

A Guide to LinkedIn

Creating a LinkedIn account for the first time and don't know where to start? Trying to strengthen your current profile? Still figuring out how it works and how you can use it to grow your network? This comprehensive guide reviews the basics of LinkedIn, how you can stand out with a strong online presence, and how to use the platform to network, learn about careers, and find job and internships.

What is LinkedIn?

Launched in 2003, LinkedIn is considered the “professional” social media site that is used primarily for professional networking and development. With over 500 million users across more than 200 countries, it connects individuals from around the world so they can learn more about career paths and collaborate. Employers will also use the platform to post job and internship opportunities, and recruiters use LinkedIn to search for talent for their organizations and screen applicants.

How does it work?

“On LinkedIn, people in your network are called connections... You can build your network by sending invitations to connect with other LinkedIn members..., or by accepting invites from others. The degree of connection you have with another member affects how you can interact with them on LinkedIn.”

1st-degree connections – Contacts you know personally and who you trust on a professional level. You are directly connected with them because you've accepted their invitation to connect, or they've accepted your invitation. You have access to your 1st-degree connections' contact information, including their email address and you will see their activity on your news feed.

2nd-degree connections - People who are connected to your 1st-degree connections. You'll see a 2nd degree icon next to their name in search results and on their profile. You can send them an invitation by clicking the Connect button on their profile page (we recommend adding a note when you connect with someone new)

3rd-degree connections - People who are connected to your 2nd-degree connections. You can sometimes still connect with them by clicking on the More button on their profile, then Connect.

**If their full first and last names are displayed, you can send them an invitation by clicking Connect.*

If only the first letter of their last name is displayed, clicking Connect isn't an option.

-Adapted from [LinkedIn Help: Your Network and Degrees of Connection](#)

How do I create and edit my profile?

When you first [create a LinkedIn account](#), you will be prompted to start building your personal profile page. After that, whenever you want to make any edits to your profile, click the “Me” button in the top right of the home page, then click “View Profile.” You can add more to your profile anytime by clicking the blue “Add profile section” button to the right of your profile picture and then selecting sections to add from the drop-down menu. To edit existing sections, click on the pencil icon to the right of each section.

You can also change your privacy settings by clicking the “Me” button and then going to Settings & Privacy. In the Visibility category, you can select what others see when you've viewed their profile; under the default setting, when you look at someone's profile they will be notified that you viewed it, but you can turn this feature off if you prefer.



How do I build a strong profile?

- **Include an appropriate headshot and a cover photo**

Your profile picture should be a headshot (shoulders up) in front of a neutral background such as a blank wall or outside. The SPDC provides professional headshots, but you can also have a friend take a photo of you on their phone. Consider the culture of your chosen industry: business professional attire is always appropriate, but a more casual outfit/background can be used for creative fields such as communications. A cover photo is optional, but it can be a nice way to add some personality to your profile. Review the profiles of professionals in your chosen field to get some ideas.

- **Make your headline stand out**

Your headline on LinkedIn will auto-populate with your current position title, but you may want to customize this to better showcase your professional identity and brand yourself. Recruiters often look for people with creative headlines (something more than “Elon student studying _____” for example), so spend some time brainstorming and look at other people’s headlines for inspiration.

- **Compose a concise, well-written summary**

Your Summary or About section is a place to demonstrate who you are as a professional. Write about the skills you have and the value you can bring as an intern/employee. You can also describe your professional goals or philosophy. Keep it short (3-5 sentences) and be sure to proofread.

- **Upload relevant media**

With LinkedIn, your profile can be much more interactive than a paper resume; you have the ability to upload media and link to external documents, photos, sites, videos, etc. in your About and Experience section. This is a great way to show off your professional work just like with an online portfolio.

- **Customize your URL**

On your profile page, click “Edit public profile & URL” on the left. You can then personalize your web address using the pencil icon. LinkedIn will automatically give you a really long URL, but you can edit it to include just your name (if your name is already taken, you can add a middle initial or number at the end). Now this link will be shorter and more personalized, making it easier to add it to a resume header or email signature, for example.

- **Add Sections to Fill out your Profile**

Experience – Add any part-time or full-time jobs you’ve held, including paid or unpaid internships.

Include start and end dates for each experience and add a brief description: you can copy and paste the bullet points right in from your resume. Remember to keep this updated. If you have any on-campus leadership positions, you can put these here too if you feel they are relevant to your career path.

Education – Include the degree(s) you are working towards at Elon along with any minors or concentrations. You can also add in your high school if you’d like. There is a section for Activities & Societies where you can input extracurricular involvement, or you can add a section for organizations.

Skills – Here you can add both hard/technical skills such as Microsoft Excel or Adobe Photoshop and soft/power skills like public speaking or event planning. LinkedIn will also suggest skills based off the content in your profile. Your connections can endorse you for any of your listed skills.

