

How to build a Professional Student LinkedIn Profile

> Craft an informative profile headline

Your profile headline gives people a short, memorable way to understand who you are in a professional context. Your headline will initially default to your current position title, but whatever you do, don't leave it as "Cashier at McDonalds". Think of the headline as the slogan for your professional brand, such as "Student, Queensland University of Technology" or "Recent honours grad seeking marketing position."

> Display an appropriate photo

Remember that LinkedIn is not Facebook or MySpace. If you choose to post a photograph (and we suggest you do, as the more complete a profile is, the more likely it will turn up in search results!), select a professional, high-quality headshot of you alone. Party photos and cartoon avatars don't fit in the professional environment of LinkedIn.

> Show off your education

Be sure to include information about all institutions you've attended. Include your major and minor if you have one, and highlight your activities. Did you spend a semester studying abroad? Are you a member of a student club or society? Won any awards? Don't be shy – flaunt it here!

> Develop a professional summary statement

Your summary statement should resemble the first few paragraphs of your best-written cover letter – concise and confident about your goals and qualifications. Include relevant internships, volunteer work, and extra curriculars. Present your summary statement in short blocks of text for easy reading. Bullet points are great too.

> Fill your "Specialties" section with keywords

"Specialties" is the place to include key words and phrases that a recruiter or hiring manager might type into a search engine to find a person like you. The best place to find relevant keywords is in the job listings that appeal to you and the LinkedIn profiles of people who currently hold the kinds of positions you want.

> Summarise your experience

Use the experience section of your profile to outline any jobs you've had in the past, including a summary of your responsibilities and achievements. Remember that this section is not just for paid positions – any work experience, internships or voluntary work you've done (that is relevant to your current career direction) is worth including!

> Update your status regularly

A great way to stay on other people's radars and enhance your professional image is to update your status regularly. Tell people about professional events you're attending, major projects you've completed, professional books you're reading, or any other news that you would tell someone at a professional networking reception.

> Show your connectedness with LinkedIn Group badges

Joining Groups and displaying the group badges on your profile are the perfect ways to fill out the professionalism of your profile and show your desire to connect to people with whom you have something in common. You can start by joining QUT's LinkedIn group as well as the larger industry groups related to your industry or future career.

> Claim your unique LinkedIn URL

To increase the professional results that appear when people type your name into a search engine, set your LinkedIn profile to "public" and claim a unique URL for your profile (for example: www.linkedin.com/in/yourname). This also makes it easier to include your LinkedIn URL in your email signature, which is a great way to demonstrate your professionalism.

Flesh out your profile with the new ‘Add Sections’ option

If you haven't had the chance to undertake much work experience throughout your studies, your LinkedIn profile may be looking a little bare. To help students and recent grads flesh out their profiles with meaningful, professional information, LinkedIn has introduced a new “Add Sections” button. Here are some sections you may want to add to your profile:

- **Projects:** Participating in projects shows that you can apply classroom learning to real-world challenges and work effectively in a team.
- **Honours and Awards:** Did you make the Dean's List or earn a merit-based scholarship? Add it to your profile. While much of your profile is a subjective characterisation of your abilities, Honors and Awards provide objective validation for your accomplishments.
- **Organisations:** Participation in on-campus or external organisations shows your contributions outside the classroom. Leadership abilities, and making a positive impact within an organisation, are talents widely sought by employers and recruiters.
- **Test Scores:** Employers often view strong test scores as indicators of good problem solving skills. But only add this section if you have a really stellar GPA – there's nothing wrong with leaving it out.
- **Courses:** Listing select courses on your profile (not every class you've ever taken) is a good way of demonstrating your areas of interest and expertise. Add courses that are specifically relevant to the career you want to pursue.

Collect diverse recommendations

Nothing builds credibility like third-party endorsements. The most impressive LinkedIn profiles have at least one recommendation associated with each position a person has held. Think about soliciting recommendations from lecturers, internship coordinators and colleagues, employers, and professional mentors.

Share your work

A great way to enhance your LinkedIn profile is to add examples of your writing, design work, or other accomplishments by displaying URLs or adding LinkedIn Applications. By including URLs, you can direct people to your website, blog, online portfolio or Twitter feed. Through Applications, you can share a PowerPoint or store a downloadable version of your resume.

What Next?

Develop your network

Now that you have a compelling profile, it's time to start developing your network. You can easily import your contact list from gmail, hotmail, AOL or Windows Live. But make sure you also search for people who may not be in your contacts list already. Connect with everyone you know in a professional sense – former employers, colleagues, classmates, etc. Use the ‘People You May Know’ feature to check if you're missing anyone.

Research Jobs/Organisations

LinkedIn's advanced search function allows you to search for people with specific job titles, or who work at specific organisations, making it a very handy career research tool. You can search for people who have your ideal job and try to identify patterns in what they studied and what jobs they had early in their career, to help you plan your own career path. It can also help you identify specific organisations you may want to work for in the future.

Get introductions to people you want to know

One of LinkedIn's unique features is the ability to request introductions through your existing network. You can explore your contact's connections for people who you think may be valuable to network with, or you can search for people by company or title, and see if any of your search results are second or third degree contacts. Once you have decided who you want to know, request an introduction, and be specific about why you want to connect with them. In a world where getting a job is about WHO you know, not just what you know, this is a very handy function.