

Establishing Relevance in a New Field

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Why am I relevant?

Preparation for Crafting a Relevancy Statement:

Identify the new field you want to be relevant in

The more specific you can be the better. I wanted to design adult training in the private sector. If you can’t identify a specific field you want to enter you should do more research.

Identify the skills you have and are relevant in the new field

In theory you want to use these skills in the new field. If you’re not exactly sure which of your skills are most relevant do more research or make an educated guess.

Identify where you have demonstrated these skills

People love concrete examples. Get into the habit of being able to tell stories of where and how you used your relevant skills. Bonus points if you can also explain the impact of what you did.

Identify why those skills are relevant in the new field

I can write very good step by step directions and I know this is a relevant skill because training workbooks have several sets of directions. Why should your new field care about why your skills are relevant?

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You may not know exactly what skills are relevant or why. If that is the case you need to do some informational interviews to find out what the most relevant skills are.

Constructing a Relevancy Statement

A relevancy statement is a genuine and engaging one liner that answers the question, “why should I bother talking to you?”

You’ve identified the skills your new field needs. People are hiring and interested in those skills. Initially they really don’t care what your current job or how long you have been doing it.

Start all relevancy statements with an important skill quickly followed by the impact or importance of what you do.

Example: “I explain technical things to non-technical people so they can do their jobs better and help their organizations thrive.”

Your relevancy statement is the beginning of your elevator pitch. Once you gained someone’s interest and established your relevance you can get into the details such as “I’ve worked as an instructional designer for 8 years.”

Finding the “Right People”

The Advanced LinkedIn Search Feature

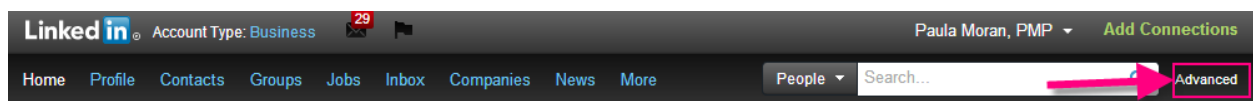
General networking is not as effective as targeted networking. To do targeted networking you need to find both the right people to talk to and what groups they hang out with. Start with whichever one is easier to find.

Keep in mind this is an iterative process of finding higher quality contacts within a community.

For starters find people who have the job you want and talk to them.

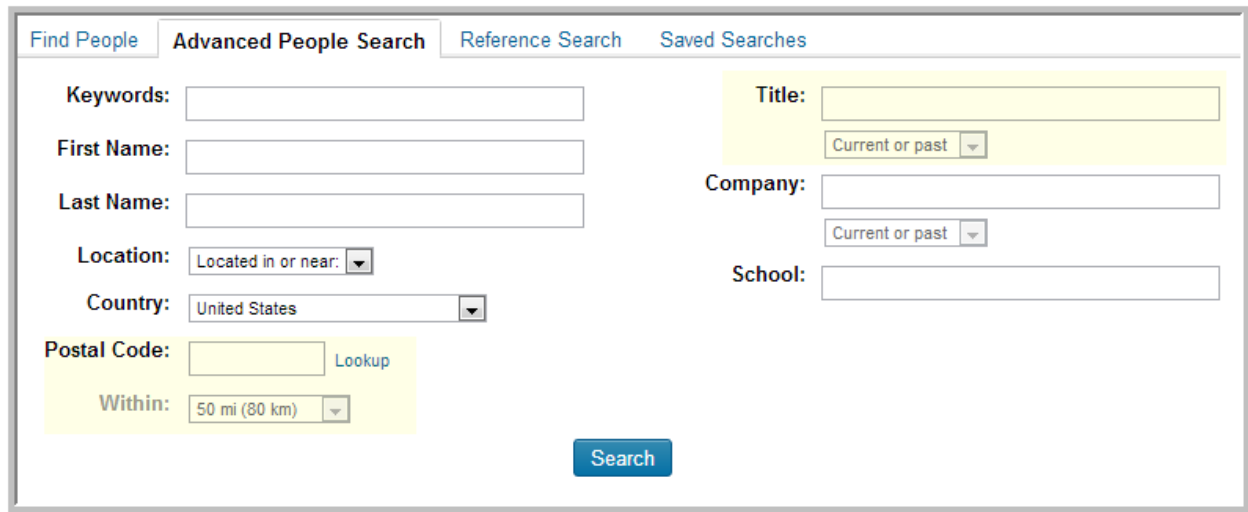
I have found the most effective tool for finding people is LinkedIn. The advanced search feature is the most efficient tool for finding the right people.

