

# University of Montana

## Career Conversations

Career conversations (*informational interviews*) are conversations between you and someone you're trying to network with. The goal is to collect relevant information to help you learn more about someone's position, industry, and career path. These conversations help you build relationships, expand your professional network, and "try on" jobs to see if they are a good fit for you based on your interests, skills, values, and strengths.

You can request a career conversation from known and unknown contacts—friends, family, professionals in your field/company of interest, colleagues, faculty/staff, acquaintances, UM alumni, peers, etc. Most people enjoy talking about themselves and their careers. The first step is building a connection via email, LinkedIn, in-person, or phone.

### EMAIL SAMPLE

Subject: [Major] Undergraduate Seeking Your Advice

Dear [Mr./Ms. Last Name],

I hope this email finds you healthy and well. My name is [First and Last Name], and I'm a [blank-year] student at the University of Montana who is interested in [describe areas of interest]. I'm emailing to see if you might have 15 minutes of time to speak with me over the phone or Zoom to ask you about your experience with [name their company]? I'm trying to learn more about careers in [field of interest] and your insights would be very helpful.

I realize this may be a busy time for you, so if we are unable to connect this week, I'll try again next week to see whether that is more convenient.

Thank you for your time,  
[your First and Last Name]

### LINKEDIN CONNECTION NOTE SAMPLES

- I noticed we have common connections. Let's connect to share advice, networks, and opportunities.
- We're both University of Montana alum - boy do I miss Missoula! Let's connect to share advice, networks, and opportunities. Go Griz!
- I noticed we have similar career paths in [industry]. It would be great to connect to hear your experiences!

Once someone accepts your connection request, follow-up with an additional message introducing yourself and requesting a career conversation:

- Thank you for connecting with me, [first name]! I am eager to learn more about your role at [name their company] and how you got involved in the [name their industry] industry. Would you be open to a brief conversation via phone or Zoom to talk more about your role, career pathway, and company?

### CAREER CONVERSATIONS BREAKDOWN

**Step 1:** Research the company.

**Step 2:** Ask about them and listen. Small talk is important!

**Step 3:** Do not bring up them getting you a job in this first meeting.

**Step 4:** Use the TIARA method below to formulate questions—Trends, Insights, Advice, Resources, and Assignments.

## QUESTIONS

TIARA is a useful framework for preparing questions for your informational interview. Consider selecting questions from each of the categories below that are appropriate for your target career field and stage of decision-making.

### Trends Questions:

- What trends are impacting your field right now?
- What current issues in the field should I know about/be aware of?
- What are some common career paths in this field?
- What kinds of accomplishments tend to be valued and rewarded in this field?
- I've read that the entry-level salary range for this field is usually in the range of \_\_\_\_\_? Does this fit with what you've seen? (Don't ask about the person's actual salary.)
- What is the profile of the person most recently hired at my level?

### Insight Questions:

- What surprises you most about your job?
- What is a typical day (or week) like for you?
- What do you like most about your work?
- What do you like least about your work?
- What kinds of problems do you deal with?
- What kinds of decisions do you make?
- How does your position fit within the organization/career field/industry?
- How does your job affect your general lifestyle?
- How did you become interested in this field?
- How did you begin your career?
- If you could do it over again, would you choose the same path for yourself? If not, what would you change?
- How relevant to your work is your undergraduate major?
- What kind of education, training, or background does your job require?
- What skills, abilities, and personal attributes are essential to success in your job/this field?

### Assignments Questions:

- What project (s) have you done that you enjoyed the most?
- What are some common assignments and tasks in your position?
- Have you had interns/new graduates in the past? If so, what sort of projects have they done?

### Resources Questions:

- Can you recommend resources or associations that would be helpful for my professional development?
- What resources should I be aware of to stay current on industry trends?
- How would you recommend I stay abreast of current trends in the field?
- Can you suggest anyone else I could contact for additional information?

### Advice Questions:

- What can I do right now to best prepare for a career in this field?
- What related fields do you think I should consider looking into?
- How do most people get into this field? What are common entry-level jobs?
- What steps would you recommend I take to prepare to enter this field?
- What are the most effective strategies for seeking a position in this field?



Check out the following learning journeys on Elevate U Online for more tips and techniques you can utilize as you prepare for career conversations:

- **Building Your Professional Self - Informational Interviewing In Depth:**
  - Explore additional methods for finding people to interview.
  - Anticipate ways the conversation might not go as planned and consider how to make the most of those situations.
  - Watch a mock interview and analyze what went well and what didn't.
- **Know Your Skills – Short term career milestones:**
  - Reexamine what jobs or industries fit you well based on your interests.
  - Understand how milestones allow you to reflect on and assess your progress towards your larger goals.
  - Discover the career milestones of different people around you, and use that as a reference for setting your own milestones.