learn the security-specific parts.

I had none of that. I was a delivery driver in Sydney who had decided to change careers.

So I had to build my own bridge. I watched Professor Messer's free videos (brilliant, but fast). I read Reddit posts from other career changers (helpful, but scattered). I joined Discord study groups (supportive, but chaotic). And slowly, painfully, the pieces started clicking.

This book is the result of that process. It's the guide I wish I'd had from day one — one that explains every concept as if you've never touched a command line, because when I started, I hadn't.

What makes this different from other Security+ study guides:

- **No assumed IT background.** Every technical term is explained in plain English before it's used in an exam context. If I use jargon, I translate it immediately.

- **Career-changer study schedules.** Because you're probably studying while working a full-time job, not sitting in a classroom.
- **Real-world analogies first, exam language second.** I explain what a concept actually means in the real world, then show you how CompTIA words it on the exam.
- **Hands-on labs per domain.** Not just theory — actual exercises you can do on TryHackMe or in your home lab.
- **"When you're stuck" recovery tips.** Because you will get stuck, and that's normal, and here's what to do about it.
- **Honest about difficulty.** Some domains are harder than others. I'll tell you which ones and why.

> 💡 **KEY INSIGHT**
>
> This book is comprehensive for the SY0-701 exam, but it's written at a different altitude than Sybex or Darril Gibson's guides. They go deeper on technical minutiae. This guide goes deeper on making those concepts accessible to someone starting from zero. Used together, they're a powerful combination. Used alone, this guide covers everything you need to pass — I just explain it differently.

How to Use This Book

You don't have to read this cover to cover. Here's how to get the most value based on where you are:

If you're brand new to cybersecurity: Read Chapters 1-4 first. They'll give you the foundation that makes everything else click. Then work through Domains 1-5 in order.

If you already have some IT experience: Skip to Chapter 4 (Networking & Crypto Crash Course) to check your foundations, then jump into the Domain chapters (5-9). Use the Diagnostic Pre-Assessment to identify your weak areas.

If you're already studying and need exam practice: Go straight to the Domain chapters for the areas where you're weakest, do the hands-on labs, then tackle Appendix B (Full Practice Exam).

If you're panicking because your exam is next week: Read Chapter 10 (PBQ Strategy), do the Domain Essentials summaries at the end of each domain chapter, review Appendix A (Cheat Sheet), and take the practice exam in Appendix B.

Callout Legend

Throughout this book, you'll see these callout boxes:

> **▶ ACTION STEP**
>
> Something you can do right now. Don't just read — do.

> **💡 KEY INSIGHT**
>
> An important concept or "aha moment" that's worth pausing to absorb.

> **⚠ WARNING**
>
> A common mistake or danger to avoid. Pay attention to these — they're often exam traps.

> **✓ TIP**
>
> A helpful shortcut or best practice that'll save you time.

> **📋 WORKSHEET**
>
> A self-assessment or planning exercise. Grab a pen.

Companion Resources

- **Free website content:** mycybersecuritypath.com — 120+ pages of free cybersecurity career guidance
- **Newsletter:** Weekly study tips and career change updates — mycybersecuritypath.com/newsletter
- **Other books in this series:** Career Roadmap + Study Tracker, Interview Guide (see "What's Next" at the end)

Important Disclaimers

This guide is provided for **educational and informational purposes only**.

No Employment Guarantees. Nothing in this guide guarantees employment, a specific salary, or career outcomes. The cybersecurity field is competitive, and success depends on individual effort, market conditions, location, prior experience, and many other factors. Passing Security+ positions you for success — it does not guarantee it.

Certification Information. Exam objectives, format, pricing, and policies are based on publicly available CompTIA information as of March 2026. CompTIA regularly updates exam content. Always verify current information directly at comptia.org before making purchasing decisions.

Salary Data. All salary figures cited in this guide are sourced from publicly available data including the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), CyberSeek.org, Glassdoor, Seek.com.au, and the Hays Salary Guide. Compensation varies significantly by geography, company size, experience level, and economic conditions. Individual results vary.

