

With over 300 million members, LinkedIn is the leading online professional networking database. In today's job market, a LinkedIn profile is just as indispensable as a resume. Recruiters of all types rely heavily on LinkedIn during the selection process.

So if you don't have a profile yet, it's time to get active! As a student or recent grad, you will find that LinkedIn offers built-in components designed to help you make the most of your skills, even if you have limited on-the-job experiences.

Name

If you have a common name, consider adding your middle initial or full middle name when conducting professional business. Whatever name you use on your LinkedIn profile, make sure it's consistent with your email signature, resume and all job application documents.

Photo

Having a great profile photo can make the difference between a recruiter paying attention to your profile or passing it by. Your photo should be colorful, yet professional. It should show your face clearly and you should be smiling. Even if you're serious about your work, potential employers will still connect more strongly with a positive, energetic photo.

Headline

The headline is one of the shortest pieces of text in your profile, and apart from your "Summary," it's the piece you should spend the most time developing. When it comes to your headline, impact, concision and creativity count. Your headline, much like your photo, can compel recruiters and potential mentors to either continue reading your profile, or to move on to someone else. Use targeted keywords.

Summary

Now that you've hooked people in with your headline, it's time to sell your skills. The "Summary" is your opportunity to describe your experiences, goals, skills and unique traits in a way that makes you absolutely unforgettable to recruiters. This section should take you longer than any other, even though the final product should be no more than one or two paragraphs.

The summary should state your career goals and top skills, and should creatively state what makes you different from any other candidate. Don't be kooky, but do be willing to think outside the box. We recommend including some strong, internationally-oriented descriptive keywords in this section.

Experience

This section is designed to showcase your on-the-job experience. Include dates and locations (especially international ones), and make the most of the description section. Remember, you want to present a profile that's comprehensive, yet scan-able.

Skills and Endorsements

It is possible to build and customize the "Skills & Endorsements" section of your LinkedIn profile; but over the long term, the biggest value in this section will actually come from your connections recommending you, either by endorsing your skills or writing a note about your professional capabilities.

When you first create your profile, select ten to fifteen high-impact skill terms. Remember: You're creating an honest skill inventory, but it should be the skill inventory appropriate for your ideal career rather than an exhaustive list of all your capabilities. As a student or recent grad, don't be afraid to ask professors, volunteer managers and peers to recommend you on LinkedIn.

Projects

Have you built a blog? Planned an international event? Participated in a public debate or lecture series? "Projects" is a space on the LinkedIn profile where you can outline side projects that don't fall into the traditional work experience category. This is a great way for students with limited on-the-job experience to showcase relevant skills.

Education

The basic elements of this section are simple to complete, but it offers a few important sub-sections. Students without on-the-job experience can get mileage out of the "Activities" and "Description" sub-sections. Discuss extra-curricular activities, particularly those with cross-cultural or career-oriented focuses.

Courses

For those who took one or more highly international or heavily project-based courses in university, this is the ideal location to describe your experience and the skills you built. You might also use this space to describe a language course, or other career-relevant studies.

Honors and Awards

We suggest only including significant awards and recent honors. If you won the spelling bee in grade nine, don't feel the need to include it here.

Test Scores

Depending on your field of study, you may have test scores that could make your profile more attractive to a potential employer. Think about whether you have anything you wish to include in this optional section. Unless you have a truly standout score, you might want to pass.

Languages

This section gives you a limited number of proficiency options, and no opportunity to discuss your language-learning experiences. Be honest in about your level of fluency, but include all languages in which you have experience.

Volunteering and Causes

This section allows you to list your previous volunteer roles with organizations and groups, but it also allows you to list the causes that you care about, and the organizations you might be interested in working with – even if you haven't yet worked with them. Discuss what matters most to you.

Organizations

Perhaps you're a junior member at a professional organization in your industry, or you have participated in events at a local refugee assistance organization. If you have connections to career-relevant organizations, highlight them in this section.

Note that "career-relevant" doesn't necessarily mean the organization relates to your field exclusively. An organization that puts you in contact with people from other cultures, for instance, is relevant regardless of your professional field.

Patents, Certifications, Publications

This section can be particularly useful for graduate and PhD students, as well as young journalists, artists and designers. If you have had work/s published in academic journals, magazines or newspapers, list them here with Web links.

Additional Info

The "Additional Info" section allows you to put your birthdate, marital status, contact information, etc. This section also allows you to list interests. As with every other section, don't waste the chance to support your career goals.

Connections

As a potential employee, you're no longer solely represented by the content of your resume; you're also represented and reflected by your network. Once you've created a killer LinkedIn profile, start building your connections.

When you first arrive, import your email contacts. Then it's time to get creative, researching companies that you're interested in, mentors you'd like to work with, personal connections you think could help you professionally, etc.

Following

Follow companies you're interested in. Follow your university. Follow your mentors. This is a way to have a professionally-oriented newsfeed that's constantly updated with useful and/or inspiring information.

A Last Word

In a great LinkedIn profile, the elements work in harmony, creating a unified image and reflecting a unique professional identity or "personal brand". Creating a profile is easy – but creating the **perfect** profile takes research, foresight, effort and time. We wish you all the best as you enter the exciting and fruitful world of LinkedIn!

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