LinkedIn.com is a useful database for career exploration and making career connections. LinkedIn connects you to your trusted contacts and helps you exchange and enhance knowledge, ideas, and opportunities with a broader network of professionals. It is an online destination that allows you to represent yourself professionally to potential employers, alumni, and the broader professional community of your choosing.

**TAKE THE FIRST STEP**

One of the largest opportunities new users miss out on with LinkedIn is that they rush to put up a profile and don’t take the time to create an effective presence on the site before connecting with others.

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
- Add where you went to school
- Fill out your industry and ZIP code
- Have 50 or more connections

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.

**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. Choose professional attire, ensure that your hair and skin look acceptable, select a background that enhances but doesn’t distract from you, and find a setting that provides for good lighting.

**LINKEDIN SUMMARY**

Your LinkedIn summary is a place for you to tell your professional story—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?

Look at the summaries of professionals you admire, or some of the examples on LinkedIn University to find a profile summary that matches your personality and lines up with your industry of interest.

**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT LINKEDIN**

**HOW CAN I USE LINKEDIN IN MY JOB SEARCH?**

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

**WHAT IS THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY TO CONNECT 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.

**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 UVA Career Center Library:

- I’m On LinkedIn, Now What??? by Jason Alba
- The Start-up of You by Reid Hoffman and Ben Casanocha
- E-Habits: What You Must Do to Optimize Your Professional Digital Presence by Elizabeth Charnock
I’M ON LINKEDIN—NOW WHAT?

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.

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 upload written documents, videos, 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 may want to start by joining the University of Virginia Alumni, Students and Friends group 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, and based on your college affiliations. As you connect to people, take a look at the groups they’re a part of—they’re a great source of inspiration for the future.

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 profession, and it’s also a great place to observe the interactions of likeminded people. 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.

HOW CAN I ENSURE MY PROFILE IS WIDELY VISIBLE?

Create 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 “Profile” > “Edit your profile”
- Click the URL provided underneath your profile photo, which leads to your public profile. Click “Create your custom URL” found on the right. Type the last part of your new custom URL in the text box.
- Click “Save.”

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.

GETTING STARTED WITH LINKEDIN

Visit the students.linkedin.com provided by LinkedIn to find instructional videos that help you understand the features and benefits of using LinkedIn, plus there are student specific resources.

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!