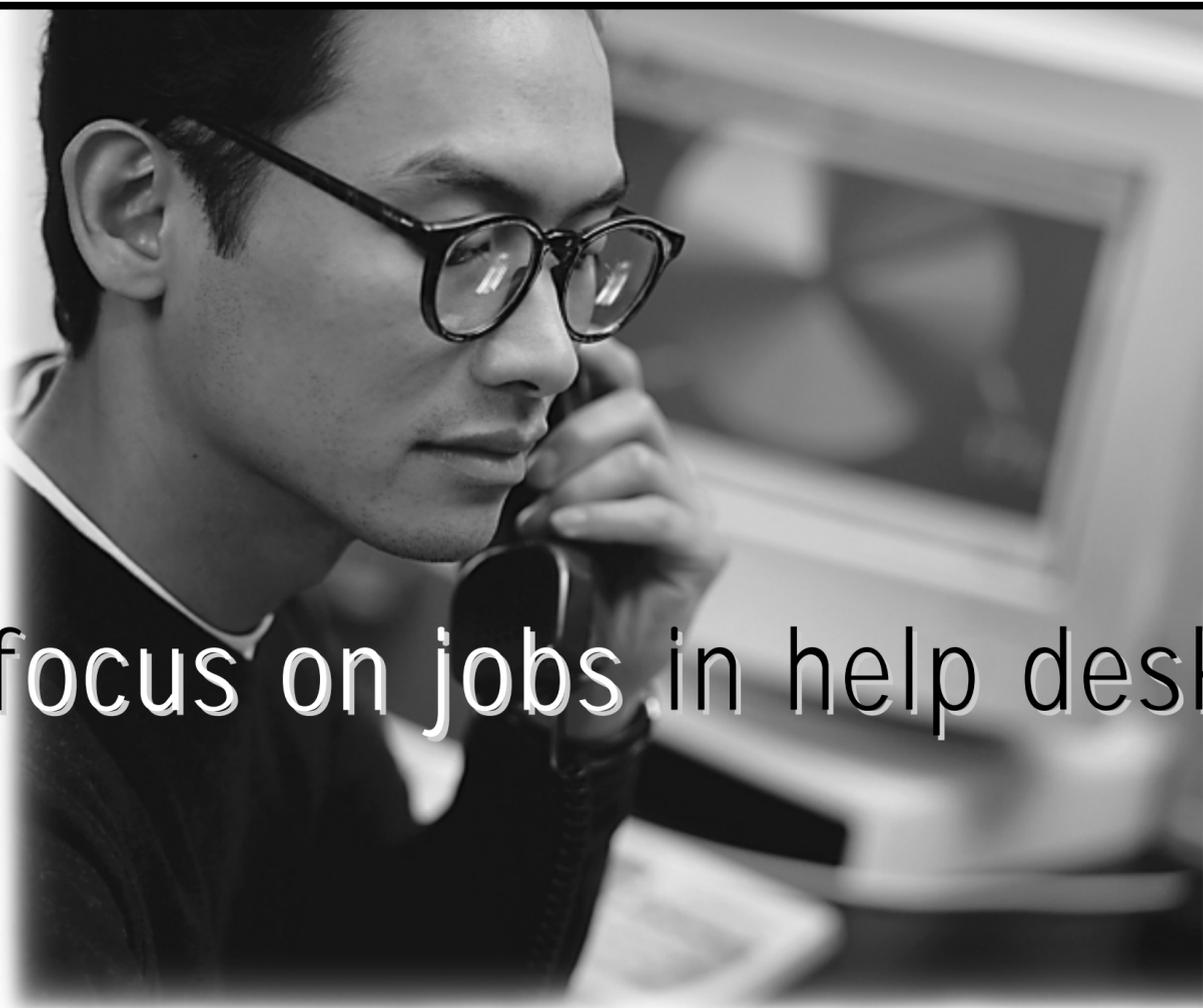


# school to career

## focus on jobs in help desk



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If you would like to make a statement about your business' commitment to education, call Sheila Gould at 829-4639 or email sgould@newsobserver.com to find out how you can sponsor a School to Career Page.

### FINANCIAL AID

Grants, scholarships, loans and work/study programs are available for community college students. The financial aid office at each college can provide specific information on these opportunities. In addition, information on special curriculum-based scholarships may be available from academic department heads or from foundation directors at some colleges.

### FUTURE JOB OPPORTUNITIES

Industry observers predict that the number of jobs in this career field may grow by 20 percent.

### RECOMMENDED CLASSES

High school classes in technical writing and computer science are especially helpful for students who plan to pursue careers in helpdesk & support technology.

