

A decorative graphic consisting of three blue spheres of varying sizes (one large, one medium, one small) and two thin blue lines that intersect to form a triangular shape. The spheres have a 3D effect with shadows and highlights.

# Career Exploration

## Searching by Skills

Explore career options based on what you want to do on a regular basis, rather than by job titles or posted openings. Targeting your search will help you maximize your efforts and get better results.

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## Career Exploration by Skill

If you're looking to make a career change and aren't 100% sure of your direction, one of the easiest methods of surveying your options is to start with a skills search. Taking stock of what you already have will help you to see which options are immediately available, and which ones may take a little more planning before you are ready to make that transition. This guide, and the accompanying worksheet, will walk you through the process of identifying your existing skills and teach you how to use those skills as building blocks for your search.

### Communication Skills

The ability to communicate is something that we take for granted, but also a skill that tends to be listed in most job postings in one form or another. Hiring managers and recruiters do **not** want to read "strong communication skills" or anything like that. It's a generic phrase that doesn't prove anything other than the fact that you consider yourself a great communicator. That kind of thinking also won't help you to identify career paths that rely heavily on communication skills, but it is a good start.



You can see from the picture that we have lots of options for describing our communication skills, and that this will affect the types of work that we engage in now and in the future. If you don't enjoy

public speaking, then I wouldn't expect to see you use the verbs **presented** or **lectured** on your resume, but you may very well have **proposed**, **suggested** or **collaborated**. The verbs we select represent our strengths and our interests. If you don't want to use a skill on a regular basis, then don't choose that ability as one of your criteria for career exploration. It doesn't mean that you don't still have that skill, or that you couldn't use it in a given situation, it just means that you aren't going to go looking for a career that requires you to do something that you know you don't enjoy or don't have the ability to do now. Keep in mind that as you develop new skills and strengthen existing ones, your skills profile will change.

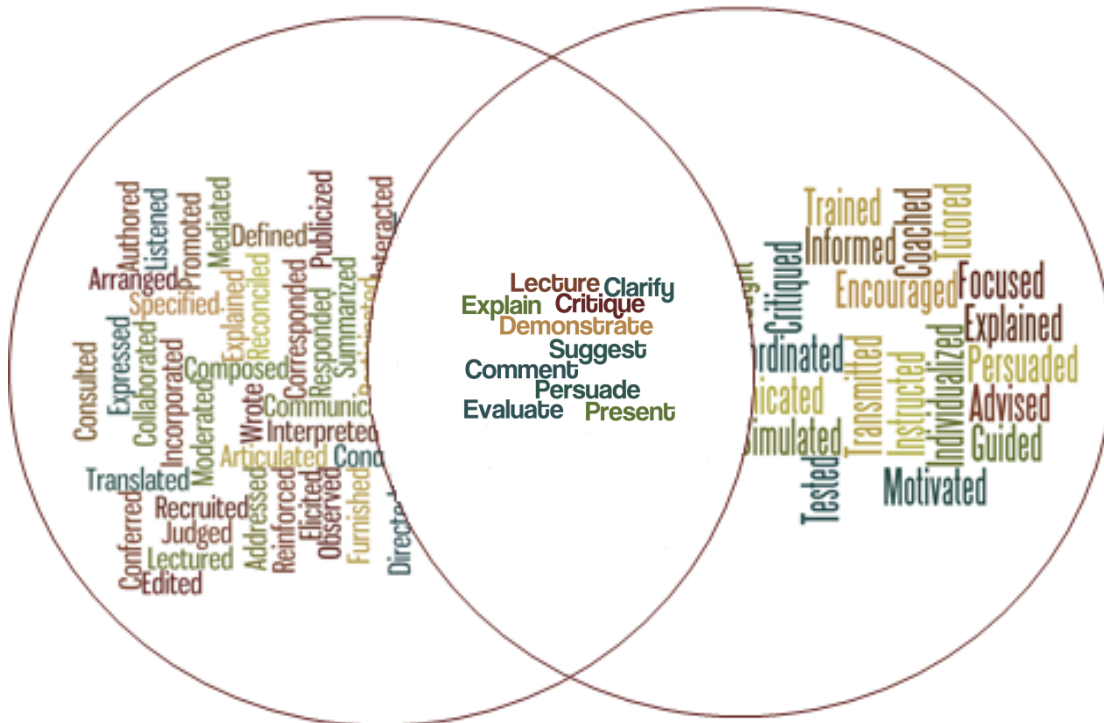
### Teaching Skills

Let's look at a second example. Teaching skills are closely related to communication, whether you are teaching in person or by distance.



