

# Professionalizing in the Liberal Arts

*How can you prepare now to apply for internships or jobs in the future?*

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**Y**ou are immersed in your college coursework, working hard (and having fun), and growing your skillset for your future. That is great! But should you be doing more?

Setting aside a few hours a week to strategize about your professional development will pay big dividends in the future. If you prepare now you will be in a much stronger position when it is time to apply for future internships and full-time jobs.

*Here are four strategies that will help you make the leap from college to career:*

## 1. Develop and Demonstrate Your Qualifications

You have honed many critical skills as a liberal arts major. You can communicate effectively on the page and in person. You can think critically and cogently. You are intellectually curious. You have research skills and good time management. You can work collaboratively and independently. These are all skills that employers want! But keep in mind that *developing* your qualifications is one thing; *demonstrating* your qualifications is another. For a successful job hunt you will need to give clear examples of what your skills are and show how you have acquired them in and out of the classroom.

Take the time to catalogue *your* unique set of skills. Now: Strategize about how you can demonstrate those skills in a resume, cover letter, or interview. For example, you are great at managing large projects. Can you think of a powerful example of project management you can share with prospective employers? You are a whiz with social media. Can you develop a social media campaign that you could list on a resume? Being qualified is essential, but being able to demonstrate that you are qualified is equally important.

**Pro tip:** Even if you aren't ready to look for a full-time position, it is a great idea to begin to look at job advertisements for positions you might be interested in when you graduate. Start keeping track of the required or recommended qualifications employers are looking for in candidates. Then, use these qualifications as a "to do" list for your own professionalization and resume development.

For example, in a recent ad for America Media they ask for strong writing, organization, and

communication skills. Now that you know what they want, how can you demonstrate that you have developed these skills as an undergraduate? Of course you should highlight that these are skills you have grown through your liberal arts coursework, but are there additional things you can do now that will demonstrate your expertise?

The ad also asks for familiarity with Adobe products, Macintosh and Microsoft office, and content management systems. Do you have these skills? If not, how could you develop and demonstrate this expertise? This could range from teaching yourself to taking courses at your university or a community college. For example, one of the most in-demand skills is the ability to work with Excel spreadsheets. This is a skill you could easily and inexpensively master (and show you have mastered) with a training course at a local community college.

## 2. Writing Sets You Apart. Flaunt It.

[97 percent of Fortune 1,000 executives](#) rate strong writing skills as absolutely essential or very important. But only [27% of employers](#) think college students are prepared to write well when they graduate. Students in fields like English, History, and Philosophy get much more experience writing than their counterparts in other majors. This puts you ahead of the game. If you want to go into a field where writing is valued (which is most of them!), you can pursue additional opportunities that will develop and demonstrate your writing expertise. Then you can highlight that experience in cover letters and resumes. In other words, let them know that you have what they want.

### How to develop and demonstrate your writing skills:

- Write! Every day.
- Submit your written work to your school newspaper or literary magazine, to writing contests, or to online blogs and websites.
- Work as a consultant or tutor in your university's Writing Center.
- Write and submit a grant proposal for a non-profit organization.
- Develop a social media profile for your church or community organization and take the lead in developing and posting content.
- Expand your writing expertise by taking courses in professional/business writing.
- Write a blog or website focused on an issue relevant to your future profession.
- Develop an online portfolio of written work that you can share with prospective employers.

## 3. Liberal Arts +

The skills you have gained in your liberal arts major are invaluable. But if you want to be as competitive as possible on the job market you also need to develop skills that are not directly related to your major, skills that will complement your liberal arts training and help set you apart from the crowd. How can you become **“Liberal Arts +”**?

One great strategy is to complement your liberal arts major with a **minor in another discipline** that will be useful in your chosen career. Examples include computers, design, economics, or business. Another important strategy is to **use your extracurricular activities** to enhance your qualifications. Say you are picking between two part-time jobs. Does one let you grow skills you will need in the career you want? It might be worth choosing that position, even if it pays a little bit less. What about

organizations you are a part of? Don't just join—take on a particular role or responsibility that will let you develop and demonstrate your skills. Finally, think back to that America Media ad. Once you have **identified skills** that employers are looking for, take the time to learn them!

### **Over your college career, can you develop and demonstrate:**

- Leadership skills in an on- or off-campus organization?
- Fluency in a foreign language?
- Intercultural competencies through study abroad?
- Interpersonal skills through your work or extracurricular activities?
- Computer or technological expertise?
- Knowledge of core business concepts?
- Design or social media skills?

## **4. Manage Your Online Identity**

Your online identity *is* part of your job search, whether you want it to be or not. If you are proactive now you can build and manage your online identity to help make your job search successful. Your online identity includes any and all information that exists about you online, including all social media sites (Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, etc.).

**Build Your Brand:** Focus on building positive content, not just deleting those selfies you wouldn't want employers to see. Your online presence should highlight what makes you a great candidate, what defines you as a person and as a professional. 80% of employers look up potential employees online before they invite them to interview.

⚡ When they Google you, what will they see?

**Get Linked In:** LinkedIn is the most important online resource for professional development. If used well, it can be a powerful tool to develop your professional presence and explore possible careers. Build a LinkedIn profile, [learn more](#) about what it can do for you, and [follow these tips](#) for using it in your job search. It is important to start early so that you can develop your LinkedIn profile and build your contacts list before you are on the job market. *Forbes* also has a great article on [how to use LinkedIn](#) for your job search.

### **Other tips for managing your online identity:**

- Read more about [how social media can help and hurt](#) your job hunt.
- Google yourself! Make sure you know what is out there.
- Manage your [social media privacy settings](#) so they are ready for potential HR screeners.

## **Professionalization: A Long-Term Investment**

Professionalization is not an overnight process; the strategies I have outlined here will take time and effort. But remember that you are investing in your single most valuable asset: YOU. Developing and demonstrating your qualifications, growing and communicating your skill sets, and managing your online identity are all invaluable to your future career. And I promise, the payoff will be worth it.