The advanced search feature can be found at the top right of the page.



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When you click on it the menu featured below comes up on your screen.

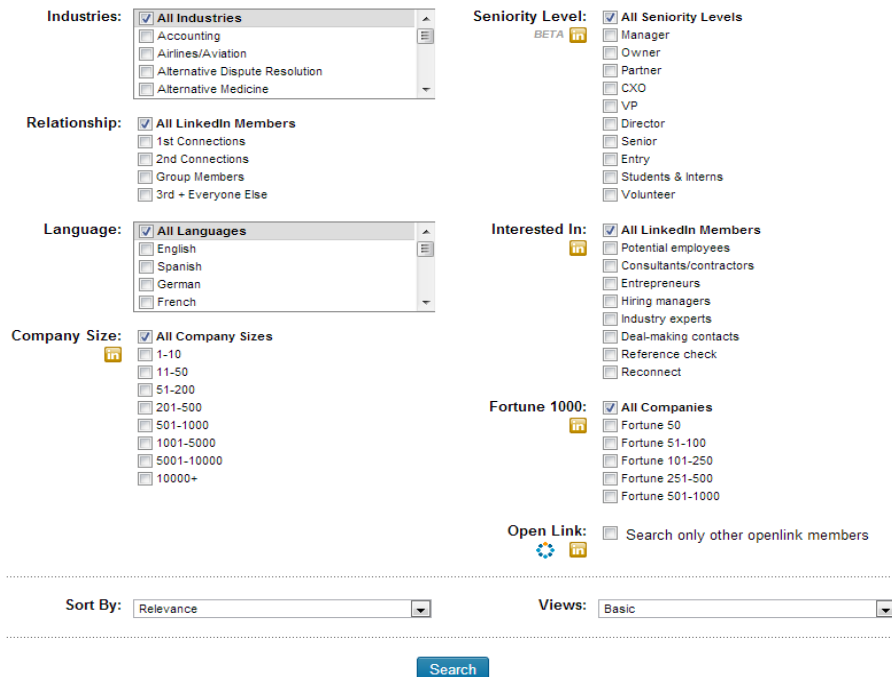


The screenshot shows the LinkedIn search interface with the following fields and options:

- Find People** | **Advanced People Search** | Reference Search | Saved Searches
- Keywords:** [Text input]
- First Name:** [Text input]
- Last Name:** [Text input]
- Location:** Located in or near: [Dropdown]
- Country:** United States [Dropdown]
- Postal Code:** [Text input] [Lookup](#)
- Within:** 50 mi (80 km) [Dropdown]
- Title:** [Text input] [Current or past](#) [Dropdown]
- Company:** [Text input] [Current or past](#) [Dropdown]
- School:** [Text input]
- Search** [Button]

Enter a job title, area, and any other features you would like. Run the search several times if your dream job goes by different names.

If you have a very specific job in mind there are additional features to narrow the search (illustrated in the next diagram). If this is the first or second time you're running the search I would recommend avoiding the more detailed options.