Security Practices. Any technical guidance, tool recommendations, or security practices described in this guide are for educational purposes only. Only perform security testing activities on systems you own or have explicit written permission to test. Always follow applicable laws, employer policies, and ethical guidelines.

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Diagnostic Pre-Assessment

Before you start studying, take this 20-question diagnostic to identify your strongest and weakest domains. Don't worry about your score — this is a starting point, not a judgment. Most career changers score 3-7 out of 20 on their first attempt, and that's perfectly fine.

Instructions: Choose the best answer for each question. Check your answers at the end and note which domains need the most attention.

Questions

1. Which security concept ensures that data has not been altered or tampered with during transmission? *(Domain 1)*

- A) Confidentiality
- B) Availability
- C) Integrity
- D) Non-repudiation

2. A company requires employees to use both a password and a fingerprint scan to access the building. What type of authentication is this? *(Domain 1)*

- A) Single-factor authentication
- B) Multi-factor authentication
- C) Single sign-on
- D) Federation

3. An attacker sends an email pretending to be the company CEO, asking the finance team to transfer funds. What type of attack is this? *(Domain 2)*

- A) Phishing
- B) Whaling
- C) Vishing
- D) Smishing

4. Which threat actor is MOST likely to be motivated by political or social change rather than financial gain? *(Domain 2)*

- A) Nation-state
- B) Organised crime
- C) Hacktivist
- D) Script kiddie

5. What does the "shared responsibility model" in cloud computing mean? *(Domain 3)*

- A) All security is the cloud provider's responsibility
- B) Security responsibilities are divided between the provider and the customer
- C) The customer is responsible for all security
- D) Security is outsourced to a third party

6. An organisation needs to ensure their web application can continue operating even if one server fails. Which concept applies? *(Domain 3)*

- A) Load balancing
- B) Encryption
- C) Data masking
- D) Tokenisation

7. Which of the following is the BEST description of a SIEM system? *(Domain 4)*

- A) A firewall that blocks malicious traffic
- B) A tool that collects, correlates, and analyses security logs from multiple sources
- C) An antivirus solution for endpoint protection
- D) A backup system for disaster recovery

8. During an incident response, what is the FIRST step after detecting a potential security breach? *(Domain 4)*

- A) Eradication
- B) Recovery
- C) Containment
- D) Lessons learned

9. What is the purpose of a Business Impact Analysis (BIA)? *(Domain 5)*

- A) To identify which employees should be terminated after a breach
- B) To assess the potential effects of disruptions on business operations
- C) To calculate the cost of new security tools
- D) To determine which compliance frameworks to follow

10. Which regulation specifically governs the protection of healthcare patient data in the United States? *(Domain 5)*

- A) GDPR
- B) PCI-DSS
- C) HIPAA
- D) SOX

11. What is the primary purpose of the principle of least privilege? *(Domain 1)*

- A) Give all employees the same access level for simplicity
- B) Grant users only the minimum access needed to perform their job functions

- C) Restrict access to the IT department only
- D) Allow temporary elevated access for all users

12. Which type of malware encrypts a victim's files and demands payment for the decryption key? *(Domain 2)*

- A) Trojan
- B) Worm
- C) Ransomware
- D) Rootkit

13. What does RPO (Recovery Point Objective) measure? *(Domain 3)*

- A) How quickly systems must be restored after a failure
- B) The maximum acceptable amount of data loss measured in time
- C) The total cost of a disaster recovery plan
- D) The number of backups stored offsite

14. An analyst notices unusual outbound traffic from a workstation at 3 AM. The workstation belongs to an employee who works 9-5. What should the analyst do FIRST? *(Domain 4)*

- A) Delete the workstation's hard drive
- B) Ignore it — could be an automatic update
- C) Investigate and document the activity
- D) Immediately disconnect the entire network

