

DevOps or DevSecOps? Which Path Is Right for You as a Working IT Professional

A short, honest self assessment to help you choose a direction, DevOps, DevSecOps, cloud security, or strengthening your foundations first, before you commit months to the wrong one.

SWQ IT Academy trains working IT professionals with a simple standard: skills you can actually demonstrate, not skills you have merely watched someone else use. That standard only helps once you're pointed in the right direction, which is what this assessment is for.

Built for working IT professionals who already have some background in the field but genuinely aren't sure whether DevOps, DevSecOps, or a cloud security focus fits them best, or whether they should spend a bit more time on fundamentals first.



Before the roadmap, the direction.

We get some version of this question constantly. Someone writes in with a solid IT background, real curiosity about this field, and a completely reasonable question underneath all of it: should I be learning DevOps, or DevSecOps, or something else entirely.

It's a fair question, and it deserves a better answer than "just pick one and see." Both paths share real overlap early on, Linux, Git, Docker, the fundamentals are common ground either way. But they diverge meaningfully after that, and starting down the wrong one doesn't just cost you time, it costs you the specific kind of time you probably don't have much of, evenings and weekends around a full time job.

This assessment exists to shorten that guessing period. A handful of honest questions about your current role, your comfort with code and infrastructure, and where your genuine interest sits, mapped to a direction that actually fits where you're starting from.

ONE THING WORTH SAYING UP FRONT

There's no wrong answer here, only an honest one and a hopeful one. This assessment only works if you answer based on your actual day to day work and instincts, not the version of yourself you're hoping to become.

Why choosing the right path matters

Not because the wrong choice is unrecoverable. Because it's expensive in exactly the currency you have the least of.

DevOps and DevSecOps aren't the same skill set wearing a different label. DevOps leans toward building and automating delivery, speed and reliability are the measures that matter most. DevSecOps leans toward building the same systems with security as a genuine constraint from the start, risk and control effectiveness sit alongside speed, not beneath it. Both need real engineering ability. They ask you to develop that ability in different directions.

Pick the direction that fits your actual interest and background, and the next few months of learning feel like they're building toward something specific. Pick the one that sounded more impressive in a job posting, and you'll likely find yourself relearning the sequencing three months in, once it becomes clear the fit was never quite right.

That's really all this is about, not finding the "correct" answer, there isn't one in the abstract, but finding the answer that's correct for you, specifically, right now.

Six honest questions

Mark the option closest to true for you right now. Each option is tagged with a letter, D, S, C, or F. Keep a rough tally as you go, you'll use it in the next section.

D Leans DevOps **S** Leans DevSecOps **C** Leans Cloud / Security first **F** Leans Foundations first

1. What best describes your current role

- ☐ **D** Developer or software engineer
- ☐ **C** Infrastructure, cloud, or operations professional
- ☐ **S** Security, risk, or compliance professional
- ☐ **F** Support, QA, or a generalist IT role

2. Most of your current responsibilities involve

- ☐ **D** Building and shipping features or applications
- ☐ **C** Maintaining, monitoring, or operating existing systems
- ☐ **S** Assessing risk, reviewing access, or handling audits
- ☐ **F** A mix of tickets, tasks, and learning as I go

3. How comfortable are you writing or reading code and scripts

- ☐ **D** Very comfortable, I write code regularly
- ☐ **C** Somewhat, I can read it and write basic scripts
- ☐ **S** Limited, but I understand it conceptually
- ☐ **F** Not yet comfortable at all

4. How comfortable are you with Linux, infrastructure, or cloud platforms

- ☐ **C** Very comfortable, this is where I already work daily
- ☐ **D** Somewhat, I've touched it but it's not my main strength
- ☐ **S** Limited, I understand the concepts more than the hands on side
- ☐ **F** Not yet comfortable at all

5. How strong is your genuine interest in security specifically

- ☐ **S** High, risk and protecting systems genuinely interests me
- ☐ **C** Moderate to high, but more from a cloud and configuration angle
- ☐ **D** Moderate, I care about it without it being my main draw
- ☐ **F** Not something I've thought much about yet

6. How strong is your interest in automation, delivery, and operations

- ☐ **D** High, I genuinely enjoy automating things and owning delivery
- ☐ **C** Moderate to high, more from an operational reliability angle
- ☐ **S** Moderate, mainly as it connects to securing that delivery
- ☐ **F** Not something I've had much exposure to yet

YOUR TALLY

D count _____

S count _____

C count _____

F count _____

Whichever letter you marked most often is your likely direction. A close tie between two letters is common and meaningful too, it usually means either path is genuinely workable for you, so go with whichever one you'd be more excited to spend the next three months on.

Decision framework

Four likely outcomes. Find the one matching your highest tally below.

MOSTLY D ANSWERS

Likely fit, DevOps

WHAT THIS USUALLY LOOKS LIKE

You already build or ship things, and automation and delivery genuinely interest you more than risk and compliance do. Your coding comfort is a real asset here.

GAPS TO CLOSE

Operational depth, Linux, infrastructure as code, and container orchestration, the parts of the job that live outside an application codebase.

