Q&A: LinkedIn Etiquette Guide for Students & Recent Grads

Etiquette rules in the offline world are pretty clear: Say please and thank you; shake hands firmly; keep your elbows off the table. But what are the rules for interacting professionally online? Here are some guidelines for managing your e-manners.

Q: How often should I check LinkedIn?
A: While logging in daily is ideal, what’s most important is that you maintain a consistent presence and respond to messages and connection requests in a timely fashion. LinkedIn will send you a Network Update once a week or once a day -- you can use that email as a reminder to log in and send someone a note, respond to a request or post to a group discussion.

Q: How do I make sure my LinkedIn profile is professional?
A: First, be totally truthful and never stretch the facts -- remember that your profile is public. Next, post a photo that is professionally appropriate (no pets, quirky backgrounds or funny expressions). Finally, write up your experience and credentials as you would present them on a resume or cover letter. Your writing can be a little less formal on LinkedIn, but proper grammar, spelling and proofreading are essential.

Q: What’s the best way to request to connect with someone?
A: LinkedIn provides a basic message “I’d like to add you to my professional network on LinkedIn,” but it’s a good idea to customize your requests. You’ll get a better response rate if you write a brief, personalized, polite note to each potential connection reminding them how you met (if necessary) and explaining why you’re interested in connecting -- e.g., to ask for advice or to keep in touch after meeting at a conference.

Q: How do I ask for an introduction?
A: When you request an introduction, you’ll be prompted to write a note to your mutual connection and then a separate note to the person you want to meet. In both cases, draft a compelling subject line and a short note that introduces you and explains why you hope to connect. Just remember never to ask directly for a job -- it’s not polite or appropriate.

Q: What should I do if someone doesn’t respond to my connection request or message?
A: There is no guarantee that everyone you want to connect with will want to connect with you. If you haven’t heard from a potential connection in over a month, it’s okay to send that person an email to say that you’ve reached out and would like to connect. If that doesn’t work, it’s best to move on to people who are more interested or responsive.

Q: How do I handle a request from someone I don’t know or don’t want to connect with?
A: You can either reply with a short note requesting an explanation (“Hi - can you remind me how we know each other?”) or you can click “Archive” to ignore the request or save it for the future. If you definitely don’t want to connect, simply click “Archive” and move on. If you want to report the person as a spammer, then click “I don’t know this user.” Users who receive several of these clicks are removed from LinkedIn.
Q: Will people know if I un-connect from them?
A: If you unconnect from someone, that person will not be alerted. Of course, if that person looks through his or her contacts or attempts to send you a message, you will no longer be shown as a 1st-degree connection.

Q: How many groups should I join?
A: The number of groups you belong to on LinkedIn should reflect approximately the number of professional affiliations you have (or want to have) in real life. For instance, if you attend college, are an accounting major and love social media, it would be great to join your alumni group, an accounting group or two and a social media group or two. To get the most benefit from group participation, quality trumps quantity.

Q: What is the most polite way to ask someone to write a recommendation for me?
A: Most importantly, you want to request recommendations from people who really know you and your work, such as former bosses or professors. Customize each Recommendation Request with a polite, gracious and personalized note, and provide a few words outlining the accomplishments or qualities this person might mention about you. And, of course, always thank the person for writing the recommendation.

Q: What’s appropriate to write in my LinkedIn status updates?
A: Although LinkedIn status updates can cross-post with Twitter, be careful only to post professional comments to LinkedIn. This means no posts about the weather or your crazy cat. The best status updates are like snippets from a networking conversation: quick notes about events you’re attending, accomplishments you’re proud of, articles or books you’ve read and professional announcements like a new position.

Overall, use your judgment, be polite and act maturely. If you wouldn’t do it in person, don’t do it on LinkedIn!
LinkedIn Profile Checklist

- **PHOTO:** It doesn’t have to be fancy - just use your cellphone camera in front of a plain background. Wear a nice shirt and don’t forget to smile!

- **HEADLINE:** Tell people what you’re excited about now and the cool things you want to do in the future.

- **SUMMARY:** Describe what motivates you, what you’re skilled at, and what’s next.

- **EXPERIENCE:** List the jobs you held, even if they were part-time, along with what you accomplished at each. Even include photos and videos from your work.