15. Which encryption type uses the SAME key for both encrypting and decrypting data? *(Domain 1)*

- A) Asymmetric encryption
- B) Symmetric encryption
- C) Hashing
- D) Digital signature

16. What is the MAIN difference between a vulnerability scan and a penetration test? *(Domain 4)*

- A) There is no difference
- B) A vulnerability scan identifies weaknesses; a penetration test actively exploits them
- C) A penetration test is automated; a vulnerability scan is manual

- D) A vulnerability scan is more expensive

17. Which framework was developed by NIST specifically for improving critical infrastructure cybersecurity? *(Domain 5)*

- A) ISO 27001
- B) COBIT
- C) NIST Cybersecurity Framework (CSF)
- D) PCI-DSS

18. A company processes credit card payments. Which compliance standard MUST they follow? *(Domain 5)*

- A) HIPAA
- B) GDPR
- C) PCI-DSS
- D) SOX

19. In a Zero Trust architecture, what is the fundamental assumption? *(Domain 1)*

- A) Internal network traffic is always safe
- B) Never trust, always verify — regardless of network location
- C) Firewalls are sufficient for security
- D) Only external traffic needs to be inspected

20. Which of the following BEST describes the purpose of a change management process? *(Domain 1)*

- A) To speed up software deployments by skipping testing
- B) To ensure changes to systems are evaluated, approved, and documented before implementation
- C) To prevent any changes from being made to production systems
- D) To automate all system updates

Answer Key

#	ANSWER	DOMAIN	EXPLANATION
1	**C**	1	Integrity ensures data hasn't been modified. Confidentiality protects against unauthorised access. Availability ensures systems are accessible. Non-repudiation proves who sent a message.
2	**B**	1	MFA requires two or more different authentication factors: something you know (password) + something you are (fingerprint). Both being passwords would be single-factor with two steps.
3	**B**	2	Whaling specifically targets high-profile individuals (CEO, CFO). Phishing is the general category. Vishing is voice-based. Smishing is SMS-based.
4	**C**	2	Hacktivists are motivated by ideology, politics, or social causes. Nation-states pursue geopolitical goals. Organised crime seeks money. Script kiddies seek attention or fun.
5	**B**	3	In shared responsibility, the cloud provider secures the infrastructure; the customer secures their data, access, and configurations. The split depends on the service model (IaaS/PaaS/SaaS).
6	**A**	3	Load balancing distributes traffic across multiple servers so if one fails, others handle the load. This provides high availability and resilience.
7	**B**	4	A SIEM (Security Information and Event Management) collects logs from multiple sources, correlates events, and helps analysts detect threats. It's not a firewall, antivirus, or backup.
8	**C**	4	The IR lifecycle: Preparation → Detection → Containment → Eradication → Recovery → Lessons Learned. After detection, contain the threat to prevent further damage.
9	**B**	5	A BIA identifies critical business functions and assesses the impact of disruptions — financial loss, operational downtime, reputational damage. It drives disaster recovery planning.

#	ANSWER	DOMAIN	EXPLANATION
10	**C**	5	HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) governs healthcare data in the US. GDPR is EU privacy. PCI-DSS is payment cards. SOX is financial reporting.
11	**B**	1	Least privilege means users get only the access they need — nothing more. This limits damage if an account is compromised.
12	**C**	2	Ransomware encrypts files and demands payment. Trojans disguise as legitimate software. Worms self-replicate across networks. Rootkits hide deep in the OS.
13	**B**	3	RPO = maximum acceptable data loss in time. If RPO is 4 hours, backups must run at least every 4 hours. RTO is how quickly systems must be restored.
14	**C**	4	Investigate first — document the traffic, check for indicators of compromise, determine if it's malicious or benign. Don't destroy evidence (A), ignore it (B), or overreact (D).
15	**B**	1	Symmetric encryption uses one shared key (AES, DES). Asymmetric uses a key pair — public and private (RSA, ECC). Hashing is one-way and doesn't decrypt.
16	**B**	4	Vulnerability scans are automated tools that find weaknesses. Penetration tests are manual (usually) and actively exploit those weaknesses to prove impact. Pen tests go further.
17	**C**	5	NIST CSF provides a voluntary framework for managing cybersecurity risk. ISO 27001 is international. COBIT is IT governance. PCI-DSS is payment cards.
18	**C**	5	PCI-DSS (Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard) applies to any organisation that processes, stores, or transmits credit card data.
19	**B**	1	Zero Trust assumes no user or device is trusted by default — even inside the network. Every access request must be verified, authenticated, and authorised.

