Chapter 1

The Network+ Certification Examination

In This Chapter

▶ Checking out the format of the Network+ exam

▶ Knowing how to study: Preparing for the exam

▶ Scheduling and paying for the exam

*C*ompTIA, the A+, Network+, Server+, i-Net+ — and a vast array of other pluses — certification outfit has revised its certification program for the hard-working network technician with an excellent general knowledge of networks and internetworking technologies — the Network+ certification.

Unlike A+ Certification, which at one time awarded you the official title of CompTIA Certified Computer Technician, the Network+ Certification goes by no other name. The exam label was formerly IT (Information Technology) Skills, but the testing program is now officially known only as the Network+ Certification. Passing the Network+ exam certifies to the world that a technician possesses the knowledge required to configure and install TCP/IP clients.

Unlike other networking certifications, such as MCSE (Microsoft Certified Systems Engineer), CNE (Certified Novell Engineer), or CCNA (Cisco Certified Networking Associate) certifications, Network+ covers all kinds of general network technology knowledge and practices instead of revolving around just the brand-specific stuff. Apple, Microsoft, Novell and other manufacturers and their products are included on the Network+ test, making it the true measure of a networking technician's overall grasp of networking and internetworking technology.

Checking Out What the Network+ Exam Covers

The Network+ exam is the result of an industry-wide analysis of a networking technician's storehouse of skills and knowledge after 18 to 24 months of on-the-job experience. The final test, the one published in January 2002, reflects the culmination of over five years of skill set and test development by the IT Skills Project task force.
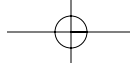
The questions on the Network+ exam cover four topic areas of networking technology knowledge, called domains in the exam objectives:

✓ Media and topologies
✓ Protocols and standards
✓ Network implementation
✓ Network support (also known as troubleshooting)

Table 1-1 lists and describes the four domains of the Network+ exam, the topics within each major area, and the percentage (and number of questions) that each area represents on the total test.

Table 1-1	Network+ Exam Domains	
Area	*Percentage of Test*	*Content*
1.0 Media and topologies	20%	Basic network terminology and knowledge of networking elements, including media, connectors, structure, topologies, and the OSI model
2.0 Protocols and standards	25%	TCP/IP, IPX/SPX, and Apple protocols and the application of the OSI model
3.0 Network implementation	23%	Network planning, design, configuration, and installation procedures
4.0 Network support	32%	Network troubleshooting techniques, procedures, and tools

The format of the Network+ exam is a hybrid of the formats used for many other certification exams. Although the A+ exam has recently been converted into an adaptive testing format, the Network+ exam (at least for the time being, but don't hold your breath) remains a *serial exam*, or what you might

call your basic, standard multiple-choice test. An adaptive test, on the other hand, is one in which the difficulty on your next question is based on whether or not you get the current question right or wrong.

You can expect to see predominantly multiple-choice questions. The really nice thing about this test is that you don't have to worry about not giving all of the correct answers on multiple right answer questions. There are no "Choose All That Apply" questions. Any question that has more than one correct answer has two tip-offs:

- ✔ The first tip-off is that instead of a round button beside each answer choice, you'll see a square box.
- ✔ The second tip-off is that at the bottom-left corner of the screen is the exact number of answers expected. In fact, when you finish answering the exam questions, any that you haven't given enough answers for are highlighted as incomplete.

Expect at least one question that asks you to mark components and network types on electronic illustrations, as well as a couple of questions that ask you to identify a network component or troubleshooting area from an exhibit.
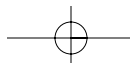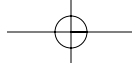
Counting up the questions

If you choose to do the optional test tutorial that can orient you to the various question types you're about to encounter, this time doesn't count against the time limit. Your actual testing time doesn't begin until you click the Start button for the test.

I recommend that you use the Item Review feature that's built into the test engine, pacing yourself to allow some time at the end of the exam for another look at any questionable answers or unanswered questions (although a guess is better than no response at all, because you may not get a chance to review everything you marked).

Don't be surprised that if, during the life of the Network+ exam, the number of questions, the time allowed to take the exam, or the passing score change, up or down. For the latest information about the test, go to the CompTIA Web site: `www.comptia.org`.

Like all CompTIA tests, you know immediately how you did. After you completely signoff and exit the test engine, the test center administrator has a printout of your results waiting for you. The Score Report is a standardized format that shows you both a Gantt chart and a section-by-section breakdown of how you did. The Gantt chart shows your score represented as a bar plotted against a bar of the Required Score to pass the exam. Below that you get a Section Analysis that shows for each section how many questions were on the test and how many you answered correctly. For any sections in which you answered incorrectly, the blueprint summary is printed.

Although the exam objectives are divided into four distinct sections, the questions on the test are not. Questions from all domains and all topics are intermixed throughout the test, often with more than one domain covered in a single question.

