

[*LinkedIn Checklist*]

If your first response to LinkedIn is to groan and roll your eyes, you're not alone. The platform has a reputation for being a bit self-serving and stuffy, and I wish that it would expand its capacity to accommodate the needs of creative people, but it does have a lot to recommend itself. If nothing else, it can be a place to investigate potential career fields and to learn how people in positions you admire acquired their current role. Think of it as detective work—you can find out how the executive director of Portland's Rock 'n' Roll Girls Camp earned her stripes before she took the helm of a vibrant music education nonprofit. Use this handy checklist to help you craft a LinkedIn profile that gets noticed and positions you for attracting opportunities to propel you forward.

Write a Compelling Headline.

Copywriting legend David Ogilvy once said, "Five times as many people read the headline as read the body copy." Apply this sound logic to the headline of your LinkedIn and assume that, much like they do with a news article, people are looking for a reason to read further when they read your headline. Give them a reason to read more about you and use as many of the allotted 120 characters as possible.

"Director of Public Relations and Marketing | Expert at raising brand awareness and developing partnerships," for example, uses 105 characters and stands out from candidates who merely list their title. You can also use it to show a bit of personality: "Speech Pathologist who gives voice to children with autism spectrum disorder."

The headline is also the perfect place to work in keywords to attract employers and recruiters and the robot scanners that match job announcements with your profile. A web developer would be wise, for instance, to mention the technologies with which he is proficient that are most highly in demand: "Web Developer | Full Stack Engineer | Front End Specialist | HTML5, CSS3, PHP, JQuery." It's not poetry, but it's compelling because it lists crucial information that "Web Developer" alone doesn't.

Some people worry that populating their LinkedIn profile and resumes with keywords comes across unnaturally, forcing them to word sentences awkwardly or redundantly. One trick to alleviating this fear is to read what you have written out loud. If it sounds "sincere to the ear," you are in good shape. You may be forced, however, to use the same words again, if the applicant scanning system prefers it, which contradicts what most of us have been taught about writing well, further aggravating you.

Don't worry what your high school English teacher would say about repeating words. Strive to write well, obviously, but realize that you are playing a game, to some extent. This game is all about getting noticed, understood, and appreciated, and to do so, you will want the robots to find you and confer their acceptance. (Think of them as the Arnold Schwarzenegger character in Terminator 2, not Terminator 1. They are on your side and are not to be feared but used to your advantage.) The section below gives you a chance to consider keywords and organically work them into your profile. (Read about resume- and cover-letter-scanning robots in How to Talk to Robots.)

If you're unsure what keywords to use, look at relevant job descriptions and pay attention to which words and phrases pop up frequently. Brainstorm a list in the table below.

If you're forging an entrepreneurial path, by the way, the robots will matter less, and you can strive to write copy that your intended audience will respond to. Your task will be to match the tone and intention of your branding. Read more about using LinkedIn to promote a business in LinkedIn for Entrepreneurs on page 144.

Tell people what you're passionate about now with an eye toward the future. Write a headline that describes the position you want and references your skills. Imagine what keywords a recruiter would type into the search box. Here are a few more examples to give you examples of ways you can think outside the box with your headline:

- VP of Sales | Experience growing and leading global teams of 100+
- Social Media Expert driving successful B2B and B2C campaigns on a shoestring budget (Average ROI of 620)
- Graphic Designer able to give vitality to confusing stats with stunning infographics
- Environmental Policy Analyst and Lobbyist seeking opportunities to combat climate change
- Six Sigma Master Black Belt dedicated to process excellence in email operations
- Procurement & Contract Specialist | Treasury Manager | Trilingual in English, Spanish, and German

Use this space to play with some headline options:

Craft a Readable Summary.

At the time you initially posted your profile, you may not have been as clear about your career focus as you are now. Whether your basic message is dialed-in or not, you may be clearer about how your experience and skills have prepared you for your future path. Draw from your basic message to write your Summary section, which is a critical component of your LinkedIn profile that many people gloss over or skip entirely.