The screenshot shows the LinkedIn search interface with the following filters and options:

- Industries:** All Industries, Accounting, Airlines/Aviation, Alternative Dispute Resolution, Alternative Medicine
- Relationship:** All LinkedIn Members, 1st Connections, 2nd Connections, Group Members, 3rd + Everyone Else
- Language:** All Languages, English, Spanish, German, French
- Company Size:** All Company Sizes, 1-10, 11-50, 51-200, 201-500, 501-1000, 1001-5000, 5001-10000, 10000+
- Seniority Level:** All Seniority Levels, Manager, Owner, Partner, CXO, VP, Director, Senior, Entry, Students & Interns, Volunteer
- Interested In:** All LinkedIn Members, Potential employees, Consultants/contractors, Entrepreneurs, Hiring managers, Industry experts, Deal-making contacts, Reference check, Reconnect
- Fortune 1000:** All Companies, Fortune 50, Fortune 51-100, Fortune 101-250, Fortune 251-500, Fortune 501-1000
- Open Link:** Search only other openlink members
- Sort By:** Relevance [Dropdown]
- Views:** Basic [Dropdown]
- Search** [Button]

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The search results will look like this:

The screenshot shows a LinkedIn search interface. On the left, there are search filters: Keywords (empty), First Name (empty), Last Name (empty), Title (instructional designer), Current or past (dropdown), Company (empty), Current or past (dropdown), School (empty), Location (Located in or near: dropdown), Country (United States), Postal Code (94122), and Within (10 mi (15km)). The main area shows 336 results, sorted by Relevance. Five results are visible, each with a profile picture, name, title, location, and industry. A dropdown menu is open over the first result, showing options: Connect, Save profile, Get introduced, Send InMail, Share Profile, and Find references. The industry for each result is highlighted in yellow: E-Learning, Writing and Editing, Information Technology and Services, and Professional Training & Coaching.

To the right of each search result is a drop down menu that allows you to save a profile of interest to be introduced.

Note the yellow highlighting. Those are what people put as their “industry.” There are a variety of industries that hire instructional designers. If they were all the same industry that would be what you should do.

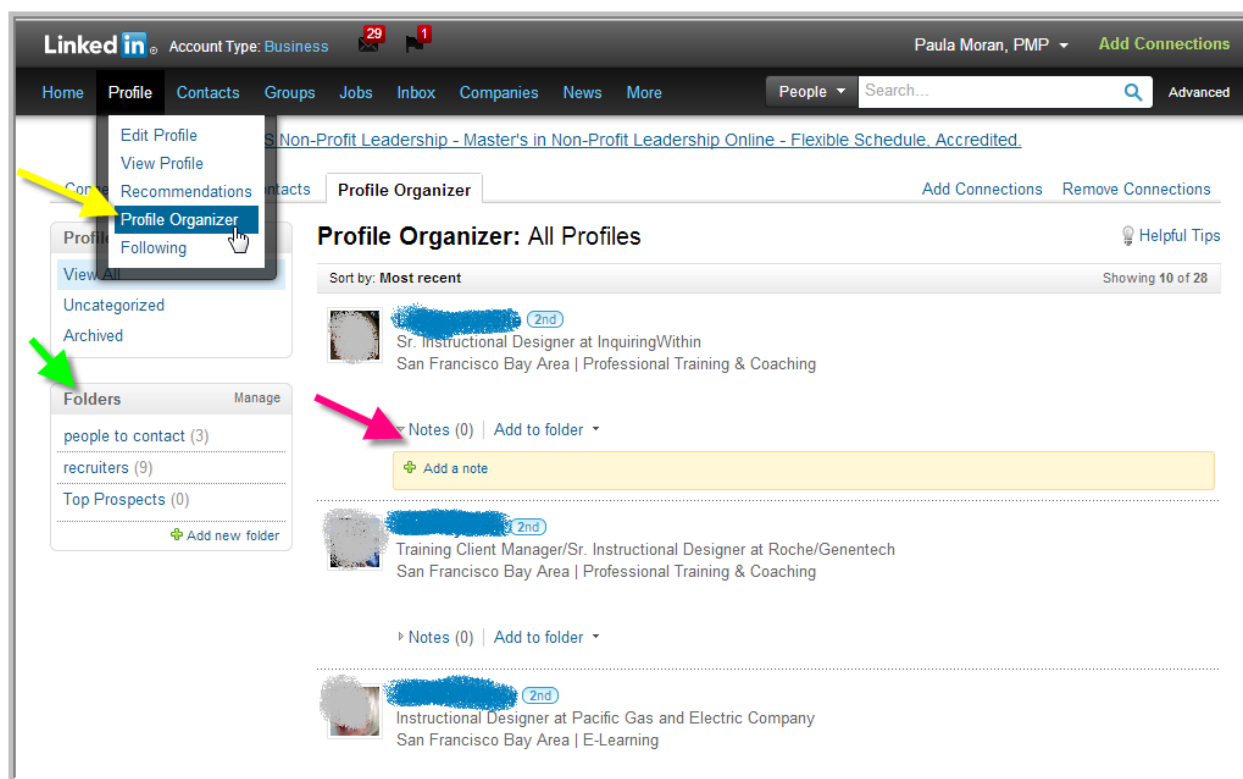
By the nature of LinkedIn everyone’s advanced search results will be different even if you put the same terms in. If you have a paid business account with LinkedIn you will get more results. You may consider a few months of paid business account to get better results. The business account also means you show up higher in the rankings when recruiters run searches.

