

Translating Academic Skills into Professional Language

A Workshop for Humanities & Interdisciplinary Majors

Course context: Upper-level seminar within the major (e.g., gender studies, English, history, philosophy). Best for weeks 6–9 of the semester, after students have spent a few weeks engaging with their LinkedIn contacts from lesson 1.

Class length: 75 minutes

Prerequisite: Students completed lesson 1. They arrive with a LinkedIn profile already created, 5–10 professionals they've been following, and a list of 3 contacts they would consider asking for an informational interview.

THIS LESSON IS STEP 2 OF A 3-PART CAREER READINESS ARC

- 1 COMPLETED** LinkedIn as networking infrastructure—identify 5–10 target professionals to follow and engage with
- 2 TODAY** Translating academic skills into professional language—build out the LinkedIn Skills section
- 3 LATER IN SEMESTER** Informational interview assignment—3 outreach requests, made with context

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, students will:

- Identify the difference between describing academic work by its content and describing it by the capabilities it required
- Extract skills vocabulary from real job postings and contribute to a shared class glossary
- Apply a structured translation process to at least one piece of their own academic work

- Add at least 5 skills to their LinkedIn Skills section using the vocabulary they've identified
- Connect their skills translation to the informational interview conversations they'll have in lesson 3

Faculty Prep (60–90 minutes)

Step 1: Do the exercise yourself first. Choose one piece of your own work—a research article, a course you designed, a committee role—and work through the translation worksheet (below). You don't need to share the results with students, but doing it yourself will help you anticipate where they'll get stuck. You may find that the skills that translate most clearly aren't the ones you'd have predicted.

Step 2: Collect 8–12 job postings across a range of fields. These are for the group activity in class. Include fields your students have mentioned, but don't limit yourself to those—exposure to unfamiliar job categories is part of the point. Useful fields to cover: nonprofits and advocacy organizations, education and edtech companies, media and publishing, local and state government, healthcare administration, project management and consulting. LinkedIn, Indeed, and Idealist are the most useful sources. You don't need to curate for quality; a mix of entry-level and mid-career postings gives students more vocabulary to work with. Copy the job titles and the full text of the "Responsibilities" and "Qualifications" sections into a single document for easy access.

**Important: job postings are sometimes removed within 24hrs or a week after posting. Saving links to job ads to open in class will likely result in several empty pages.*

Step 3: Set up a shared Google Slide deck before class. Create a slide for each pair of students (you can add more if needed). Add a simple template to each slide: three rows, each with fields for "Skill term" and "What we think it means." Share the link so students can open it on their devices. This is where students will contribute their vocabulary finds during the activity.

Step 4: Audit your own LinkedIn Skills section using the same criteria you'll teach today. It's worth being able to say whether the exercise surfaced anything new for you.

Step 5: Prepare one worked example to walk through as a class. A seminar research paper works well because most students in the room have written one. If you want to use a different artifact—a course project, a research assistantship, a leadership role in a student organization—that's fine, but concrete is better than generic.

Class Plan

1 Reframe the problem

8 MIN

Many humanities students believe their job search struggle is a skills problem: that they don't have the right skills for most jobs. More accurately, they have a translation problem. They have real analytical, research, and communication capabilities. What they lack is the vocabulary to describe those skills in terms that travel outside the discipline.

The relevant context: most job applications go through some kind of screening before a human reads them—either an automated system matching keywords, or a recruiter scanning for a few seconds. Profiles and resumes that use academic vocabulary ("critical analysis," "close reading," "theoretical frameworks") fail, not because the underlying skills are irrelevant but because the vocabulary doesn't match what the screener is looking for.

The frame to establish: we're not going to guess what business people want. We're going to look at actual job postings and find the vocabulary there. The skills language used in job ads is the clearest map we have of how the relevant audiences describe the work. The goal of today's class is to build that map together, then use it to describe what students already know how to do.

2 Build a shared vocabulary: job ad research

20 MIN

This is the foundation for the rest of the lesson. Students extract professional skills vocabulary directly from job postings, which grounds the translation work in real evidence rather than guesswork.

Setup (2 min): Pair students up. Share the Google Slide link and the job postings document. Each pair picks two job postings from the list—encourage them to pick postings in fields they find interesting, but don't let all pairs cluster around the same postings. Students could also look for a posting during the activity, if you have enough time, or you could assign them to bring 1-2 examples in preparation for the lesson.

Pair work (10 min): Each pair reads through their two job postings and identifies 3 skills terms they find notable. A skills term is any word or phrase used to describe something the candidate should be able to do—it might appear under "Qualifications," "Responsibilities," or "What you'll bring." They add their 3 terms to their slide, along with what they think each term means based on context or searching for a definition.

