Using LinkedIn Effectively

Get Started With LinkedIn
The best way to get started with LinkedIn is to visit the LinkedIn Learning Center at learn.linkedin.com. At this site, there are instructional videos that help you understand the features and benefits of using LinkedIn, plus there are student specific resources. As of December 2012, students were the fastest growing group of users on LinkedIn—so you’re in good professional company! You may also want to consult these resources:

- How to Build a Professional Student LinkedIn Profile at university.linkedin.com
- Networking Professionally, also at university.linkedin.com

Take the First Step
Probably the biggest area of opportunity new users miss out on with LinkedIn is that they rush to put up a profile, and they don’t take the time to create an effective presence on the site before connecting with others. There’s no prize for getting to a 100% complete profile the fastest, so take your time in executing these steps to a complete profile:

- Add a profile photo
- List all the jobs or positions you’ve held, along with descriptions of your roles
- Have 5 or more skills on your profile
- Write a summary about yourself
- Fill out your industry and ZIP code
- Add where you went to school
- Have 50 or more connections – it’s easier than you think to get connected!

We’ll discuss these steps in further detail later.

Creating your LinkedIn profile will also be easier if you gather a few key resources ahead of time. The most important is to have an updated copy of your resume available, along with your transcripts, a good profile photo, and a draft of a summary.

But how can I take a good profile photo?
As a student, your options to have a professional headshot are likely limited. What you can do, however, is focus on taking a photo that represents you at your professional best. That includes choosing professional attire, ensuring that your hair and skin look the best they can, selecting a
background that enhances you and doesn’t distract from you, and finding a situation that provides for good lighting. You may want to work with a friend that is studying art or photography to take this photo, or simply review existing photos of yourself with these criteria in mind.

*What should I say in my LinkedIn Summary?*

Your LinkedIn Summary is a place for you to tell the professional story you want about yourself—a place to “connect the dots” of your experience. To get started, consider answering these questions in your profile summary, within the 2000 character limit:

1. What am I interested in, professionally?
2. What do I aspire to, professionally?
3. What are my best skills or experiences that have prepared me for these aspirations?

For more information, check out these examples:

- Example 1
- Example 2

**Frequently Asked Questions About LinkedIn**

*What is the purpose of LinkedIn?*

LinkedIn is often referred to as “the place you put your resume online”, or “the professional Facebook”, but the truth is more nuanced. The official answer: the world’s largest professional network with over 200 million members and growing rapidly. LinkedIn connects you to your trusted contacts and helps you exchange knowledge, ideas, and opportunities with a broader network of professionals.

The practical answer: an online destination that allows you to represent yourself professionally to potential employers, alumni, and the broader professional community of your choosing. It is a tool that helps you present a professional image online, connect with others to enhance your knowledge of a field, learn about the issues in different professions, and begin to build a track record as a savvy job seeker.

*How can I use this tool in my job search?*

Students have used LinkedIn to do any and all of the following: find and contact alumni, develop their Google Search rankings, set up informational interviews, research companies prior to an interview, learn about their chosen industries, expand their network by contributing to professional discussions, and staying current on news in their future industries.

*What is the most effective way to connect on LinkedIn?*

There are several methods of connecting to people on LinkedIn. The first, and easiest, is to search for a person’s name and click the ‘connect’ button. You can also import your email contacts and browse the user directory for potentially interesting contacts.

Pay careful attention when importing your email contacts to ensure that you aren’t sending email invites to everyone in your address book, and always personalize your connection messages. LinkedIn offers form text that states “I’d like to add you to my professional network,” but you should personalize it to reflect some of the following:

- Letting the contact know how they met you or why you’d like to be connected
- How you think this relationship would be mutually beneficial
Anecdotally, LinkedIn users seem to respond more positively to personalized invitations than the pre-populated message. Some users who will not accept invitations unless they are personalized, so why not take the extra time?

**What should I avoid doing when using LinkedIn?**
LinkedIn is a place to create and manage a professional image of yourself, and that should guide all of your interactions on the site. Keep your focus on connecting to people that you know and have something in common with, strive to personalize your interactions with others on the site, and remember that it’s not a place to air grievances about your job search. Focus your energy on being authentic, helpful, and enthusiastic in your interactions. For further reading, consult these resources in the UCS Library:

- *I'm On LinkedIn, Now What???,* by Jason Alba
- *The Start-up of You*, by Reid Hoffman and Ben Casanocha

**I'm Already On LinkedIn—Now What?**

*Consider using ALL of the available sections*

You already know that LinkedIn offers you the ability to edit a summary section, a section covering your work experience, groups and associations, skills, and recommendations. However, there are even more sections you can use to customize your profile. This can be a boon to liberal arts majors, as it allows for easy integration of your volunteer experience, personal interests, and academic performance with your professional aspirations. You could consider adding sections on:

- Courses, Honors and Awards, and Languages
- Organizations
- Projects
- Publications
- Test Scores (certain industries are more interested in this data than others.)
- Community Service
- Show samples of your work by uploading them to your profile. LinkedIn allows you to uploading written documents, video, and other forms of media to enhance your experience

**Engage with LinkedIn Groups**

Groups are where the promise of “exchanging knowledge” truly comes to life. You can join a wide ranging amount of groups that cover all of your interests. You may want to start by joining the [University of Virginia Career Networking Community](http://www.career.virginia.edu), which is where students, alumni, parents, and recruiters regularly interact. Beyond that, you could search for groups that focus on your related interests, such as future career fields, networking in a certain geographic location, based on your college affiliations, such as Greek membership or pre-professional society membership. And as you connect to people, take a look at the groups they’re a part of—that’s a great source of future inspiration.
As you search for groups, you can see additional data about each group in the results, such as the number of people in your network that belong to the group, and most importantly, whether or not the group is active. LinkedIn Groups all have a similar structure that includes discussion boards, the ability to post and view jobs, and search the member directory. As a student, the discussion boards are a key source of insight into the issues, concerns, and challenges of a particular industry or professional situation, and it’s a great place to observe for a little while. Within each discussion, you can follow the discussion and receive additional information when others comment, and you can also like the discussion.

Within each group, we recommend adjusting your update settings to prevent getting overwhelmed. You can do that by choosing “my settings” under the “more” menu in each group. You can choose to have group updates sent to you as they happen, once a week, or daily, and you can specify which email address they should go to.

**How can I ensure my profile is widely visible?**

If you’re asking yourself this question then you need a public profile link. Making your profile public gives you a short, easily shareable link that you can include on your resume, cover letter, email signature, and business cards. Making your profile public also improves your Google search results for your name, which can be very helpful if you have a common name, or it can assist you in making the right information about you accessible.

- To get started, Go to Settings and click "Edit your public profile".
- In the "Your public profile URL" box on the right, click the "Customize your public profile URL" link.
- Type the last part of your new custom URL in the text box.
- Click Set Custom URL.

You can then visit the “settings” page and then choose “edit your public profile” to make changes to the content that is shown online. You can show all of the same sections that are available to registered LinkedIn users, or restrict it further.

**In Summary**

LinkedIn can be a powerful tool if you take the time to use it well. It is an important component in creating an online personal brand, and it shows employers that you have the confidence to successfully navigate online professional networking. Take your time in developing your profile, think about the long term impact of using the tool, and **contact us** if you need any assistance!