### SKILLS REQUIRED

Helpdesk & support technicians are cyber detectives. They use information provided by customers to identify and solve problems and to help customers implement the solutions. These tasks require both computer skills and communication skills.

### EDUCATION

A two-year associate degree program can help individuals prepare for careers in helpdesk & support technology. During the first year of study, they learn to install and configure operating systems for optimal performance. They study Internet protocols, system diagnostic tools and programming languages. They also learn about the business of helpdesk & support technologies — what kinds of opportunities are available and how they can build their skills to have a successful career.

As they continue their studies, they learn about telecommunications standards and protocols, as well as network administration and database applications. They develop skills in areas including project management, systems design and analysis and measurements. They also have the opportunity to design and develop a helpdesk system.

Students are able to develop customer and communication ("soft") skills as well as technical and business ("hard") skills. They complete courses in psychology, business and elective subjects. They also learn to research and write professional reports.

The helpdesk & support technology associate degree program provides a broad overview of all aspects of computer services, so it prepares graduates for a wide range of employment opportunities. In addition, many graduates choose to continue their education and specialize in other areas of computer technologies, such as networking or programming.

The educational process does not end when the student graduates. Companies who hire graduates to work as helpdesk & support technicians usually have training programs for new employees. Many companies use their helpdesk and support areas to teach new employees about company products and procedures.

These training programs help the new employees learn more about the particular products for which they will provide customer assistance. The new employees also learn the specific procedures that each company has established for helpdesk services.

In the early days of mining, a coal miner might bring a caged canary or other bird into the mine shaft, to warn miners of unsafe conditions. If the canary lost consciousness, the miners knew that there wasn't enough oxygen in the mine shaft and that they should leave immediately. It was a simple but effective early warning system.

Today, helpdesk & support technicians are the "canary in the coal mine" of the computing world. They are the first personnel to learn when there are problems with software, hardware and networks. Often, they are also the first personnel to create solutions. Most importantly, they must be able to communicate those solutions with other persons.

Although helpdesk & support technology is a new career field, it has grown very quickly. In 1998, there were nearly 7 million individuals working as technicians in this field. The growth rate is estimated at 20 percent.

Many of these technicians begin in call centers, responding to telephone calls and e-mail requests from computer users who need help. Technicians may guide a computer user, step by step, through the process of configuring an application, an operating system or a network. Technicians may provide customer service for an ISP (Internet service provider), like America Online or Earthlink. Technicians may help individuals who want to buy computer systems for themselves or for their companies, helping these customers determine what equipment meets their individual or corporate needs.

In some cases, helpdesk & support technicians take the role of "cyber detective." When technicians receive many phone calls about the same problem in a new product, they can alert programmers and other personnel to the problem. They may also help identify and repair the problem, or "bug," in the product.

With experience, technicians move into positions with more responsibilities. They may recruit, train and supervise entry-level technicians. They may write specifications and design systems for new call centers. They may help install and configure networks.

Individuals who enter this career field must have several strengths. First, they must be knowledgeable in many areas of computer technology, and they become experts in specialized areas. Second, they must have outstanding "people skills," also known as soft skills — they are good listeners, and they can share information in ways that other people can understand easily. Third, they must genuinely enjoy solving problems creatively and effectively, while following the protocols set by their employer.

Helpdesk & support technology is the ideal career field for persons who want to combine their computer skills with the opportunity to help people, one to one. As electronic commerce continues to grow, there will be more jobs in this challenging career field.

### WANT TO KNOW MORE

If you are interested in pursuing a career in helpdesk & support technologies, you can learn more about preparation for your career by contacting Wake Tech:

Wake Technical Community College  
9101 Fayetteville Road  
Raleigh, N.C. 27603  
(919) 662-3500  
www.waketech.edu

### WHAT YOU WEAR

Appropriate clothing varies with the workplace. Technicians who work face-to-face with clients usually wear business attire, while technicians who work in telephone centers may wear casual clothes.

### JOBS IN THIS FIELD

Job Title	Minimum Education & Experience	Average Pay*
Help Desk Technician	Associate Degree, entry level	\$12-15 per hour
Help Desk Analyst	Associate Degree	\$40K-47K per year
Support Rep, Level 1	Associate Degree	\$25K-34K per year
Tech Support Agent	Associate Degree	\$14-18 per hour
IT (or IS)* Coordinator	Bachelor's Degree or equivalent experience	\$15-18 per hour
IT (or IS)* Supervisor	Bachelor's Degree or equivalent experience	\$32K-56K per year

\*IT and IS refer to "Information Technology" and "Information Systems."

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