#	ANSWER	DOMAIN	EXPLANATION
20	**B**	1	Change management ensures modifications are planned, tested, approved, and documented. It prevents untested changes from breaking systems or creating vulnerabilities.

Score Your Domains

DOMAIN	QUESTIONS	YOUR SCORE
Domain 1: General Security Concepts	1, 2, 11, 15, 19, 20	___/6
Domain 2: Threats, Vulnerabilities & Mitigations	3, 4, 12	___/3
Domain 3: Security Architecture	5, 6, 13	___/3
Domain 4: Security Operations	7, 8, 14, 16	___/4
Domain 5: Security Program Management	9, 10, 17, 18	___/4
Total		**___/20**

How to interpret:

- **0-4 correct:** You're starting from the beginning — that's okay. Read Chapters 1-4 first, then work through every domain chapter in order. Give yourself the 12-week study plan.
- **5-10 correct:** You have foundations. Focus extra time on the domains where you scored lowest. The 8-week plan is realistic for you.
- **11-15 correct:** You have solid background knowledge. Use this book for the domains where you're weakest and for exam strategy (Chapters 10-12).
- **16-20 correct:** You're close to exam-ready. Focus on practice questions, PBQ simulations, and the full practice exam. You may be ready in 4-6 weeks.

> 💡 **KEY INSIGHT**
>
> Most career changers score 3-7 on their first attempt. If that's you, you're in exactly the right place. This book is designed to take you from wherever you are to exam-ready. The diagnostic isn't a measure of your potential — it's a map of where to focus.

CHAPTER 1

FOUNDATIONS

Why Security+ Is Your Best First Cert

The data-backed case for Security+ as your first certification, ROI analysis, and what it unlocks for career changers.

Chapter 1: Why Security+ Is Your Best First Cert

When I started researching cybersecurity certifications, I was overwhelmed. CompTIA A+, Network+, Security+, CySA+, CISSP, CEH, OSCP — the list goes on. Everyone had a different opinion about which one to get first. Some people said start with A+ because

you need IT fundamentals. Others said go straight for CISSP because it's the "gold standard." The advice was contradictory, confusing, and mostly written by people who already had five certifications and couldn't remember what it was like to have zero.

After months of research, talking to hiring managers, reading job postings, and studying the actual data, I landed on Security+. And the more I learn, the more I believe it's the right first cert for most career changers. Here's why.

The Numbers That Made My Decision

According to CyberSeek.org (a project funded by NICE and CompTIA), Security+ is requested in more entry-level cybersecurity job postings than any other single certification. As of March 2026:

- **Over 750,000 active job postings** in the US reference cybersecurity skills
- Security+ appears in approximately **200,000+ job postings** annually
- It's the **#1 requested certification** for SOC Analyst, Security Analyst, and IT Security Specialist roles
- The U.S. Department of Defense requires Security+ (or equivalent) for anyone performing **Information Assurance Technical (IAT) Level II** functions — that's a massive government hiring pipeline

(Sources: CyberSeek.org, CompTIA State of Cybersecurity 2025, DoD Directive 8140)

> 💡 **KEY INSIGHT**
>
> Security+ isn't just a certification — it's a hiring filter. Many organisations use it as a checkbox requirement. Without it, your resume may never reach a human reviewer, regardless of your skills.