Additional Sections – The above sections are probably the most important to have filled out, but you can always add more to strengthen your profile. You can highlight your best posts, articles or media in the Featured section. You can also add Licenses & Certifications, Volunteer Experience, Languages, and Accomplishments, which can include Honors & Awards, Projects, and Publications.

What can I use LinkedIn for?

- **Network**
 - **Stay connected** with colleagues and **build new relationships** with other professionals in your field
 - Engage with your connections using the Home page: like, comment on, and share their posts
 - Post your own updates to celebrate professional accomplishments and spark conversations
 - **Follow organizations and companies** that interest you to stay informed on industry trends
 - **Join groups** related to your major or career goals. Examples include Elon groups by major, locations, and/or identities and larger professional groups, such as the ones listed below:
Elon: *Elon Media Analytics Connection, Elon Women in Finance, Elon Alumni in Washington, D.C., English Department at Elon University, Elon Underrepresented Business Student Alliance Network, Elon University Computer Science, Elon Sport and Event Management Department Networking*
Larger Professional Organizations: *The Psychology Network, Molecular Biology Jobs, New York Theatre Professionals, Accounting & Finance Professionals, Healthcare PR & Communications Pros, Political Science, Non Profit Network, American Public Health Association, History Enthusiasts Group*
- **Search for Jobs and Internships**
 - Use the Jobs tab to find jobs and internships and filter by industry, experience level, location, etc.
 - Set job alerts to be notified of new postings that match your search criteria
 - For any posting, LinkedIn will let you know if you have any connections there or if there are any Elon alumni at that company – then you could click right on those alums and reach out to them
- **Learn about Career Paths**
 - Not sure what graduates from your major do after Elon? Go to Elon University’s page on LinkedIn, scroll down and click Alumni on the left. You can then use the filters to sort by “What they studied” and/or “What they do” to generate a list of alumni in your major and see all of the different career paths they’ve taken.
 - Major is not a determinant of career, and you’ll find that Elon alumni work in a variety of areas regardless of their degree of study.
 - You could reach out to these alums to learn more about their careers, how they got started, and how they maximized their time at Elon.
- **Find Professional Development Events to Attend**
 - Type in a topic in the search bar (such as “advertising”) and click “see all results” on the bottom
 - Click on the “More” dropdown and go to “events” (you can also search for groups/companies here)
 - This will produce a list of related upcoming professional development events, often offered online and for free. Take advantage of these webinars and other events to hear from leaders in the industry and grow your network!
- **Learn New Skills with LinkedIn Learning**
 - Through Elon, you have free access to [LinkedIn Learning](#) to utilize anytime, anywhere
 - Choose from a huge library of video courses taught by industry experts for software, creative, and business skills; engage in short 20-min courses or learning paths that tie related courses together
 - Examples: *Excel: Tips and Tricks; Time Management Fundamentals; Unconscious Bias; Project Management Foundations; Learning Python; Strategic Thinking; Communicating with Confidence*
 - After completing a course or learning path, you’ll be prompted to add the certificate and new skills learned to your LinkedIn profile, a great way to showcase your new expertise to employers

How do I reach out to someone on LinkedIn?

When connecting with someone you don't know, always write a note to introduce yourself and explain why you are reaching out. Keep it short and sweet and emphasize your point of connection, such as Elon if they are an alum. Once they connect with you, you will have access to their email. Then you can send a more detailed message to set up an informational call with them. For a 2nd degree connection, you can also ask one of your mutual connections to do an email introduction for you. Email is often the best method to connect because people may not always check their LinkedIn very frequently.

See below for some additional tips from alumni and recruiters and a sample LinkedIn message:

- Always be professional. Send messages to Mr., Ms., or Mx. (using the contact's first name is acceptable if they have graduated in the last five or less years.)
- Be concise and clear about what you want – no long messages or emails
- State how you got the contact's email address
- Be prompt in your communications; always respond within 24 hours
- Provide potential dates and times for the meeting; it saves a lot of back and forth
- NOTE: "Alumni" is plural; "alumna" is a female graduate of college, "alumnus" is a male graduate of college, "alum" can be used for one or more graduates from college regardless of gender
- If you are able to have an informational meeting, always send a thank you note within 24-48 hours

LinkedIn Sample Message:

Dear _____,

I hope you are well. I discovered your profile while researching Elon alumni in the graphic design field on LinkedIn and thought I would reach out to connect. Thank you for considering my request.

Sincerely, Frank Black

For more tips and samples emails, refer to our [Informational Meeting/Networking Guide](#).

Additional Resources

- [LinkedIn Profile Checklist](#)
- [LinkedIn Guides](#) – a variety of job/internship and profile development resources for students
- [Popular LinkedIn Learning Courses](#) – the 20 Most Popular LinkedIn Learning Courses of 2019

If you have additional questions or would like to review your LinkedIn profile/online presence, we encourage you to schedule an appointment with a career advisor on the [Elon Job Network](#).