You can even see some repeated words, like **persuaded**, **communicated**, and **clarified**. Your goal here is not to censor out repetition, but to come up with a list of skills that represent your abilities in that category. Don't worry about how/where you might apply them, we'll go through that a bit later.

If we were to combine the two areas, we might see something like this:



In this example, the middle area represents the common ground where the two skills meet. Now you have a more reasonable list of skills that will allow you to search for potential careers that relate to your interests and strengths.

To get you thinking and brainstorming your skills, you may want to visit [Quintessential Careers](#) for a list of action verbs that will help you to categorize your abilities. The list is not exhaustive, so view it as a starting point rather than an absolute. I would also encourage you to download the accompanying worksheet so you can start to organize your abilities and identify your skills for exploration.

## Career Search by Skills

Once you have a list of specific abilities and skills categories that represent what you are looking for, we can start the exciting part – the exploration. What can I say? I find the possibilities exciting! This list of resources and strategies is aimed at North America, so if you are in the EU or further afield, please verify the information you find with data/regulations for your geographic region.

### [O\\*Net Online](#)

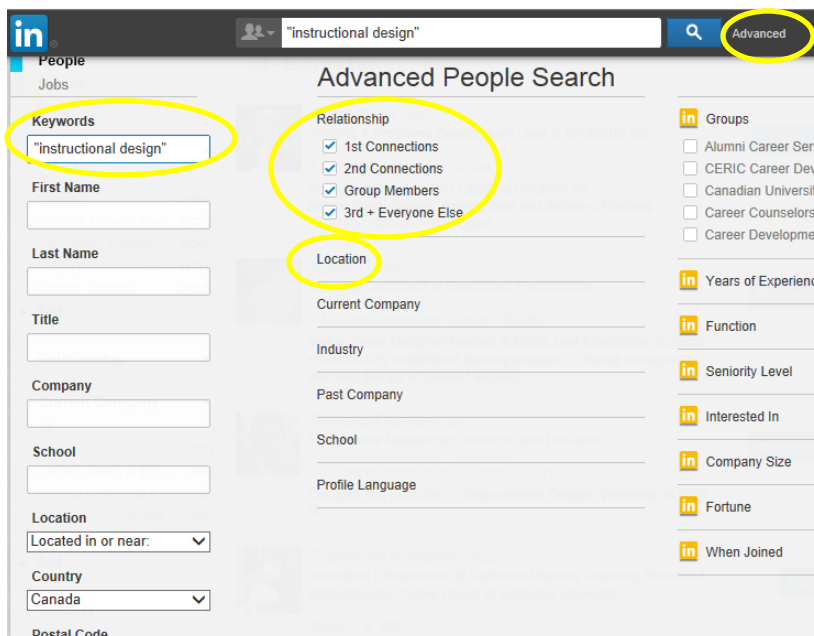
This US database has a fantastic resource – the skills search. Even if you haven't completed your worksheet yet, you should be ready and able to identify the broader categories or types of skills you would like to use on a daily basis. Be selective! If you don't really want to do something, don't choose it. You will only frustrate yourself and prolong your search if you can't be honest about what you do and do not want to do.

I like this resource because it matches your skills criteria with specific roles, provides great information on the career, types of activities, level of education/certification required or usual among people with that title, and also suggests related entries. If you notice that all of your strongest matches are related to a particular Job Zone, check that out as well.

One word of warning: because this is a US database, you will need to verify the Labour Market Information (LMI) with data from your geographic region if you are outside the US.

### [Working in Canada](#)

Somewhat less effective than O\*Net, Working in Canada also offers a skills search to users, but the site can be temperamental. The main difference between the two lies in the specificity of the skills that you can select. For job seekers who want to list higher order thinking skills in context (e.g. Professional Communication, Design, Teaching and Training, Networking and Liaising...) this is a much more targeted system than O\*Net. Choose between 15-25 skills, and you're on your way. For my American colleagues, please verify the Canadian labour market data with your own state for licensing, forecasting and salaries.