What Security+ Actually Proves

Security+ validates that you can:

1. **Assess the security posture** of an organisation and recommend solutions
2. **Monitor and secure** hybrid environments (cloud, mobile, IoT, on-premises)
3. **Operate with awareness** of applicable laws, regulations, and frameworks
4. **Identify, analyse, and respond** to security events and incidents
5. **Implement security controls** to meet organisational objectives

In plain English: it proves you understand how cybersecurity works at a professional level and can do the job of an entry-level security analyst.

Security+ vs. Other Certifications: A Career Changer's Decision

CERTIFICATION DECISION TREE

IT EXPERIENCE?	NETWORKING BASICS?	RECOMMENDED PATH
Yes	Yes	**Security+** — go directly
Yes	No	**Network+** first, then Security+
No	Daily computer user	**Security+** — use Ch 4 crash course
No	Not comfortable	**A+ first** to build IT basics

Recommendation: Most career changers go straight to Security+ with this book.

Here's how I'd think about the decision:

"Should I get A+ first?" Maybe, but not necessarily. A+ proves you can support IT hardware and software — help desk, desktop support, troubleshooting printers. If you have zero familiarity with computers (like, you've never installed software or configured a Wi-Fi router), A+ might help build confidence. But many career changers skip straight to Security+ and do fine. The Networking & Crypto Crash Course in Chapter 4 covers what you need.

"Should I get Network+ first?" Network+ is valuable if networking concepts genuinely terrify you. But here's the thing: Security+ covers networking within its own curriculum. You'll learn enough networking to pass Security+ without a separate certification. If you want to be extra prepared, study networking concepts alongside your Security+ prep — don't delay Security+ to take a separate exam.

"What about CISSP?" CISSP requires five years of professional cybersecurity experience. It's not a starter cert. You'll aim for CISSP later in your career.

"What about CEH (Certified Ethical Hacker)?" CEH is offensive security focused (hacking, penetration testing). Security+ is broader — it covers defence, operations, governance, and risk. For career changers, Security+ opens more doors because it applies to more job roles.

The Real Cost of Security+

Let's be honest about the investment:

ITEM	COST (AS OF MARCH 2026)	NOTES
Exam voucher	$404 USD	Single attempt; purchase from comptia.org or authorised resellers
Retake bundle	~$607 USD	Includes one retake — recommended if you're anxious about failing
Study materials	$0-150	This book + free resources can be enough; add Sybex or practice exams if budget allows
Practice exams	$0-50	Free options exist (Professor Messer study groups); paid options like Dion or Kaplan add value
Total realistic investment	**$404-760**	You can pass for under $500 with discipline

(Source: comptia.org pricing page, verified March 2026)

> ✓ **TIP**
>
> Ask your current employer about **education reimbursement** — even non-IT employers often have professional development budgets. Also check if your country offers government-funded retraining programmes (Australia's JobTrainer, UK's Skills Bootcamps, US GI Bill for veterans).

What Security+ Unlocks

Passing Security+ doesn't just give you a certification. It gives you:

1. **Resume credibility.** Hiring managers take your application seriously.
2. **DoD eligibility.** Opens government and defence contractor positions.
3. **Salary uplift.** Security±certified professionals earn a median of $80,000-$95,000 USD in the US, according to the CompTIA IT Salary Survey and CyberSeek (as of 2025). In Australia, the equivalent range is approximately AUD $75,000-$100,000 for entry-level security roles (source: Seek.com.au, Hays Salary Guide 2025). Individual results vary significantly by location, experience, and employer.
4. **Confidence.** You studied, you passed, and you know the material. The impostor syndrome doesn't disappear, but it gets quieter.

5. **Certification pathway.** Security+ feeds into CySA+ (intermediate), PenTest+ (offensive), and eventually CASP+ and CISSP (advanced).

> **▶ ACTION STEP**
>
> Go to cyberseek.org right now and look at the “Career Pathway” tool. Enter “Security+” and see which job roles it qualifies you for. Seeing real job titles attached to this certification makes the investment feel concrete, not theoretical.