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Once you've found people, read their profiles, especially on LinkedIn, focus on the vocabulary they use to describe their work. Adopt those words into your own profile(s). Look at who they worked for as potential employers for you. Document what professional organizations and groups they belong to and consider which would be appropriate for you to join. Note any common certifications and people tend to have and their acronyms. After researching several people determine who would be the best match for an informational interview. Those people who volunteer their time to improve the industry are more likely to say yes to an informational interview if they have the time.

This process may also make you rethink what is most important to put in your relevancy statement.

If you find many people you want to follow up with it may be helpful to organize people in the profile organizer.



The screenshot shows the LinkedIn Profile Organizer interface. The top navigation bar includes 'Home', 'Profile', 'Contacts', 'Groups', 'Jobs', 'Inbox', 'Companies', 'News', and 'More'. The 'Profile' menu is open, showing options like 'Edit Profile', 'View Profile', 'Recommendations', 'Profile Organizer', and 'Following'. A yellow arrow points to the 'Profile Organizer' option. The 'Profile Organizer' page displays a list of profiles under the heading 'Profile Organizer: All Profiles'. The profiles are sorted by 'Most recent' and show details like name, title, and location. A pink arrow points to the 'Notes (0) | Add to folder' link for the first profile. A green arrow points to the 'Folders' section on the left, which lists 'people to contact (3)', 'recruiters (9)', and 'Top Prospects (0)'. A red arrow points to the 'Add a note' button for the first profile.

The profile organizer is found on the drop down profile menu (shown by the yellow arrow). You can make specific notation about how you want to follow up with people (shown by the pink arrow). You can also organize various profiles using the folders. In this example I've organized profiles into "people to contact" and "recruiters."

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Other Places to Find People

Professional Organizations

Identify the leadership of the local chapter of your new field's professional organizations. People who volunteer to lead are in touch with the industry and are likely to know about jobs.

Conference Speakers

Review conference schedules and look for who is speaking or giving sessions. You should begin to see overlap in the speakers and you should have access to their bios.

If you speak at a conference you can get in for free. So speakers not only have something to offer but are invested in professional development and networking.

Industry Publications

Read industry periodical publications and blogs and note who is authoring the articles. Look for people who are guest authors instead of staff writers.

Webinars

See who is offering professional development webinars. Not product sales, professional development. Many are free and you have a person already dedicated to giving back.

Alumni Groups

Go to your school's career center. One of the schools I went to has a network connecting people within fields. The career center staff might also know of alumni who work in the field you want to get into. Many people are willing to talk just because you went to the same university.