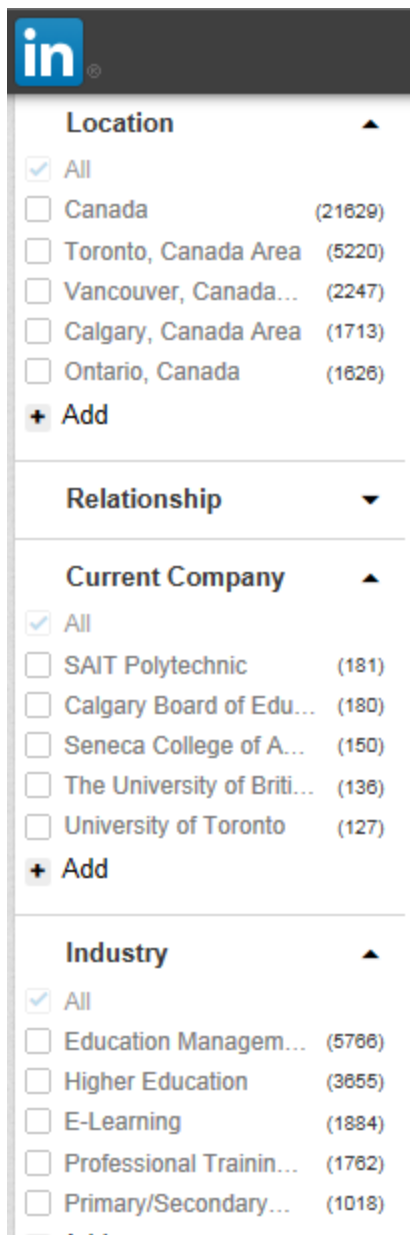
### [LinkedIn](#)

As a big LinkedIn fan and user, I am disappointed that they've retired the Skills search function on their site. So are the recruiters and talent managers. As of October 21, 2013, LinkedIn retired the page that provided users with labour market information on any given skill, and suggested related items like additional skills, profiles of users,



companies, job postings, and groups. Still, they have left the advanced search function to allow you to learn a little.

To access the Advanced Search, left click on Advanced, next to the search window at the top, which will bring up the current screen. For Relationship, make sure all are checked as you're after information right now, not contacts. Location can be specific (Toronto) or broad (Canada). You can also select multiple locations, which is handy if you have the possibility of relocating with your search or are conducting a distance job search. On the top left side, type in the skill you want to find. If it is multiple words, like instructional design, use quotation marks or LinkedIn will automatically treat the phrase as multiple individual search terms.



When you hit enter, LinkedIn now presents you with a massive amount of information. In the case of my instructional designer example, I searched for Canada and generated 21,629 profiles. That's just too much information for even the most dedicated explorer. At this point, head on over to the left column (pictured here) to get a sense of the trends for location, company and industry. Remember that all of this information is generated from people's profiles. I work in Higher Education, but on my profile I list Professional Training & Coaching as my industry. You only get to select 1, so I opted to focus on myself rather than my employer. That choice, multiplied by millions of users, affects the way that results are given in generic searches like our current example.

Notice that there seems to be a concentration in the major cities – Toronto, Vancouver and Calgary. Interesting. There is also a strong concentration in Education Management. Selecting Toronto and Education Management reduces the profiles to 1165. On the first page, I have some of the expected educational institutions from school boards to colleges and universities, but I also now have professionals employed in the private and public sectors, professional associations and non-profits. From here, I can either click on random profiles of interest to learn more, or I could revisit the relationships tab and select 2<sup>nd</sup> degree contacts and Group members to identify new contacts that I can easily reach through LinkedIn's other functions (introduction and Group members). Making these changes now yields a manageable 149 results.

## Verifying Your Info

Regardless of which tools you use to compile your list, you should have a fairly decent selection of potential careers after you've completed the exploration phase. The mistake that too many people make is to stop researching here. Don't. Keep going through this next section, and you will be able to transform your results from raw information into an informed job search action plan with targeted employers.

