

Mikael's CISSP Study Notes

Introduction

These are my notes of the most useful resources I used to study for the CISSP exam. Everyone learns in different ways and should find the best resources for them - there is a lot out there. A lot of the best ones are free or very reasonable. At the end of this I have added a few thoughts of mine. Basically all the stuff I wish I knew before I started myself.

This is split up into several parts. First communities you should (must) join in my opinion, then good ways to get an overview, before attacking the main body of content. Then useful resources for digging deeper, thoughts on questions and study techniques and capping off with great free resources. I am only including resources I used myself or trust based on multiple recommendations from trusted resources. There is no sponsored content in this guide, I paid for everything out of my own pocket.

This is v2 released in Feb. 2023 - I have a lot more I want to add to this guide, but decided to release it as-is for a few friends asking.

You may share and distribute this document as you like, I wrote this to 'Advance and protect the profession'. I will post future versions online, check <https://mikaelvinding.com/cissp> for the newest version. You will also be able to leave your email for updates and other helpful resources.

Whenever possible use content created for the latest version of the exam - you are trying to remember a lot of content, don't create any needless confusion by ingesting outdated content.

Good luck!! -mikael

Essential communities

You should be aware of and join these communities:

Certification Station Discord

You should hang out in the **#cissp** channel - this is the most amazing supportive community and you will likely end up making friends here on the same journey. There are questions and discussion on everything CISSP. Also read though **#afterhours** for breakdowns of what others found valuable (classes, books etc). You can also find promotions on training materials and more.

<https://discord.com/invite/certstation>

CISSP Subreddit

Follow the - lots of questions and writeups - great but not as 'real-time' as discord above.

<https://www.reddit.com/r/cissp/>

Get an overview of everything

I like to learn by first getting an overview of everything. Even though this will seem impossible at first, I promise you it's not. Having the entire scope in the back of your mind you will be able to easily place content and details as you go through it. I used each of these multiple times to reinforce the overall content in different ways.

Destination Certification Mindmap

Free youtube videos - a thorough and well produced overview of each domain. You'll know what the high level key points are before you sink into the details

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=geGALIfOxtI&list=PLZKdGEfEyJhKWrylvx_jm1jn6ZMTi7gW&index=27

Pete Zergers Exam Cram Video

This is 8 hours of pure gold. Watch/listen to this many times though. It's 8 hours covering everything in reasonable detail. You can rip the audio or use the youtube app to listen on the road/gym etc.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_nyZhYnCNLA

Eleventh Hour CISSP®: Study Guide

Another great overview book. As far as I know this is not updated for the most recent CISSP exam yet, but is the one exception I made. I got the audiobook for when on the go.

<https://www.amazon.com/Eleventh-Hour-CISSP%C2%AE-Study-Guide-ebook/dp/B01LNFMIU0>

In-depth written material

You will need to find some resources to get into all the gory detail. I recommend one of the main books (OSG or AIO) possibly supplemented by the CBK.

Official Study Guide (OSG)

You'll see this referred to as the OSG. You can get the paper version or the kindle version. I got the book version first but the kindle later because you can search the contents.. It crucially comes with a ton of questions that are fairly representative of the actual test.

There is a bundle with extra tests and questions that you might consider - you want all the practice questions you can get:

<https://www.amazon.com/Certified-Information-Security-Professional-Official/dp/1119790026>

This is probably the best value investment you can do in your certification.

All-in-One (AIO)

This is the other common book option, mainly referred to as the AIO. Written by Shon Harris and Fernando Maymi this is an impressive book of everything. I found the OSG much more approachable for my purpose but some swear by this.

<https://www.amazon.com/CISSP-All-One-Guide-Eighth/dp/1260142655>

Common Body of Knowledge

This is the 'official' tome of everything CISSP published by (ISC)². I recommend this for looking up details but not for reading - think of this like an encyclopedia. Pro-tip - get the kindle version so you can easily search on the go.

(ISC)²

https://www.amazon.com/Official-ISC-CISSP-CBK-Reference-ebook/dp/B09CK6CGC8/ref=tmm_kin_swatch_0?_encoding=UTF8&qid=1676844974&sr=1-1

Online courses and bootcamps

I recommend finding one or two online courses and go through them. There are lots out there. The ones I link below I have either used myself or seen positively recommended by multiple other sources. Each teacher has a specific style, so I would recommend checking out multiple and find one that matches your learning style.