Twitter

Follow your industry experts on twitter. You may be able to identify them via number of followers or hash tags. I recommend starting by following the people you find via professional associations, conferences, and industry publications. A good informational interview question would be asking for recommendations of who to follow on twitter.

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Finding the “Right” Groups

Professional Associations

Start with the professional association for the field you want to enter. They will tend to have the best information and the most dedicated people. If you don't already know the name of your professional organization Google “your industry society” or “Your industry association” (ex: mortgage bankers association or executive assistant society). Even if you know of one do the Google search some professions have multiple associations. For some professions there may be a union instead of a professional association. For example, the National Education Association is one of the big teachers' unions. If you still can't locate an association contact associations for associations.

ANSI or ISO Certification

If your new field has a certification research the organization that manages the certification. Focus on researching ANSI or ISO certifications. There may be company specific certifications such as CISCO but those will not help you network.

Meet up

Search Meet up for the industry you're trying to be relevant in.

Educational Groups

Search for educational groups. There are meet up style groups that come together on a regular basis. For example, I found a Silicon Valley startup digest listing events that people will go to.

Field Specific Alumni Groups

Some alumni groups have field specific sub groups. For example, I belong to a group for the school of education.

People you talk to

Every time you meet someone in your new field ask them what groups you should join. Some groups may be more obscure and you have to learn about them through word of mouth.

Social Clubs

Social clubs or bars frequented by certain professions. This is a bit of a long shot but could pay off. For example, a legal aid kick ball team or an entrepreneur ultimate Frisbee team. If you're dying to work for a particular company you can try frequenting the bar near their location. For companies with multiple locations look at job posting to identify which location your intended department is located (I know the educational section of PG&E is located in San Ramon.)

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Conclusion on Groups

At the end of the day it doesn't matter where you get your start but it is essential to meet people face to face. You will not become relevant in a new field through online means only. Targeted groups are far more effective for finding work than general networking or alumni events. Even if you think you've found all the groups and joined them, it is a good to ask people in the field about what groups they belong to.

The Informational Interview

Informational interviews are a bi-directional flow of information. In an informational interview you learn about a field or company while the person you're interviewing learns about you. Your interviewee learns about you through the questions you craft.

Tips for Obtaining an Interview

Phone or coffee

For people you don't know phone or coffee is better than lunch or drink. More people may be receptive to the phone interview because it is likely less time and they don't have to travel. Phone is even better than coffee.

Explain what you want to ask

People feel more comfortable when they know what things are about. Define what you will be asking questions about because it will make them feel more prepared. For example, are you asking questions about entering a field, the industry in an area, or about working for a company.

Specify Duration

In your request for an informational interview specify duration and a general time period. For example, "I am new to the San Francisco area, would you have 15 minutes next week to answer some questions over the phone about the magazine publishing industry in San Francisco." "I'd like to enter the pharmaceutical industry, as someone who works in the field could you answer a few questions?" "

Email don't phone

Don't force anyone into an awkward confrontation. In your request for an informational interview specify duration and a general time period. For example, "I am new to the San Francisco area, would you have 15 minutes next week to answer some questions over the phone about the magazine publishing industry in San Francisco." "I'd like to enter the pharmaceutical industry, as someone who works in the field could you answer a few questions?"

Call it "Answer some questions" instead of "informational interview"

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Some people may be more receptive to “answering a few questions” opposed to the formality of the phrase “informational interview”.

Crafting Good Informational Interview Questions

Choose your words carefully so they both convey information about you and solicit information from the interviewee.

NO YES/NO

Do not ask YES/NO questions! Yes/no questions can be answered by the internet. You should craft questions that require the interviewee to give at least a one sentence answer. If you have ever had teenage children now is the time to implement those skills of pulling out information.