The Summary section is the next most important section of your profile and the best place to strategically use primary keywords. To optimize readability, keep paragraphs short (two or three sentences) and keep your language active, lively, and as light as possible on the jargon. Mention that you know PHP and Java but write it as if you were saying it in a normal sentence to a nontechnical person: "Proficient in programming languages germane to web development like PHP and HTML5."

Describe what motivates you, what you're skilled at, and what you're prepared to tackle. A nice trick is to get you started is to brainstorm your

“UVP”—write down what makes you unique, what value you bring to a team, and what proposition you’re offering. Go back to the Craft a Written Basic Message on page 166 worksheet to help you open up more language.

Also, no matter what job you’re going for, think (as much as possible) like a graphic designer. Since it is not possible to use color or different font styles in the copy, maximize your online readability with the use of white space and bullets.

At the top of your summary, list your top ten skills across the page, separated by pipes (also known as vertical lines).

Public Relations | Written Communication | News Reporting | Blog Writing & Management | Newsletter Creation | Internal Communications | Public Speaking | Social Media Content

Summarize your background, core strengths, expertise, and professional highlights in a few brief paragraphs. Review carefully to see if your profile projects who you are and what you offer a potential employer.

Highly organized and versatile writer, editor, and storyteller with strong journalism background and twenty years of experience with major metro daily newspapers. Interested in telling compelling stories with impact and originality that elicit engagement, interest, and results. Possess outstanding writing and research skills and a curious nature that is sensitive to diverse perspectives and values trenchant analysis.

Able to produce, write, and edit online content; coordinate complex projects; and develop and maintain a system of best practices. Can stay calm in high-pressure environments with ever-shifting priorities. Experienced in outreach and relationship development with strategic sources and community leaders.

Like a cover letter, your summary can also account for gaps in work history, articulate how you have kept your skills up-to-date, and explain anything significant not obvious in your work experience.

Spent two years caring for an elderly parent full-time, maintaining her health records, corresponding with insurance companies, monitoring medication usage and physical therapy progress, scheduling and transporting her to medical appointments, and offering companionship and care.

A leadership opportunity assumed as a volunteer is a great example of an item worthy of expanding upon in a summary.

Elected president of Clayton Elementary Parent Teacher Association (PTA) for three years, leading monthly meetings, directing fund-raising efforts and event logistics, and managing forty-five volunteers. Chaired silent auction and dinner and three other annual events that raised \$150,000 to \$200,000 each year. Augmented fund-raising efforts by 50 percent in first year and created and successfully pioneered two yearly events meant to welcome new parents and improve volunteer participation and parental involvement.

Here is a profile summary example that shares experience and core skills and offers a compelling “call to action” (reviewing the writer’s recommendations on LinkedIn).

With eleven years of experience in green energy technology, I possess a proven track record of researching, designing, and implementing innovative marketing and public relations strategies for renewable energy and climate change legislation. Strengthened by customer data, these efforts have significantly reduced energy expenditures and carbon emissions as well as raised public awareness of the need for policy change and advocacy to encourage the mitigation of greenhouse gases.

Please see my recommendations from supervisors, colleagues, and strategic partner organizations for more insight into my accomplishments and work style.

Bullet points can also work in a profile summary, if you feel like specific accomplishments, accreditations, and measurable objectives are a better way to showcase your experience.

- English and humanities secondary teacher since 2000 experienced with racially diverse students in urban and rural settings with varying levels of academic performance and learning challenges
- Designed and implemented a model high school literacy coaching program, resulting in a 25 percent increase in literacy rates over a five-year period
- Developed peer-reviewed, evidence-based reading strategies throughout entire Springfield Public School system, garnering praise from the White House in 2008 and improving reading test scores by 41 percent over a two-year period
- Led fifteen professional, four-person learning teams that stimulated teacher collaboration focused on developing long-term system of classroom management best practices over the course of three years to improve collaboration among students and implement mindfulness strategies tailored to facilitating calmer classroom settings

Upload an Impressive Photo.