MOSTLY S ANSWERS

Likely fit, DevSecOps

WHAT THIS USUALLY LOOKS LIKE

Risk and security genuinely interest you, and you're willing to build real hands on engineering skill rather than staying at the review and audit layer alone.

GAPS TO CLOSE

Hands on scripting, Docker, and CI/CD pipeline construction, you need to be able to build the systems you're meant to secure.

MOSTLY C ANSWERS

Likely fit, Cloud / Security first path

WHAT THIS USUALLY LOOKS LIKE

You're already comfortable in cloud and infrastructure, with real but not primary interest in security. You have a genuine choice ahead, and it's worth deciding deliberately rather than defaulting.

GAPS TO CLOSE

Depends on direction, automation and pipeline depth if you lean DevOps from here, IAM and security posture depth if you lean cloud security.

MOSTLY F ANSWERS

Likely need, strengthen foundations first

WHAT THIS USUALLY LOOKS LIKE

You're genuinely early in this field, comfortable with neither code nor infrastructure yet, and that's a completely normal place to start from, not a setback.

GAPS TO CLOSE

Linux, Git, and basic scripting, before choosing a specific direction. This assessment will still be useful once that foundation exists, revisit it in six to eight weeks.

IF YOUR TALLY IS GENUINELY SPLIT THREE WAYS

That happens, and it usually points to an F result underneath the surface, spread comfort across coding and infrastructure without deep strength in either yet. Foundations first is a perfectly good answer, not a consolation prize.

Role based examples

Four short profiles, based on patterns we see often. See if one sounds familiar.

The backend developer who wants more ownership

Typically a D result

Writes code daily, has touched a build pipeline but never owned one, curious about what happens after a pull request merges. Strong coding comfort, moderate infrastructure comfort, low security focus. A clear DevOps fit.

The compliance analyst who wants to build, not just audit

Typically an S result

Deep understanding of controls and risk frameworks, has reviewed plenty of pipelines but never built one, genuinely curious about the engineering side. Strong security interest, limited hands on coding so far. A DevSecOps fit, with real groundwork to build first.

The cloud administrator deciding between two directions

Typically a C result

Comfortable across a cloud console daily, moderate scripting ability, genuine but not overwhelming interest in security. Could reasonably go either direction, worth the deliberate decision this assessment is built to prompt.

The support engineer early in their IT career

Typically an F result

Handles tickets and troubleshooting, hasn't written much code, still building comfort with Linux fundamentals. Not behind, simply earlier in the process, foundations first is the honest and correct next step.

Recommended next step learning sequence

A short starting sequence for each outcome. For the complete path, projects, and a 60 to 90 day plan, see SWQ IT Academy's *Role Based Learning Paths* resource.

YOUR RESULT	START WITH	THEN MOVE TO
D, DevOps	Docker, building on your existing coding comfort	CI/CD, then Terraform, then Kubernetes
S, DevSecOps	Linux, Git, and scripting fundamentals	Docker, then a working CI/CD pipeline, then security scanning inside it
C, Cloud / Security first	Decide your direction deliberately using the decision framework in this guide	Docker and CI/CD for DevOps, or IAM and cloud security posture for cloud security
F, Foundations first	Linux command line, basic networking, and a real Git habit	Basic scripting, then revisit this assessment in six to eight weeks

Common misconceptions

Five beliefs that quietly send people down the wrong path, or stop them from starting at all.

- ✗ **"DevSecOps is just DevOps with extra certifications."** It's a different emphasis built on the same technical base, security as a genuine constraint from the start, not a checklist added at the end.

- ✗ **"Cloud security and DevSecOps are the same thing."** They overlap but aren't identical. Cloud security focuses on the infrastructure and configuration layer, DevSecOps focuses specifically on securing the delivery pipeline itself.

- ✗ **"I need to master coding before I can start any of this."** Comfort helps, mastery isn't required to begin. Plenty of strong DevOps and DevSecOps professionals built their coding ability alongside the rest of the field, not before it.

- ✗ **"Security professionals can't succeed in DevOps."** Risk instincts transfer well into DevOps, they just need an engineering foundation built alongside them, exactly what the S and F sequences in this guide are for.

- ✗ **"This decision is permanent."** It shapes your next quarter of learning, not your entire career. Most fundamentals from one path remain accessible if you later decide the other genuinely fits better.

A tally gives you a direction. A conversation makes it specific.

This assessment gets most people to a genuinely useful answer. It can't account for a background that sits between two categories, or years of experience that shift how much foundation you actually need. That's worth telling us directly.

Message us your background

Tell us your current role, roughly how many years of experience you have, and your tally result from this assessment. We'll confirm the fit or point you somewhere better if your situation is more nuanced than the categories above.

Get the full learning path for your result

Once your direction is confirmed, ask for the matching path from our Role Based Learning Paths resource, the complete sequence, projects, and a 60 to 90 day plan.

Join the SWQ IT Academy community

Connect with other working professionals who landed on the same result, and compare notes as you both move through it.



A part of the ENGITRIX group

Email: itacademy@swqgroup.com

WhatsApp and calls: +91 8123999170

Web: itacademy.swqgroup.com

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