Mike Chapple Linked-in Course

Mike Chapple is one of the authors of the OSG and he has a very good LinkedIn course. Many have linked-in learning free through work or a local library. If not, it is not expensive (\$50/mo or so) from LinkedIn.

<https://www.linkedin.com/learning/paths/prepare-for-the-certified-information-systems-security-professional-cissp-exam>

The course can seem a bit dry but it is thorough and covers what you need. I highly recommend this.

Discord Bootcamp (free)

Adam Gordon from itpro.tv will do a free boot camp for CISSP occasionally - it is announced in the discord and takes place over 8 weeks, 2 nights a week. Its quick but good. On that note, go to the #classroom-1 channel and gets Adams notes - they are very, very good for each domain even if you do not attend the actual classes. You join this from the discord server.

ITPro.TV Adam Gordon has a set of CISSP videos on itpro.tv - use the ADAM30 code for 30% off. I used this mainly for in-depth learning on specific topics like GDPR.

<https://www.itpro.tv/courses/cissp/>

Thor Teaches has a well regarded course on CISSP. It runs ~40 hours for ~\$200ish. The content is top notch, but some dislike the intonation style. It didn't bother me at all but check it out first and see how it works for you. This is available through the Thor Teaches site or on udemy. There are multiple questionbanks available as Thor easy-medium or Thor Hard, I'll discuss these later but they are a good resource to get. Thor runs frequent promotions.

<https://thorteaches.com/cissp/>

Destination Certification has a masterclass that while a little pricey promises to be very good. I would likely have purchased this if the cost had been lower. It currently sells for just under \$1k but was 2-3x more expensive when I was studying. Their content is very well produced and I like how they present material.

<https://destcert.com/cissp/>

Study Notes and Theory is another popular one. Luke Ahmed has many fans of his courses and other content. I have not personally joined any of his classes.

<https://www.studynotesandtheory.com/signup>

Digging into details

As you go down your path, you'll run into things that you'll want to research more... The OSG/AIO/CBK will have useful information but I highly recommend using youtube as well. You will find many great deep dive videos on a lot of topics that need it like OSI model, Kerberos, Data destruction, Security Frameworks, GDPR, Cryptography and so on.

Pete Zerger (<https://www.youtube.com/c/InsideAzureManagement/videos>) has some good ones, Destination Certification has as well.

Also popular is **Prabh Nair** (<https://www.youtube.com/c/PrabhNair1>) who does 'coffee shots' on topics, questions and answers. I did not personally use these but he's very popular especially on reddit.

Another popular resource is **Kelly Handerhan** over at <https://www.cybrary.it/instructor/kelly-handerhan/> I have not personally checked them out yet, but they are very often referenced.

Another worthy mention is **Mike Chapple** again of OSG fame. He markets content as CertMike and has some youtube videos over at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCcefHUoPp8aKB7vaafrulgw> with questions and some overviews.

Here are some other resources I found helpful for specific topics:

OSI model:

Sunny Classroom - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nFnLPGk8WjA>

Models. Processes and Frameworks:

Pete Zerger - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mLuLtlSdjK8>

Kerberos :

Certification Station - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5N242XcKAsM&t=564s>

Questions and Tests

You will need to do a lot of practice questions and 5-10 practice tests. Here are my recommendations and warnings. Finding practice questions that mimic the exam questions is very hard. You should use practice questions to gauge what areas you are weak in and study those.

OSG questions

The OSG and Official Practice Question banks are free with the books and really good. I highly recommend these. Comes free with the OSG and you can add on the Practice Tests Bundle. Great value, great questions. Both the

Activating questions from OSG and OPT (Official Practice Tests) is a little cumbersome, here's how you do it:

- 1) Buy the OSG and/or OPT (I recommend the bundle with both). Kindle or hardcover are fine)
- 2) Go to <https://www.wiley.com/go/getsybexpin> and select your book from the ridiculous long dropdown. Make sure to get the right version
- 3) Fill out the form, including the verification of a word from a specific page in the book.
- 4) Check your email for a pincode
- 5) Make an account on <https://www.efficientlearning.com/> (or login if you already have one).
- 6) Enter the pin from your email here <https://www.efficientlearning.com/pin/activate/>

You now have access to questions and tests! You can download the free mobile app and access all the questions on the go as well!