LinkedIn profiles with a photo receive far more engagement: twenty-one times more views and nine times more connection requests.¹ A carefully chosen photo lends a sense of approachability and warmth, not only proving that you are a real person instead of a Russian bot but also giving people an immediate sense of who you are.

Here are a few photo pointers:

- Smile! Or at least try not to look too grumpy or spaced out. Adopt a facial expression that fits your industry: more energetic and friendly for coffee roasting, approachable but more serious for health care, for example.
- Looking directly at the camera works better in more formal, posed shots, but those with an artistic flair might play with looking at a focal point to the side, as if you’re looking at someone to the left or right of the photographer and smiling at a secret inside joke.
- Take advantage of the space available by uploading a profile picture that’s at least 200px by 200px. I recommend starting with one larger (400px by 400px) but with a 1x1 aspect ratio and reducing its size.
- Avoid busy backgrounds or including others in your photo. A neutral, solid-colored background makes the best impression, as it keeps the focus on you.
- If you insist on having a background, definitely invest in a professional photographer to help keep you on target and to know how to make a busy setting still cast the focus on you. (For an urban vibe, take it in front of a red-brick wall; for a nature-inspired look, consider having some trees or the beach behind you.)

¹ <https://business.linkedin.com/sales-solutions/blog/best-practices--linkedin-profile/2018/picture-perfect--make-a-great-first-impression-with-your-linkedin>

- Pick a photographer willing to take several shots with different expressions and a mix of poses of you looking both at the camera and away, as if you are in deep contemplation.
- Professional photography is well worth the investment. At a minimum, have someone who really knows how to take photos take yours.
- Creative industries like advertising will respond better to photos with a more casual feel with a bit of flair. Think about using a black-and-white photo to stand out.

□ **Showcase Your Experience.**

List at least three recent jobs, even if they were part-time, along with detailed descriptions of your duties and accomplishments at each one. Even include photos and videos from your work.

Include a one-sentence description of the organization (unless it's a household name like Nike) and then list duties and accomplishments as bullet points.

Be sure to use an active voice and keep your sentences succinct and lively.

Instead of:

Promoted to my current role where I excelled in recruiting volunteers, increasing participation by 12 percent in one year.

Try:

Increased volunteer participation by 12 percent in the first year following a promotion.

While it's tempting to lay out your LinkedIn Experience section exactly like your resume, this is not necessarily the best course of action. While many people list their resume items, one or two short paragraphs are more readable on a LinkedIn profile:

IT Manager
The Acme Clinic, LLP
August 2002–2011
Des Moines, Iowa

Managed ten direct reports, allocated resources appropriately, and provided organizational knowledge and guidance to employees, physician owners, and administration. Implemented new workflows to facilitate the interfacing of electronic medical records with scheduling, registration, and billing systems and optimized the overall practice management system.

Directed and encouraged project team, conducting interviews, coordinating hiring, arranging travel and training, providing accountability to reports, and implementing processes to augment team performance. Coordinated spec reviews and procurement and maintained and tested software and hardware for six hundred desktop and laptop computers and more than fifty servers across seven locations.

If you have metrics or other impressive accomplishments you are eager to highlight, you could add two to five bullet points below your smaller paragraphs:

Business Systems Analyst
Little Rock Medical Center
September 1992–Aug 2002
Little Rock, Arkansas

For ten years, provided technical and hardware support and maintenance for more than three hundred staff in twelve departments. Analyzed and improved clinic process flows to maximize efficiency and optimize software usage. Confirmed and configured new software releases.

Periodically installed new client/software and maintained over 150 PCs, assuring desktop standardization. Provided monthly management updates on health of business, action plans, and road map for short-term and long-term growth. Analyzed and improved clinic process flows to maximize efficiency and optimize software usage. Using data drilling tools, converted financial reports in outdated formats to create specialized reports in Excel and Access.