CHAPTER 3

FOUNDATIONS

The Career Changer's Mindset

Managing fear, failure, and impostor syndrome. Study-life balance strategies for working adults.

Chapter 3: The Career Changer’s Mindset — Fear, Failure & Moving Forward

This chapter doesn’t contain any exam content. There are no practice questions at the end. CompTIA won’t test you on what you read here.

But I'm including it because it might be the most important chapter in the book.

When I started studying for Security+, the technical content wasn't my biggest obstacle. My biggest obstacle was the voice in my head that said, "Who are you kidding? You were driving deliveries six months ago. You're not cut out for this."

If you're a career changer, you probably have your own version of that voice. Maybe it says:

- "I'm too old to learn this."
- "Everyone else in cybersecurity has a CS degree."
- "I don't understand any of this — maybe I should quit."
- "What if I fail the exam and waste $404?"
- "What if I pass and still can't get a job?"

I want to be honest with you about all of this. Not motivational-poster honest. Actually honest.

The Fear Is Real — And It's Normal

Changing careers is one of the hardest things an adult can do. You're not just learning new material — you're rebuilding your professional identity. You're walking away from the thing you know how to do and toward something you don't know how to do yet. That takes courage, and it's completely normal to feel afraid.

The fear doesn't mean you're not ready. It means you're taking this seriously.

You Will Get Stuck

There's a moment in every career changer's Security+ journey — usually somewhere around Domain 3 (Security Architecture) or Domain 4 (Security Operations) — where the material suddenly feels impossible. The acronyms blur together. The concepts don't stick. You read the same paragraph three times and still don't understand it.

This happens to everyone. It happened to me. Here's what I've learned about getting unstuck:

1. Switch the medium. If reading isn't working, watch a video. If videos aren't working, do a hands-on lab. If labs aren't working, explain the concept to someone else (or to your dog — seriously). Different representations of the same concept activate different parts of your brain.

2. Go smaller. Don't try to understand an entire domain in one sitting. Break it into the smallest possible piece. Instead of "understand Domain 4," try "understand what a SIEM does." Just that one thing. Then the next thing.

3. Sleep on it. This isn't a platitude — it's neuroscience. Your brain consolidates new information during sleep. If something isn't clicking at 11 PM, stop studying and try again in the morning. It will often make more sense after rest.

4. Ask for help. The r/CompTIA subreddit is full of people who were stuck on the exact same concept you're stuck on. Professor Messer's free study groups are another great resource. You're not the first person to struggle with subnetting or PKI — and the people who struggled before you are usually the most helpful.

> 🔄 ***Stuck?*** *If a concept feels impossible right now, try this:*
>
> 1. *Watch Professor Messer's video on that specific topic (free, 5-10 minutes)*
> 2. *Do a related TryHackMe room (hands-on makes it click)*
> 3. *Come back to this section after the hands-on experience Remember: you don't need to understand everything on the first read. Understanding builds in layers.*

What If I Fail?

Let's talk about this directly, because most study guides pretend it doesn't happen.

The pass rate for Security+ is not publicly disclosed by CompTIA. Various industry estimates suggest it's somewhere around 50-60% on the first attempt. That means a significant number of people — including IT professionals with years of experience — don't pass the first time.

If you fail:

- **It's not the end.** You can retake the exam after 14 days.
- **CompTIA gives you a score report** that shows which domains you were weakest in. Use this to target your studying.
- **The retake bundle** ($607 instead of $404) includes a free second attempt. If you're worried about failing, buy this instead.
- **Many successful cybersecurity professionals failed on their first attempt.** This is not a secret — browse r/CompTIA and you'll see hundreds of "Failed, then passed" stories.

- **A failed attempt is not wasted studying.** You still learned the material. You just need more time with specific topics.