- **ORGANIZATIONS:** Have you joined any clubs at school or outside? Be sure to describe what you did with each organization.

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CREASE EXPERIENCE & CAUSES: Even if you weren't paid for a job, be sure to list it. Admissions officers and employers often see volunteer experience as just as valuable as paid work.

SKILLS & EXPERTISE: Add at least 5 key skills - and then your connections can endorse you for the things you're best at.

HONORS & AWARDS: If you earned a prize in or out of school, don't be shy. Let the world know about it!

COURSES: List the classes that show off the skills and interests you're most excited about.

PROJECTS: Whether you led a team assignment in school or built an app on your own, talk about what you did and how you did it.

RECOMMENDATIONS: Ask managers, professors, or classmates who've worked with you closely to write a recommendation. This gives extra credibility to your strengths and skills.
Checklist: 10 Online Job Hunting Tips

Want to increase your chances of landing a great job online? LinkedIn can help you find -- and attract -- the best opportunities. Here are some tips:

1. Make time
It’s easy to let job hunting fall to the bottom of your to-do list, but you can’t afford to let that happen. Schedule at least 15 minutes a day in your calendar to work on your resume, update and check online networking profiles and search job listings. Opportunities come and go quickly, so you need to be in the game on a daily basis.

2. Get noticed
What better way to impress a recruiter than to have a professional networking profile appear as the first search result for your name? Completing your LinkedIn profile to 100% with your education, experience, recommendations and group memberships will increase your search ranking and give employers a strong impression before you ever meet in person.

3. Be keyword savvy
Make sure your profile is chock-full of keywords that will attract a recruiter’s attention. Look through job postings and LinkedIn profiles that appeal to you and incorporate some of the same words or phrases. In addition to job- and industry-specific words, recruiters also love leadership terms (captain, president) and action words (managed, designed).

4. Reach out
Connect on LinkedIn with everyone you know -- friends, family, neighbors, professors, family friends, internship colleagues and others. Once you’re connected, send each person a friendly message on LinkedIn, asking if they would keep an eye out for the particular kind of job or jobs you’re seeking or if they can introduce you to other helpful contacts.

5. Spread the word
To build your credibility and stay on people’s radar screens during your job hunt, regularly update your status on LinkedIn and other social networks. You might share links to articles you think would be relevant to people in your field (to show you are up on the news), announcements about events you’re attending (to show that you are actively networking) and good career news (to show that you’re headed for success). Just remember to keep your updates clean and appropriate.

6. Get into groups
Beyond connecting to individuals, join LinkedIn groups related to your alma mater, professional associations, volunteer organizations and industries you want to join. Every discussion in which you comment is an opportunity to market yourself to people who might be hiring, and every group contains a “Jobs” tab where members post opportunities to one another.

7. Search high and low
What makes LinkedIn’s job postings different from others is that they don’t just tell you who is hiring, they tell you how you are personally connected to that company through your network. Even when you see a job listed on another site, LinkedIn can help you research people at that company and tell you how you are personally connected through your network. No matter where you look for jobs, cast a wider net by altering your search terms and location criteria from time to time.

8. Follow companies
When you see a job you like on another job board, use LinkedIn as a company research tool. Check out the LinkedIn Company Page of any organization where you’d like to work and click “Follow company.” Activities of that organization on LinkedIn (job postings, hires, announcements) will appear on your homepage and alert you to potential opportunities.

9. Persist (without pestering)
While you don’t want to be a pest, persistence is a very important component of the job search process. Sending follow-up messages through LinkedIn can help you stand out from other candidates. Every time you send someone a message through LinkedIn, the recruiter or hiring manager can easily click over to your profile and check out your credentials.

10. Consider Job Seeker Premium
Once you have a strong LinkedIn profile, you want to make sure it gets to the top of recruiters’ inboxes when you apply for jobs. LinkedIn offers an upgrade feature called Job Seeker Premium that, among other benefits, places your profile at the top of the list of applicants to the jobs you apply for on LinkedIn. Premium subscribers are twice as likely to be contacted by recruiters and 80% more likely to be found in search. Check it out at http://www.linkedin.com/jobseeker.

Visit the Learning Center at http://learn.linkedin.com/students for more tips and advice on making the most of LinkedIn!