

THE ADULTING VAULT

LinkedIn Makeover

Being Findable, Not Just Present

Everything They Forgot to Tell You

Most people treat LinkedIn as a place to have a profile. Recruiters treat it as a searchable database, and increasingly so do the AI sourcing tools that build a picture of you from public data before anyone has read your application. Those are completely different uses, and a profile written for the first one performs badly at the second. This guide covers how you actually get found, what each section is for, and the specific words that determine whether you appear in a search at all.



Part One: How People Actually Find You

Search, not browsing. That changes everything about how you write.

Almost nobody discovers you by scrolling. A recruiter with a role to fill runs a search — job title, skills, location, seniority, sometimes company — and works through the results. You either appear in that result set or you do not exist for that role.

So the first question about any profile is not "does this read well" but "what searches does this appear in." Those are different problems and only one of them is solved by good writing.

THE THREE FIELDS THAT CARRY THE MOST SEARCH WEIGHT

HEADLINE — the line under your name. The most valuable real estate on the profile and the most commonly wasted.

CURRENT AND PAST JOB TITLES — searched heavily. A creative internal title that nobody outside your company recognizes makes you invisible.

SKILLS — a structured, searchable list. Skills-based filtering is now standard, and an empty or generic skills section removes you from a large share of searches.

The second audience: the sourcing layer

Enterprise sourcing tools now build a profile of candidates from public sources — LinkedIn, code repositories, publications, conference appearances — and surface or bury people based on data they never directly submitted.

The practical implication is consistency. Titles, dates, and skills that disagree between your resume and your profile are penalized more heavily than they used to be, because the mismatch is now detected automatically rather than noticed by a person who might not care.

- ☐ Open your resume and your profile side by side. Make the titles and dates match exactly.

Part Two: The Headline

Where most profiles lose before they start.

By default LinkedIn fills your headline with your current job title and employer. That is the weakest possible use of the field, because it describes where you are rather than what you can be found for.

A formula that works

Role or target role, then specialism, then optionally a differentiator. Plain words that a recruiter would actually type.

Weak	Stronger
Senior Associate at Meridian Group	Operations Manager Supply Chain & Vendor Management Process Improvement
Looking for opportunities	Data Analyst SQL, Python, Tableau Healthcare & Insurance Analytics
Passionate problem solver and lifelong learner	Engineering Manager Distributed Systems Building and Growing Platform Teams
Marketing	Digital Marketing Specialist Paid Social & SEO B2B SaaS

Rules

- Use the job title people search for, not your internal one. If your company calls you a Growth Ninja, the searchable term is still Marketing Manager
- Include three to five concrete skills or domains. These are search terms, so they must be words a recruiter would type
- Skip adjectives. "Passionate," "results-driven," and "dynamic" are not searched by anyone
- If you are changing fields, lead with the target role rather than the one you are leaving — provided you can substantiate it
- Vertical bars read cleanly and are conventional. Emoji are a matter of taste and industry

Write your headline. Role, specialism, differentiator. Then read it and remove every adjective.

Part Three: The Rest of the Profile

Photo and banner

- A photo materially increases profile views. It does not need to be professionally shot — a plain background, good light, and your face filling most of the frame is sufficient
- Look like you do on an ordinary working day. A photo from eight years ago creates an awkward first meeting
- The banner is free space most people leave as the default blue. Even a plain image with your specialism on it is an improvement

The About section

Only the first two lines show before someone clicks. Front-load accordingly, and write in first person — third person reads oddly and always has.

A STRUCTURE THAT WORKS

1. One or two lines saying what you do and for whom. Specific, not aspirational.
2. Two or three lines of evidence — the kind of problems you handle and a result or two with numbers.
3. A line on what you are looking for, if you are looking.
4. How to reach you.

THE SINGLE MOST COMMON ABOUT-SECTION MISTAKE

Writing a personal essay about your journey and values. Nobody reads it, and it contains no searchable terms.

Write the version that would make a recruiter think "this person does the thing I need." Save the philosophy for a post.

Experience

- Same discipline as a resume: what you did, at what scale, with what result. Not a duty list
- Fill in every role, even briefly. Gaps in the profile invite questions that a one-line entry would have answered
- Add the company if it does not auto-link — an unlinked employer looks like a placeholder
- Two to four bullets per recent role. Older roles can be a single line

- Spell out acronyms at least once. Both humans and parsers benefit

Skills

This section has become genuinely load-bearing rather than decorative, because skills-based filtering is now standard practice. Treat it as a search index rather than a personality summary.

