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CIA photo

Chandler Harris (<https://news.clearancejobs.com/author/chandler-harris/>) / Feb 6, 2015



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Security Clearance Article: What are the

Levels of Access?	Security Clearance
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A security clearance (<https://news.clearancejobs.com/category/security-clearance/>) is a special status given to those who have met stringent requirements, allowing access to classified information. Given the sensitive nature of the information security clearances afford, they can be difficult to obtain.

Security clearances are issued by numerous U.S. government agencies including the Department of Defense (DoD), the Department of Homeland Security, Department of Energy (DoE), Department of Justice, and Central Intelligence Agency.

The majority of security clearances are issued by the DoD (80 percent). The DoD and most other agencies have three levels of security clearances (<https://news.clearancejobs.com/2011/09/19/sci-sap-and-security-clearance-levels-of-access/>):

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★ CONFIDENTIAL

Obtaining a confidential security clearance requires between a few weeks or a few months. The process is largely administrative, but financial issues or security concerns may delay the process. The questionnaire dates back seven years on the applicant's record.

★ SECRET

A Secret clearance takes a few months to a year to adjudicate. If an applicant has poor credit and is unable to justify financial issues, or has committed a felony, they are unlikely to obtain a clearance. However, bankruptcies are evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

★ TOP SECRET

A Top Secret clearance requires a Single Scope Background Investigation (<https://news.clearancejobs.com/2013/09/08/ssbi/>) and grants access to data that affects national security, counterterrorism, counterintelligence or other highly sensitive data. A Top Secret clearance can take between six and 18 months.

Security clearances don't stop there. For those U.S. military personnel and government contractors that work with one or more of the 26 North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) countries, there are additional security clearances including (<http://clearancejobsblog.com/cosmic-top-secret-access-secrets-universe/>):

- ★ **Cosmic Top Secret (CTS)**– This is the essentially the same as U.S. Top Secret but for NATO nations.
- ★ **NATO Secret (NS)**– This is the same as U.S. Secret, information that would cause serious damage to NATO.
- ★ **NATO Confidential (NC)**– This is for access to information that could be damaging to the interests of NATO.

NATO Restricted (NR) – Provides access to information that is not classified, but if disclosed, would be disadvantageous to the interests of NATO.

TOP SECRET

/NATO and non-military level at all three levels (CTS NS and NC)



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HOW DO YOU GET A PERSONNEL CLEARANCE (PCL)?

In order to obtain a DoD clearance, a cleared contractor or government agency first identifies an employee who needs clearance. Then the contractor's Facility Security Officer (FSO) or the Government agency's Security Officer (SO) submits an investigation request through the Joint Personnel Adjudication System (JPAS). The employee must complete a clearance application in the Electronic Questionnaires for Investigations Processing (e-QIP).

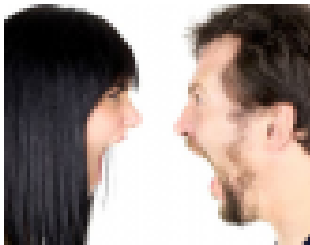
Then the FSO or SO reviews, approves and forwards the completed e-QIP for approval, issuance of an interim clearance and release to the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). OPM conducts an investigation and sends the results of the investigation to the Department of Defense Central Clearance Facility (DoDCAF) who either grants or denies a clearance.

Clearances for other federal agencies are processed in the same way, but can involve a different Investigation Service Provider (ISP).

More: background investigations (<https://news.clearancejobs.com/tag/background-investigations/>), top secret (<https://news.clearancejobs.com/tag/top-secret/>)

Chandler Harris is a freelance business and technology writer located in Silicon Valley. He has written for numerous publications including Entrepreneur, InformationWeek, San Jose Magazine, Government Technology, Public CIO, AllBusiness.com, U.S. Banker, Digital Communities Magazine, Converge Magazine, Surfer's Journal, Adventure Sports Magazine, ClearanceJobs.com, and the San Jose Business Journal. Chandler is also engaged in helping companies further their content marketing needs through content strategy, optimization and creation, as well as blogging and social media platforms. When he's not writing, Chandler enjoys his beach haunt of Santa Cruz where he rides roller coasters with his son, surfs and bikes across mountain ranges.

More in Security Clearance (<https://news.clearancejobs.com/category/security-clearance/>)



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