Knowledge within questions

Demonstrate your knowledge within questions. Show you know the field with targeted questions. You should be reading about the field that you want to enter. Pull recent industry news into the conversation, “I’ve been reading about how different organizations are implementing mobile learning, how is your organization implementing mobile learning?”, or “How do you think the recently passed stimulus bill will affect the mortgage industry?” Same applies to knowledge of a company, “I noticed on your website that you have a new social media initiative, how will that impact the finance department?” Don’t get too specific, “I noticed you have a new CFO, how will that affect your department?”

Use of technical information and jargon will communicate your knowledge of the new field. Make sure the jargon is universal to the field. I can use the words ADDIE in L&D and agile in project management but not vice versa.

Industry Certifications

This is a great time to ask about the process of getting a certification and/or if the certification is worthwhile. This is of course better to ask when the person actually has the certification.

People love to give advice. So flatter your interviewee and ask for some. Very general questions such as “what advice would you give someone wanted to enter the HR field?” can be difficult to answer and you give up an opportunity to communicate anything about yourself.

- Good: As someone new to the mortgage banking, what publications or blogs do you recommend I read to keep up to date with the industry?”

Feedback: This is a good focused question. It demonstrates your willingness to go the extra mile to learn about the field. You may want to swap out “publications or blogs” with twitter, commentators, or whatever is relevant to your new field. A good follow-up question is “Why do you recommend that one?”

- Good: “I applied for a job at your company and haven’t heard back. I’m really interested in the position how would you recommend I follow up?”

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Feedback: This is another good general procedural question. It can give you some insight into the company. I don't find this question is as fruitful as others. But if it's your situation it can't hurt to ask.

- Bad: "I applied for a job and haven't heard back, who should I follow up with?"

Feedback: This is too specific a question. They may know that Jane in HR is processing your application but that would not be professionally appropriate to reveal to you.

Bonus: When I'm writing questions I use a thing called Bloom's taxonomy. If you Google it there will often be a good selection of verbs that help prompt you to write questions. I recently published an article on crafting escalating interviewing questions

(<http://paulamoran.squarespace.com/blog/2013/1/23/crafting-better-interview-questions>).

Don't let your questions get too hard to answer. The information should be easy for them to answer.

Good Ways to End the Interview

Actions speak louder than words. Demonstrate that they can trust you by ending exactly at 15 minutes. In fact if you promised 15 minutes on the phone start thanking them at minute 14. By the way, that means you need to have a clock in front of you to keep track of time. That is your responsibility as the interviewer.

Always end with "who else would you recommend I speak to?" NOT "Are there other people who I should speak to?" This question continues the conversation and networking.

You should never run out of questions EVER! Have more questions prepared than you will ever have time to ask. This shows you care and are invested in this interview.

Because you'll have more questions than you have time for prioritize which ones you ask first. Sometimes you can even get a nice flow going from question to question.

Realistically you'll only have time to ask 3-5 questions in 15 minutes.

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Paula's Tips

These are things I've learned along the way:

- Always talk positively about your transition and the opportunities you're looking for. You may be leaving the field because of a tyrannical overlord boss and a politically charged environment.
- Be fearless! (within reason) The worst anyone can tell you is "no" or ignore you. Don't be afraid to reach out to people in positions of power. Contact the president of a professional association, call a department head. That said, keep it within reason, the CEO of Wells Fargo is probably too busy to talk to you about entering the banking industry.
- Start with email. Follow up with phone calls.
- Despite the squiggly red line don't forget to run grammar/spell check
- When typing emails, make the email address the last thing you type in to prevent accidentally sending a premature email.
- This is an endurance event. Your social life will take a hit. Story of face time at church. You need to go to more events than you think. Brings snacks before an evening event.
- Get business cards made. There is nothing more awkward that jotting stuff down on scraps of paper or programming new contacts into your phone. With vista print there is not excuse.
- Follow up with people ALWAYS and on a personal level.
- Help others and thou shall be helped yourself. Believe in Karma; send a job posting to someone or a referral. It will come back to you at some point. I've found this group has been particularly good about

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