- Fill it to the limit with terms that are actually true of you
- Order matters — the top few are the most visible, so put the ones you want to be found for first
- Include both the acronym and the full term where both are used in your field
- Endorsements help marginally. Ask a few colleagues to endorse your top three rather than collecting fifty on trivia

Featured and recommendations

- Featured is underused free space — a portfolio, an article, a talk, a project
- Recommendations carry disproportionate weight because they are hard to fake. Three specific ones beat fifteen generic
- The way to get them is to write them. Most people reciprocate, and an unprompted one is memorable
- When you ask, suggest what to mention. "Would you be able to mention the migration project?" gets a far better recommendation than an open request

Part Four: Signalling Availability

Two settings, and most people pick the wrong one.

Setting	Who sees it	When to use it
Open to recruiters only	Recruiters using the hiring product. Not shown publicly and not to your employer, though the platform does not guarantee this absolutely.	You are employed and looking discreetly. This is the default choice for most people.
Public open-to-work frame	Everyone, including your current employer and your whole network.	You are unemployed, openly looking, or your employer already knows.

IF YOU ARE QUIETLY LOOKING

Turn off activity broadcasts before you overhaul your profile. Otherwise your network — including your manager — gets notified of every change at once, which is a fairly loud signal.

Make the edits, then turn broadcasts back on.

Part Five: Activity

Modest effort, disproportionate return. Most people do none.

You do not need to become a content creator. But a profile with no activity at all looks dormant, and the platform surfaces people who are visibly present.

The low-effort version that works

- Comment substantively on a few posts a week in your field. A real observation, not "Great post!" Comments are seen by the poster's whole audience, which is frequently larger than yours
- Post occasionally — something you learned, a problem you solved, an observation about your industry. Once a fortnight is plenty
- Share other people's work with your own view attached, rather than a bare reshare
- Congratulate people on moves. It is low effort, genuinely welcome, and keeps you visible

What does not work

- Engagement bait, artificial line breaks, and manufactured emotional stories. Increasingly disliked and increasingly obvious
- Posting only when you need something
- Political or personal content, unless you have decided you want that to be part of your professional identity — a legitimate choice, made deliberately

Part Six: Reaching Out

Short, specific, and with a reason.

Connection requests

Always add a note. A bare request from a stranger is usually ignored, and the note costs you fifteen seconds.

- "We both worked at Halcyon — I was in operations. Would like to connect."
- "Your post on warehouse automation was the most useful thing I read this week. Connecting if that is alright."
- "I am moving into healthcare analytics and you have the background I am trying to build. Would value being connected."

Asking for a conversation

Ask for information, not for a job. People say yes to fifteen minutes about their own work and no to "are you hiring."

A MESSAGE THAT GETS ANSWERED

Say who you are in one line. Say why them specifically — not something that could have been sent to anyone. Ask for something small and bounded. Then stop.

"I am an operations analyst moving toward healthcare. You made that move three years ago. Would you have fifteen minutes to tell me how you approached it? Happy to work around your schedule."

Follow up once if there is no reply. Then leave it — persistence past two messages costs more than the contact was worth.

Part Seven: The Audit

Twenty minutes. Do it now, not when you need it.

FINDABILITY

- ☐ Headline contains my searchable job title and three to five real skills
- ☐ Job titles are ones an outsider would recognize, not internal jargon
- ☐ Skills section is full, ordered with the most important first
- ☐ Location and industry are set correctly
- ☐ Custom profile URL set, rather than the string of random numbers

CONSISTENCY

- ☐ Titles and dates match my resume exactly
- ☐ No unexplained gaps that a one-line entry would close
- ☐ Nothing claimed here that I could not defend in an interview

SUBSTANCE

- ☐ About section front-loads what I do in the first two lines
- ☐ Recent roles have results, not duties
- ☐ At least two specific recommendations
- ☐ Featured section has something in it
- ☐ Photo is recent and looks like me

HOUSEKEEPING

- ☐ Activity broadcasts off before a big edit, if I am looking quietly
- ☐ Correct open-to-work setting for my situation
- ☐ Contact details visible to people I would want to hear from

Closing

LinkedIn rewards being specific and findable far more than it rewards being polished. A plain profile with the right job title, a full skills section, and three real results outperforms an elegantly written one that never appears in a search.

And the highest-value hour is the one you spend on it while you are still employed and not looking. A profile built under pressure reads like one.

THE FIVE THAT MATTER MOST

Replace the default headline. Role, specialism, three to five searchable skills.

Use job titles an outsider would recognize, not internal ones.

Fill the skills section completely and order it deliberately.

Make titles and dates match your resume exactly.

Turn off activity broadcasts before overhauling, if you are looking quietly.