- Developed instructional curriculum and prepared corporate trainer and more than eighty staff for all software and release upgrades.
- Responsible for thirty-seven direct reports, managing staff, allocating resources appropriately, and providing organizational knowledge and guidance.
- Supported and promoted projects with six-figure budgets while maintaining scope, schedule, cost, and quality of implementation.

More things to keep in mind:

- If switching careers, make it clear that your skills are transferrable. (If skills aren't apparent in the Experience section, include them in your Volunteer Experience section.)
- General rule: avoid acronyms or jargon. It's OK to use them sparingly, but unless you are certain your target audience understands them, spell them out or explain them.
- Quantify duties and accomplishments to draw readers in.
- If accomplishments aren't readily quantifiable, be sure to point out their significance. Ask yourself: Was it a project I initiated or led? Did it lead to an unrelated quantifiable result? Did it win an award? Did it result in praise or a promotion? Instead of: "Edited quarterly company magazine, Family Matters." Try: "Edited quarterly magazine, Family Matters, which increased employee engagement in company wellness program by 25 percent and drew significant praise from executive leadership."

□ **Add Organizations.**

List clubs, professional organizations, and memberships relevant to your career, pointing out positions of leadership and distinctions like “Member of the Year.” If a group is not immediately recognizable, describe it in one to two sentences and state briefly what you gained from these organizations—skills honed, relationships, understanding of civic leaderships, etc.

□ **Highlight Your Education Background.**

Starting with college, list all the educational experiences, including relevant continuing education programs, certifications, training programs, etc. Mention honors, academic distinctions, and positions of leadership while in college.

□ **Mention Your Volunteer Experience and Causes.**

Include all volunteer experience, whether it seems relevant to your career or not. Participation in charities and other worthy causes indicate that you are well-rounded and engaged in your community. List positions of leadership and key accomplishments—grants won, events organized, sponsorships procured, etc., and include key metrics.

□ **Emphasize Your Skills (Endorsements)**

Add at least five to ten key skills (which LinkedIn terms “Endorsements”), which your connections can then endorse you for. Refer to your resume to run through all the skills you can include.

□ **Share Your Honors, Awards, and Credentials.**

Mention awards and academic distinctions, including honor roll, dean’s list, honor societies, and class ranks. Describe the award or distinction briefly if not immediately obvious. If you have formal credentials, like a PMP (Project Management Professional) Certification, be sure to mention that too, indicating the year it was earned and credentialing body or institution.

□ **Cite Relevant Projects.**

Include examples of projects that are easy to distill into a “case study” format, complete with photographs, video, slide decks, or links to websites. People are visual and respond more readily to tangible examples, so help them picture the value you bring to their organization. Present projects in the P-A-R (Problem-Action-Result) format, including measurable results and stressing examples of leadership, vision, and innovative thinking. Instead of simply stating, “Grew revenue in sales department by 34 percent,” a P-A-R format would state the problem, articulate the action taken, and end with the result:

Tasked with managing a sales team with low morale, high turnover and declining performance (problem), I invested in trainings and team-building events (action), and coached the team to a 34 percent increase in sales revenue within the first quarter (result).

□ **Ask (and Ask Again) for Recommendations.**

Ask managers, colleagues, professors, or classmates who’ve worked with you closely to write a recommendation. This gives extra credibility to your strengths and skills. A robust mix of endorsements and recommendations show rather than merely tell employers and future clients what you can do.

Some things to consider...

- Check to make sure you list at least five transferrable skills, with endorsements for each one.
- Reorder your endorsements to reflect your professional aspirations, listing first the ones you want to be known for the most.
- Include at least one written recommendation for each position listed on your profile.
- Recommendations from direct reports or peers are nice; recommendations from managers and clients are most impactful.