## Professional Associations

Whatever your career might be, you can pretty much guarantee that there will be at least one professional association geared toward you. Professional associations are the most amazing, and underutilized resource in job searches, and it's about time that we changed that. I know that the price of memberships can be steep, so I'm not actually suggesting that you join any groups. I don't personally pay for any professional association memberships – I just belong to relevant groups on LinkedIn where I can access articles for free. Sneaky, I know, but I don't like to spend money on things that I can access for no cost.

So why am I an advocate for professional associations? Because they can help you to identify different careers within a field, provide you with fantastic and accurate labour market information for your geographic region and profession, and provide you with lists of potential employers for networking and career opportunities. Some of these resources are hidden behind a members login, so you won't necessarily gain access to everything, but you should be able to find enough information to help you get started and break down your research into more usable parts.

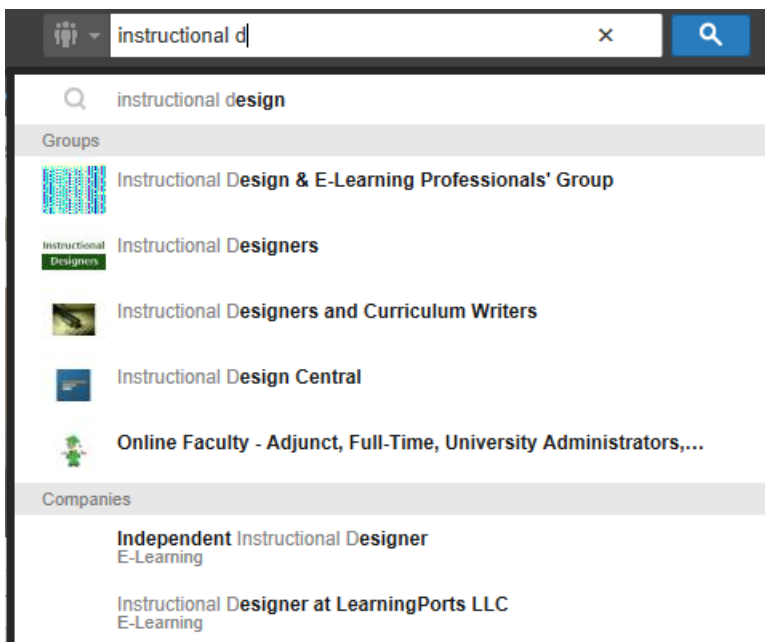
### [Charity Village Directory of Professional Associations](#)

A great place to start if you don't know what might be available, or don't know who the main

associations are for your sector or specific profession. The list is divided into 2 parts and covers all of Canada. It's a great starting point, but the list is by no means exhaustive.

### [LinkedIn](#)

No, I don't have stock but maybe I should! LinkedIn is a great resource for identifying professional groups for anywhere in the world. From the search bar at the top, select groups, and start typing. Don't be limited by the few results that come up, hit enter and see how many groups there are that meet your criteria. Search group members' profiles to find employers.



## Final Notes

As you're compiling all of this information, you might wonder how you are ever going to sort through it, and it might seem like I'm sending you on a fool's errand. That's not the case at all. Searching by skill is following both your strengths and interests, and using that information to identify potential employers will help you to find the **right** next position, rather than just another job. Going forward, you'll be able to use this information to identify strategic networking contacts, write better cover letters and resumes, sound knowledgeable in interviews, and crack into the hidden job market.

Don't limit yourself to just some of the resources I am suggesting. Use those as a starting point, and don't forget to have a browse through search engines like Google or Bing. Once you have the right keywords, you'll be surprised at all the results that will start coming your way.

## Next Steps

Download the worksheet, and start identifying the skills you want to take with you to the next phase of your career. Take your time, and identify the areas of overlap, trends, and key skills. If you think of great examples for those abilities, make note of them now while they are fresh in your mind.

Explore careers that are related to your skills by using some of the search techniques suggested above. Still not sure about those careers after researching? Not a problem. Check out the informational interview guide, and try the careers on for size before you invest significant time, emotion and money into your search.

Found some potential employers? Fantastic! Check out the Employer Evaluation Guide, and make sure to update your Job Search Action Plan with the specific steps you want to take and your new timeline.