> 💡 **KEY INSIGHT**
>
> The $404 exam fee feels huge when you're a career changer on a budget. I understand — I felt the same way. But think of it this way: if your eventual cybersecurity salary is $80,000 and your current salary is $45,000, passing Security+ moves you toward a $35,000 annual increase. The $404 is not a cost — it's the entry ticket to a career that pays for itself many times over. That said, only book the exam when you consistently score 80%+ on practice tests.

Studying While Working Full-Time

Most career changers can't quit their job to study. You're fitting Security+ preparation into the margins of an already full life — early mornings, lunch breaks, evenings after the kids are asleep, weekends.

Here's what works:

1. Consistency beats marathon sessions. Thirty minutes every day is more effective than five hours on Saturday. Your brain builds neural pathways through repetition, not endurance.

2. Use dead time. Commute? Listen to Professor Messer's audio. Waiting for an appointment? Review flashcards on your phone. Cooking dinner? Run a TryHackMe room on your laptop in the kitchen. I'm not suggesting you never rest — but there's more available study time in your day than you think.

3. Tell someone you're doing this. Accountability matters. Tell your partner, a friend, a parent — anyone. "I'm studying for a cybersecurity certification" sounds real when you say it out loud. It also means they'll check in on your progress, which helps on the days you want to quit.

4. Protect your study time. Block it on your calendar like a meeting. It's easy to let "I'll study tonight" become "I'll study tomorrow." Decide when you study, and defend that time.

5. Be honest about your timeline. If you can study 2 hours a day, the 8-week plan is realistic. If you can only do 1 hour a day, give yourself 12-16 weeks. Rushing to an exam you're not ready for wastes money. Patience is cheaper than a retake.

The Advantage You Don't Know You Have

Here's something no one tells career changers: **your previous career is not a disadvantage. It's a differentiation.**

Every other Security+ candidate with an IT background has... an IT background. You have something different. You have:

- **Communication skills** from customer-facing roles
- **Problem-solving experience** from running a household, managing a store, or navigating a healthcare system
- **Resilience** from surviving a career change (most people only dream about it)
- **A fresh perspective** that IT-native professionals don't have

In interviews, "I taught myself cybersecurity from zero while working as a delivery driver" is a more compelling story than "I got Security+ because my manager told me to."

> **▶ ACTION STEP**
>
> Write down three skills from your current or previous career that could apply to cybersecurity. Not sure? Here are some examples:
>
> - Teaching → Security awareness training, explaining complex topics to non-technical staff
> - Healthcare → Compliance knowledge (HIPAA), attention to detail, high-stakes decision making
> - Military → Incident response, following procedures under pressure, chain of command
> - Finance → Risk assessment, fraud detection, regulatory compliance
> - Retail → Customer service, handling stressful situations, attention to process
> - Project management → Change management, documentation, stakeholder communication
>
> Keep this list. You'll need it for interviews.

> **✓ TIP**
>
> I send weekly study tips and career change updates to fellow career changers. If that sounds useful, join at mycybersecuritypath.com/newsletter — no spam, unsubscribe anytime.

CHAPTER 5

EXAM DOMAINS

Domain 1: General Security Concepts (12%)

Security controls, CIA Triad, Zero Trust, AAA, change management, and cryptographic solutions.

Chapter 5: Domain 1 — General Security Concepts (12%)

Exam weight: 12% (~11 questions). This domain covers foundational concepts that underpin everything else. Get this right and the other domains make much more sense.

Domain 1 has four exam objectives. We'll cover each one in detail.

1.1 Compare and Contrast Various Types of Security Controls

Security controls are the safeguards and countermeasures that organisations put in place to protect their assets. They're classified in two ways: by **category** (who implements them) and by **type** (what they do).

