

Security Clearance FAQ

Questions and answers related to US government-sponsored security clearances, compiled by ClearanceJobs.com (<http://www.clearancejobs.com>).

Q: What is a security clearance?

A: A security clearance is a status granted by the United States government that determines a person's ability to access and view documents of national security.

Q: What are the levels of security clearance, and how are they measured?

A: Interestingly enough, levels of security clearance are measured by the amount of damage that would be caused to the United States if that information were to be released to the public or to a foreign source. Security clearances can be issued by many United States government agencies, including the Department of Defense, the Department of Energy, the Department of Justice, and the NSA or CIA. Department of Energy clearances include the "Q" and "L" levels. Major Department of Defense clearances include Confidential, Secret, Top Secret, Top Secret with Single Scope Background Investigation, and Top Secret with Sensitive Compartmentalized. Information.

Q: What are polygraphs?

A: Polygraphs are special tests that can be administered to candidates when their need to access specific information is high.

Q: What type of information is asked for when filling out security clearance paperwork?

A: Information required includes past work history, locations you have lived, roommate names, financial history, travel history, groups or affiliations, and more.

Q: Can I obtain a security clearance on my own?

A: No - there are two ways in which you can obtain a security clearance. First, by joining the United States military; or second, by being sponsored by an employer who is able to process candidates to receive clearances.

Q: How long does a security clearance take to process from scratch?

A: Currently, low-level clearances can take anywhere from 6 months to 1 year to complete and be issued. Higher-level security clearances can take anywhere from 1 year to 2 years to process and be issued.

Q: What status do security clearances have?

A: Clearance status is determined by when the clearance was last used. If your present job requires use of a security clearance, that clearance is referred to as "active." If you have not used your security clearance in your job in the past two years, that clearance is referred to as "current." If you have not used your security clearance in more than 2 years, that clearance is referred to as "expired." Active clearances are easily transferable between employers. Current clearances can be reinstated with relative ease. Expired clearances hold no real weight, but at least prove that the candidate was at one point clearable.

Q: What types of things can prevent someone from receiving a security clearance?

A: Financial trouble including insufficient funds, bankruptcy, bad check writing, and debt counseling can be triggers for investigators to deny a clearance. Other indicators include criminal history including jail or prison time and past convictions, past drug or heavy alcohol use, DUIs, and sometimes even excessive foreign travel.

Q: What is an interim security clearance?

A: An interim clearance is one that is issued quickly to an individual for use at a specific job. Unlike regular clearances, interim clearances expire immediately after the candidate leaves the job that required it. Interim security clearances are generally of a low level, and can be given to individuals within 30 days of inquiry.

Q: Where can I search for jobs that require an active security clearance?

A: Candidates with active clearances can search for jobs that make use of that clearance at ClearanceJobs.com (<http://www.clearancejobs.com>).

Q: If I don't have a security clearance, where can I find employers that might be able to sponsor me to receive one?

A: Candidates without clearances can search for jobs that

do not require clearances at USDefenseJobs.com
(<http://www.usdefensejobs.com>). Employers registered
with USDefenseJobs.com are able to sponsor candidates to
receive new clearances.