Boson

Boson questions are in general pretty good even though they tend to skew more technical than the actual questions. The best value for me was reading the answer explanations as they are very detailed for both correct and incorrect answers. You can find discount coupons for boson in the cissp subreddit.

<https://www.boson.com/certification/cissp>

Thor questions

Thor questions are also popular and can be purchased with or without his course. Easy/medium are most common. Hard are.. Hard. If you are scoring 60% on hard you should feel pretty good.

rslade question thread on (ISC)² forum

These questions are amazing and feel like a realistic representation of the actual test. You will have to scroll through the pages but I promise its worth it.

<https://community.isc2.org/t5/Exams/Practice-Questions/td-p/18626>

Mike Chapple' (CertMike) Deluxe CISSP exam

This is a one-time exam that you can buy from certmike.com. I used this as a final checkpoint before going for the exam. It's very realistic and I would recommend getting this. You will get a very detailed response with answers for all questions. If you do well on this, you will do well at the test. At time of writing the cost is \$25.

<https://www.certmike.com/cissp/>

Free questions in discord, reddit, online beware

I do not recommend using these uncritically without being sure of the source. I have seen many, many questions that are just flat out wrong. Some posters in discord can be trusted, but somehow it became a study method to write questions and these can be (and are) full of errors. You are trying to remember a ton of material, don't pollute your brain with doubt of the validity of questions.

In the Certification Station Discord I do recommend the questions written by Dark Helmet. You can find these by searching "in: cissp from: DarkHelmet#7706 Answer"

Braindumps, online question cheat sites avoid

CISSP is one test where using online 'cheat' resources will not help you. Don't try. Ask any CISSP - they are not the same questions, and any that might have been are long since pulled from the CISSP exam pool. They are also full of errors. You are wasting time and money.

Other free resources

In addition to all the great youtube content, reddit and discord, there are other popular free resources floating around, some of the best ones are:

CISSP Memory Palace

This is an exhaustive summary of all the CISSP material in one monster PDF by Prashant Mohan. Free download from here

<https://www.studynotesandtheory.com/single-post/memory-palace-cissp-notes>

Sunflower - think a condensed version of the material - you can download free here -

<https://www.studynotesandtheory.com/single-post/organized-sunflower-cissp-notes>

CISSP Work Notes - A 62-page free CISSP website that can help you pass your CISSP certification

<http://luc.desfosses.fr/CISSP/>

CISSP Cheat Sheets

These are condensed material overviews - I found them mostly good for finding things you are not sure about and then go study those...

<https://www.studynotesandtheory.com/blog/categories/pdf-notes>

Thoughts on bootcamps

A lot of companies hold CISSP boot camps. These tend to be very expensive and take place over a week or two. I have not done any of these myself, but have talked to quite a few who has. The general consensus seems to be that most of these are not worth the cost. They may work well as a refresher but will not be enough alone. Using the OSG, Online courses and all the great free resources will work just as well, if not better.

Think like a Manager

You will see this a lot. There are videos and books on this and it is made to be a very big deal, perhaps disproportionately so. The gist of it is that CISSP is a manager certification. You are not typically trying to solve a technical problem. You want to look at the big picture and pick the 'manager answer'. Nothing wrong with watching a few videos on this, but don't overthink it. If you have management experience this will come relatively easy to you.

Pete Zerger : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vfC9OLsCqgk&t=1704s>

Luke Ahmed : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dq5eodSz_0k

Prabh Nair : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DXYcXOPz1Fo>

Exam thoughts

The exam is 4 hours, 125 to 175 questions. The format is what is called a CAT exam - Computer Adaptive Testing. This means the questions will change based on your answers. If you have problems in an area, expect more questions in that area. After 125 questions the system will make an assessment if you very likely passed or very likely failed. If either of those are true, the test ends then and you will be told whether you passed or not. If not, you will be given questions until a determination can be made or you reach 175 questions.

Don't let the test psych you out. You cannot go back and change answers, so treat any question as a brand new question. You can usually rule out 2 answers pretty easily. Read the question carefully again and try and figure out what makes one answer better than the other.

You will find that many questions have more than one 'correct' answer - you need to find the best one.

It is tradition to watch Kelly Handersans 'Why you will pass the CISSP' just before taking the test:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v2Y6Zog8h2A&t=3s>

Final thoughts

I hope you found this useful. I will release updates to this document - if someone sent this to you you might want to check <https://mikaelvinding.com/cissp> for updates and other links.