

# Career Conversations

Career Conversations are intentional, one-on-one discussions with professionals designed to help students explore career paths, gain insight into industries, and build meaningful connections. These conversations provide a low-pressure way to learn about roles, organizations, and professional experiences while developing confidence and communication skills. Career conversations also support long-term career growth by helping students clarify goals, expand their network, and prepare for future opportunities.



# Preparing for a Career Conversation

Before scheduling or attending a career conversation, take time to be intentional about your goals. Think about the upcoming conversations you have planned and the people you will be meeting with. Consider how you want those individuals to feel after speaking with you. Reflect on the type of energy, attitude, and presence you need to bring in order to create a positive and professional interaction.

## Reflection Prompts

- What outcomes do you hope to gain from this conversation?
- How do you want the professional to describe you after the meeting?
- What strengths or qualities do you want to communicate through your tone, body language, and questions?



# Research

Prior to the conversation, research the professional you will be meeting with. Look beyond their job title and focus on learning about them as a person. This may include hobbies, interests, professional organizations, alma mater, or community involvement. Information found on LinkedIn profiles, company bios, or personal websites is appropriate to reference. This preparation helps you build rapport and demonstrates respect for the professional's time and experience.

## Why Preparation is Important

Career conversations are most effective when you arrive prepared with thoughtful questions and a clear strategy. These conversations provide a low-pressure environment to learn about career paths, organizations, and industries. They also help you stand out from other candidates who rely solely on online applications.

Beyond your questions, professionalism plays a major role in first impressions. Your attire, body language, punctuality, and level of engagement all communicate how seriously you take the opportunity.



# Professional Appearance and Materials

## What to Wear

Choose clothing that reflects a professional version of yourself while considering the industry, organization, and meeting format. When in doubt, it is better to be slightly more polished than too casual.

General guidelines include:

- Clean, well-fitting clothing that allows you to sit and move comfortably
- A collared shirt, professional top, or blouse
- A jacket or blazer when appropriate for the industry or setting
- Professional attire applies to virtual meetings as well

Career Services at WKU can help students think through appropriate attire for different industries and connect them with resources if professional clothing is a concern. View our [Interview Attire Dress Code Guide](#) for more information.

## What to Bring for In-Person Conversations

Being prepared helps you stay organized and engaged during the conversation. Consider bringing:

- A notebook or portfolio to take notes
- Several copies of your resume on quality paper
- A laptop or tablet if it supports the purpose of the conversation

Even if you do not use every item, having them available demonstrates preparation and professionalism.

## Punctuality

Being on time signals respect and reliability.

- Video meetings: Join three to five minutes early
- Phone calls: Be ready at the scheduled start time
- In-person meetings:
  - Arrive at the parking area 20 to 30 minutes early
  - Be in the office lobby 10 minutes early



# Video Chat Etiquette

## Before the Conversation

- Prepare a few light conversation starters
- Dress professionally
- Choose a well-lit space
- Ensure your background is clean and distraction-free

## During the Conversation

- Keep your camera on and look at the camera when speaking
- Smile and express appreciation
- Maintain appropriate distance from the camera
- Vary your tone and pace to show interest and enthusiasm

## Starting with Small Talk

Beginning a career conversation with a few minutes of small talk helps set a positive tone and creates a more relaxed environment for both you and the professional.

A simple opening question such as, “How is your day going?” is an effective way to begin. Pay attention to how the other person responds and match their tone and level of detail. If they offer a brief response, keep yours brief as well. If they share more, it is appropriate to engage and respond at a similar level.

Early in the conversation, it is also helpful to acknowledge the professional’s time. This shows respect and helps you manage the conversation smoothly. You might say:

“Thank you again for meeting with me. I scheduled us for about 20 minutes. Do you have a hard stop at that time?”



# Building Authentic Connections

Ask at least one question that goes beyond job responsibilities or career titles. Showing genuine interest in the person behind the role helps establish trust and rapport.

You can reference appropriate details you discovered during your research about them. Topics like sports, campus experiences, hobbies, or local events are often natural and engaging conversation starters. Avoid personal or polarizing topics, and keep the conversation respectful and professional.

You may also acknowledge something visible in their environment or background. These moments help humanize the interaction and can make the conversation feel more relaxed and memorable.



## Sharing Your Background

Offer a brief overview of your background, interests, and goals. This should take about one minute. This is your opportunity to explain who you are, what you are studying or interested in, and why you wanted to connect with them specifically. Think of this as a snapshot rather than a full story.

End your background with a question that brings the focus back to the professional. This keeps the conversation flowing naturally and reinforces that you value their perspective and insight.

# Asking Effective Questions

Approach the conversation naturally. It is okay to adjust your questions based on how the discussion flows. Follow-up questions often lead to the most meaningful insights.

There is no required order for questions. Start with what interests you most.

## **Career Path Questions**

- Could you walk me through your career path, beginning with your college experiences and early roles?

## **Job-Specific Questions**

- What skills are most important for success in your role?
- What do you enjoy most about your work right now?
- What aspects of your job are most challenging?

## **Organization Questions**

- How would you describe the culture of your organization?
- What opportunities exist for mentorship and professional growth?
- How does your organization support employees from diverse backgrounds?

## **Industry Questions**

- What advice would you give someone starting out in this field?
- What is the best way to find internships or entry-level roles in this industry?
- What do you wish you had known earlier in your career?



# Closing the Conversation

As the conversation comes to a close, thank the professional for their time and insight.

Consider saying:

- “Please let me know if I can ever be a resource to you or your organization.”

You may also ask:

- “Would you mind if I stayed in touch from time to time?”



## Is the Professional late or unable to attend?

Remain professional and positive. Avoid showing frustration. If the meeting has not started after five minutes and no communication has been received, send a brief and courteous follow-up message.

### **Sample Email:**

Subject: Need to reschedule?

Hi [Name],

I wanted to check in to see if you need a few more minutes to join our meeting, or if you would prefer to reschedule for later this week or next week.

Thank you, [Your Name]



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