

Systems Administrator

Keep the servers, accounts and backups running so everyone else can do their job. Certifications count as much as a degree.

TYPICAL PAY

\$99,130

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$63k to \$155k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

1 to 4 years

after high school

DEMAND

Limited

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

Company offices, data centers, hospitals, universities, remote

How you get there

- 1 High school** Grades 11 and 12
 Computer science if offered, plus math. Build a home server, break it, fix it. That experience is what you will talk about in interviews.
- 2 Associate degree or a bachelor's degree** 2 to 4 years
 Employers typically want a bachelor's in computer science or a related field, but many accept a two year degree or a certificate plus experience.
- 3 First job on a help desk** 1 to 2 years
 Password resets, broken laptops, printers. Unglamorous, and the fastest way to learn how an organization really works.
- 4 Get certified** Alongside work
 A networking and a security certification first, then a platform one for the systems your employer actually runs.
- 5 Systems administrator** From year 2 or 3
 You now own servers, accounts, backups and security permissions for real people.

Pros and cons

- + Well paid without necessarily needing a four year degree
- + Certifications are a cheap, fast way to prove skill
- + Remote and hybrid work is normal
- Federal projections show the occupation declining
- On-call nights, weekends and outages that are your problem
- Nobody notices you until something breaks

Good to know

A backup you have never restored is not a backup

The oldest rule in this job. Plenty of organizations have discovered during a real failure that their backups were running but unusable. Good administrators test a restore on purpose, before they need one.

The exam makes you fix a real machine

Red Hat's system administrator certification is a hands-on practical test. You are given broken systems and graded on whether they work at the end, which is why employers take it seriously.

Optional boosts

Linux at scale. Cloud platforms. Automation and scripting. Security.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Network and Computer Systems Administrators
 Bureau of Labor Statistics: Network and Computer Systems Administrators
 CompTIA certifications
 Red Hat training and certification

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/systems-administrator>



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