Control Categories

CATEGORY	WHO IMPLEMENTS IT	EXAMPLES
Technical	Technology and systems	Firewalls, encryption, antivirus, access controls, IDS/IPS
Managerial (Administrative)	Policies and procedures	Security policies, risk assessments, background checks, training programmes
Operational	People and daily processes	Security guards, change management procedures, incident response plans
Physical	Physical barriers and protections	Locks, fences, cameras, biometric scanners, mantraps

Control Types

TYPE	PURPOSE	EXAMPLE
Preventive	Stop an incident before it happens	Firewall blocking malicious traffic, locked door
Detective	Identify that an incident is occurring or has occurred	IDS alert, security camera, log monitoring
Corrective	Fix the damage after an incident	Restoring from backup, patching a vulnerability
Deterrent	Discourage attackers from trying	Warning signs, login banners, security cameras (visible)
Compensating	Alternative control when the primary control isn't feasible	Using encryption when you can't physically secure a laptop
Directive	Direct people to follow security policies	Acceptable use policy, mandatory training

> 💡 **KEY INSIGHT**
>
> The exam loves to test the difference between **detective** and **preventive** controls. A firewall is preventive (blocks traffic). An IDS (Intrusion Detection System) is detective (alerts you to suspicious traffic but doesn't block it). An IPS (Intrusion Prevention System) is both — it detects and blocks.

> ✓ **TIP**
>
> Think about your previous career. A "Wet Floor" sign is a **directive** control. A security camera is **detective**. A locked door is **preventive**. A first aid kit is **corrective**. You already understand these concepts — they just have formal names now.

1.2 Summarize Fundamental Security Concepts

This is the broadest objective in Domain 1. It covers the principles that guide every security decision.

The CIA Triad

Every cybersecurity concept traces back to three principles:

- **Confidentiality** — Only authorised people can access information. Encryption, access controls, and classification all protect confidentiality. *Threat: data breach.*
- **Integrity** — Information is accurate and hasn't been tampered with. Hashing, digital signatures, and version control protect integrity. *Threat: data manipulation.*
- **Availability** — Systems and data are accessible when needed. Redundancy, backups, and load balancing protect availability. *Threat: DDoS attack.*

Zero Trust

Traditional security model: "Trust everything inside the network, verify everything outside." This fails because once an attacker gets inside, they can move freely.

Zero Trust model: **"Never trust, always verify."** Every user, every device, every request is verified — regardless of whether it comes from inside or outside the network.

Key Zero Trust principles:

- Verify explicitly — authenticate and authorise every access request
- Use least privilege access — give minimum permissions needed
- Assume breach — design systems as if attackers are already inside
- Microsegmentation — divide the network into small zones that require separate authentication
- Continuous validation — don't just check once at login; verify throughout the session

(Reference: NIST SP 800-207 — Zero Trust Architecture)

AAA Framework

COMPONENT	WHAT IT DOES	EXAMPLE
Authentication	Proves who you are	Username + password, biometric, smart card
Authorisation	Determines what you can do	File permissions, role-based access
Accounting	Records what you did	Audit logs, session logs, access history

Authentication Factors

FACTOR	TYPE	EXAMPLES
Something you **know**	Knowledge	Password, PIN, security question
Something you **have**	Possession	Smart card, hardware token, phone (SMS code)
Something you **are**	Inherence (biometric)	Fingerprint, face scan, iris scan, voice
Somewhere you **are**	Location	GPS, IP geolocation
Something you **do**	Behaviour	Typing pattern, gait analysis

Multi-factor authentication (MFA) requires factors from **two or more different categories**. A password + PIN is NOT MFA (both are "something you know"). A password + fingerprint IS MFA ("know" + "are").

Other Foundational Concepts

CONCEPT	MEANING
Least privilege	Users get minimum access needed for their job — nothing more
Defence in depth	Multiple layers of security (like concentric castle walls) — if one fails, others still protect
Separation of duties	No single person controls an entire critical process (prevents insider fraud)
Need to know	Access to information only if you need it for your specific role
Due diligence	Researching and understanding risks before making decisions
Due care	Taking reasonable steps to protect assets once risks are understood

📖

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- Chapter 4: Networking & Crypto Crash Course
- Chapter 6: Domain 2 — Threats, Vulnerabilities & Mitigations
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