Some pairs will find this easy; others will get stuck on terms they don't recognize. That confusion is the vocabulary gap in action. Encourage pairs to keep digging rather than skipping unfamiliar terms.

Whole-class review (8 min): Pull up the shared slide deck. Move through the slides quickly—you're not discussing every entry, you're looking for patterns. What terms appeared in multiple postings? What surprised students? What terms do they recognize from academic contexts showing up in new language? ("Synthesize," "analyze," and "communicate" often appear in both places; "stakeholder management," "cross-functional," and "deliverables" are usually new.)

Point out 2–3 terms that map directly to academic skills students have practiced. "Stakeholder communication" is what they do every time they write a paper for a particular audience.

"Research and synthesis" is what a literature review is. "Facilitation" is leading a seminar discussion. The vocabulary is different; the underlying work is similar.

3 Model the translation process

12 MIN

Now show students how to apply the vocabulary they just collected to their own academic work. Walk through the prepared example as a class, projecting the translation worksheet (below) and filling it in together.

The process:

Ask students: what did you actually *do* to write a research paper? Not what was it about—what did you do? Collect responses and write them on the board. The list might include: chose a topic, searched the library databases, read several sources, took notes, figured out an argument or thesis statement, outlined, drafted, revised based on feedback, turned it in on time, formatted citations correctly.

For each activity, ask: what would someone need to know how to do in order to do that?

Then: did we see a term in the job ads that describes that capability?

A worked translation:

WHAT I DID	UNDERLYING SKILL	TERM FROM OUR GLOSSARY
Searched library databases and found relevant sources	Research, source selection	Research; Literature Review
Read sources and figured out where they agreed and disagreed	Synthesis, argument mapping	Research Analysis; Synthesizing Information
Built an original argument and drafted	Analytical thinking, written communication	Analytical Thinking; Written Communication

WHAT I DID	UNDERLYING SKILL	TERM FROM OUR GLOSSARY
Revised multiple times based on instructor feedback	Revision, attention to detail	Editing; Attention to Detail
Managed my time to finish by the deadline	Time management	Time Management
Kept track of citations correctly throughout	Accuracy, documentation	Documentation; Attention to Detail

Point out what just happened: a "research paper" became six distinct, searchable skills. None of those descriptions are dishonest. All of them describe real capabilities. And because students pulled this vocabulary from actual job postings rather than inventing it, they know it's language that appears in the contexts they're trying to enter.

Name the resistance students often feel here. The translation can feel reductive—like you're flattening something that took real intellectual effort into generic-sounding keywords. That feeling is real, and it's worth acknowledging directly. But the alternative—leaving the skills invisible—doesn't serve students well. The goal is to find the real capability underneath the academic framing and describe it in language their audience already uses.

4 The LinkedIn Skills section: what it does and how to approach it

8 MIN

The Skills section on LinkedIn isn't just a list. It's one of the primary ways LinkedIn matches profiles to recruiter searches. When a recruiter searches for "qualitative research" or "program coordination," LinkedIn surfaces profiles that have those terms in the Skills section. Students who have done qualitative research but listed it as "independent research" or left it off entirely won't appear in those results.

What students should aim for:

- 15–20 skills to start: enough to reflect their range without padding it
- Priority: skills that appear in job descriptions in their target fields, skills they can speak to specifically if asked
- Skills should connect to something in their Experience or Education entries—not a complete list of everything they've encountered

How LinkedIn's interface works:

Go to the profile, scroll to Skills, click Add. Start typing a skill—LinkedIn suggests matching terms from its own taxonomy. This matters: the taxonomy reflects the vocabulary the platform's search actually indexes. If a term from the class glossary doesn't appear as a suggestion, keep trying variations until you find the closest match. "Written communication" almost always appears; "critical analysis" usually doesn't, but "analytical thinking" and "research analysis" do. Using the platform's vocabulary is the point.

5 In-class exercise: translate your own work

20 MIN

Distribute the translation worksheet (below). Students work individually using one artifact from their own academic or extracurricular experience—a paper they wrote, a project they completed, a role they held. They fill in the table using the class glossary as their vocabulary source.

Students who don't know what to choose: any sustained piece of work counts. A research paper, a lab report, a group project, a student organization role, tutoring or TA work, a significant internship or job. Redirect students who want to describe their entire degree—push for one specific artifact.

Students who describe the outcome instead of the process: "I wrote a paper about X" describes the product. "I searched for sources, synthesized competing arguments, and drafted an original claim" describes the work. Push students to slow down and describe the process.