Drawing on your knowledge

You may encounter a question that asks you to mark items on illustrations with a crosshair-looking cursor. You use this icon to pick which part of a network diagram includes a repeater, or to locate a bus topology, or to hone in on a network segment.
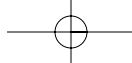
Working a Study Plan

Knowing your stuff is the key to passing the Network+ exam. So, how do you make sure that you're ready and able to give certification your best shot? Use the questions in this book or on a test simulator to determine the parts of the test that you need to study, which isn't to say that you can ignore completely any of the topics on the test, but you need to focus on those areas where you need to improve your knowledge.

At the beginning and end of each chapter in this book, you can find a Quick Assessment quiz and a Prep Test, respectively, that cover the topics in the chapter. Many commercially available test simulators are available in the certification marketplace. I include URLs for some of the better ones in Chapter 26, and I include a few demos on the CD. (See Appendix B.)

Go through this book and mark the pages that have lists, tables, and diagrams. It's a fact of certification life that certain information requires memorization. The maximum distance for a Thinnet cable, the OSI layer of a particular device, or the address range for a Class B network are typical answers that you can't figure out from the data in the question. You have to know this stuff inside and out. Begin committing this information to memory as soon as you can — and remember to refresh your quick recall regularly.

I also highly recommend using at least one (or more) of the commercially available practice test banks to help you prepare for the exam. If for no other reason than to get a different perspective and interpretation of the exam and its questions, you should seek out these products.

You may want to use other resources as well. Sometimes, a slightly different explanation or approach to a subject can bring the material into sharper focus. The CompTIA Web site (`www.comptia.org`) lists a number of companies offering study aids and practice tests.

Practice makes passing

Keep yourself focused on the topics that I identify as being on the test and avoid studying any new technologies that debut within the six-month period before the release of the exam. The very latest, brand-new, cutting-edge stuff, such as Windows XP, won't be on the test — that's guaranteed.

The benefits you enjoy from Network+ certification are well worth the time you invest in studying for and taking the test. Whatever method you use to prepare for the test, create a plan and then stick to it. Give yourself ample time to truly understand the material instead of relying purely on memorization. If you can grasp the concepts behind the details, the facts may start to make some sense.

Here are a few tips to consider as you prepare for the test:

- ✔ Focus on the exam objectives, which lay out the full landscape of the test's coverage. CompTIA is very good at staying within the boundaries established by the exam objectives; you can access the full exam objectives at `www.comptia.org/certification/networkplus/all_about_networkplus.htm`.

- ✔ Use the Quick Assessments, Prep Tests, and sample exam questions throughout this book and on the accompanying CD, as well as any other practice tests to which you have access. You can't take too many practice tests.

- ✔ Take occasional short breaks, a day or two, from studying. You can overdo the intensity and burn out. This test is very important, but it isn't a life and death thing. Keep your perspective.

How much studying is enough, anyway?

It all depends on you. Gilster's Law of Test Preparation says: "You never can tell, and it all depends." You never can tell how much preparation you'll need, and it depends on your experience, your education, and so on. Seasoned veterans of the networking wars may need only to catch up on the very latest stuff, and someone just starting out in network technology may have a much greater challenge getting ready for the exam.

Because someone (probably you!) is investing real money for you to take this test, I suggest erring on the side of too much studying, if that's possible. If you're intent on passing, make your goal to pass the first time (unless you can afford to take the test just to find out what you should study). All I can say to that is, "this book is much less expensive than the test, and I tell you what to study." But, then again, it's your money! Any excess funds that are burning a crater in your pocket, kindly send to me in care of Hungry Minds, Inc.

Scheduling the Test

An important move toward grabbing that golden ring of certification (after repeating right out loud — with feeling — "I think I can, I think I can . . .") involves registration through either Prometric or VUE. To schedule an exam, access the Prometric Web site at `www.2test.com` or the NCS/VUE Web site at `www.vue.com`. If your company is a member of CompTIA, the test fees are a bit lower, so by all means take advantage of that.

Be ready with credit card information or plan to mail a check for the registration fee (not a great option if you're in a hurry). Schedule the exam as far as six weeks in advance, but at least two days before your desired test date. The Web sites of both testing companies allow you to set a date and time and pick a testing center near your home — or close to the vacation spot where you'll celebrate after the exam. Both companies have literally thousands of locations worldwide, so it shouldn't be too hard finding one near you.

I recommend contacting the testing service as soon as you think you're entering the final phases of your preparation for the exam. Some sites aren't available every day of the week, and some have only certain hours of the day available. So the earlier you contact them, the better.

Paying the Price

If you are a corporate member of the CompTIA organization and you live in the United States, the Network+ registration cost is currently $140. If you can round up about 50 or more of your friends or co-workers to take the test, the price can be even lower. Nonmembers pay $190, whether one person registers or a small army. International pricing varies, depending on the exchange rate. Of course, CompTIA could change its fees at any time, so don't hold me to these dollar amounts.

Prometric and VUE welcome all generally accepted credit cards. You may make other payment arrangements with the testing folks, such as paying by check or money order, but before you can take the test, you must be paid in full.