Students who feel the translation is dishonest: name this directly when you see it. The question to ask: did you actually do that thing? If yes, describing it in professional vocabulary is not misrepresentation. Misrepresentation is claiming a skill you can't demonstrate. Translation is claiming a skill you can perform in the language the reader speaks.

At the end of the exercise time, students should open LinkedIn and add at least 5 skills from their worksheet to their Skills section before the end of class.

6 Reflection *(optional—for written assignment or end-of-class discussion)*

Where did the translation feel accurate — like you found a different word for the same thing?

Where did it feel like something got lost? What was harder to translate?

What surprised you about what showed up as a skill?

7 Wrap-up and bridge to lesson 3

7 MIN

The connection between this lesson and the informational interview: once you know what skills you have and what they're called, you can ask better questions in professional conversations.

The generic question is "What does a day in your life look like?" That's fine, but it positions you as someone looking for a general orientation. A better question—one that makes a contact think—is something like: "I've been building [skill] through [specific work]. What does that look like in your role, and how has it developed over time?" That question shows the contact what you bring to the conversation and makes it easier for them to connect you to people or opportunities.

Students should leave having:

- Added at least 5 skills to their LinkedIn profile
- A translation worksheet they can continue working from
- Ongoing access to the class glossary slide deck
- A sense of what vocabulary appears in job postings in their target fields

Before lesson 3, students should:

- Complete their Skills section (aim for 15–20 skills)
- Find 2–3 job postings in fields they're considering; check whether the skills language matches what's on their profile
- Have their 3 informational interview contacts from lesson 1 ready. Lesson 3 is where they draft the outreach

Articles for Faculty (and optional student reading)

NACE CAREER READINESS COMPETENCIES

[Career Readiness Defined](#) — the canonical framework page defining all eight competencies, including the 2024 revision. Useful for mapping the skills students identify today to a framework employers explicitly use as an evaluation lens. Assigning students the competency list alongside the worksheet gives them a second vocabulary source.

HUMANITIES-TO-PROFESSIONAL TRANSLATION

[Career Exploration Is a Humanities Research Project](#) (Bernard, Inside Higher Ed) — frames job searching as qualitative research; helps students see that the skills they already have are the right tools for the search itself. The most directly useful piece for reinforcing the lesson's core premise.

[What Employers Want: Dispelling Myths about the Value of the Liberal Arts](#) — AAC&U synthesis of their full employer research series. Documents the gap between what employers say they want (critical thinking, communication, synthesis) and what students are trained to claim they have. The skills translation problem is named directly.

[Preparing Humanities Majors for Postgraduation Success](#) (Mintz, Inside Higher Ed) — makes the case that humanities majors become managers at high rates; practical framing for describing this work as professional development, not remediation.

RESUME AND APPLICATION SCREENING CONTEXT

[Your Approach to Hiring Is All Wrong](#) (*paywalled*, Cappelli, HBR) — covers how application screening works in practice from the employer side; makes the vocabulary argument without students having to take your word for it. Appropriate for students who push back on the idea that keyword matching is a reasonable system. (It isn't, but it's the system.)

CAREER-AWARE HUMANITIES PEDAGOGY

[Lessons in Public Scholarship](#) (Schaberg, Inside Higher Ed) — argument for faculty engaging beyond the academy; directly relevant to why career-aware pedagogy is consistent with, not in tension with, humanistic values.

[Cathy Davidson's *The New Education*](#) — IHE coverage with her "workforce ready vs. world ready" framing; a useful counterweight if faculty worry that this lesson positions career prep against intellectual formation.

STUDENT HANDOUT · TRANSLATION WORKSHEET

From Academic Work to Professional Language

Translating one piece of your own work into the vocabulary that travels.

The goal of this exercise is to translate one piece of your academic or extracurricular work into the vocabulary that appears in real job descriptions. You're not misrepresenting what you did—you're making it legible to a different audience.

STEP 1

Choose your artifact.

Pick one specific piece of work—not your entire degree, not your major. A single paper, a single project, a specific role you held. The more concrete, the more useful the exercise.

My artifact:

Examples: "My research paper on environmental policy and activism." "My two semesters as treasurer of the student sustainability coalition." "My summer internship answering constituent emails for a city council office."

STEP 2

Break down what you did and translate it.

In the first column, list 6–8 specific activities you performed to produce or sustain this work—not what it was about, but what you *did*. For each activity, identify the underlying skill and find the closest term from today's class glossary.

WHAT I DID	UNDERLYING SKILL	TERM FROM OUR GLOSSARY

STEP 3

Add to your LinkedIn profile.

Open LinkedIn, go to your Skills section, and add at least 5 terms from column 3 before the end of class. Use the vocabulary that appears in LinkedIn's taxonomy.

Skills added today:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.
