

Crisis of Meaning (CM) Interview (25%): this assignment carries significant weight in your final grade. Please plan ahead and give yourself sufficient time to schedule, conduct, transcribe, and edit the interview.

Interview Prompt

In order to conduct a successful CM interview you must first think about what it means to have a crisis of meaning. In this course, we define crisis of meaning as

- ❖ a crucial stage or turning point in someone's life characterized by a loss of purpose, feeling of pointlessness, rejection of values once taken for granted, or shattering of a familiar self-image. A crisis of meaning may be triggered by a traumatic event (e.g. injury), by a happy event (e.g. landing your dream job), or by a seemingly insignificant, mundane situation (e.g. a random conversation on a subway or a friend's passing comment). CM may or may not bring about changes in one's lifestyle, yet in all cases it involves a period of intense introspection and searching.

Interview someone (or have someone interview you¹) about CM *with particular emphasis* on 1) what the "crisis event" was 2) how this person confronted meaninglessness/doubt/strife 3) how this person *lived through/ recovered from* this event 4) what sorts of *re-evaluation* marks a difference in the person before and after the event?

Turn these 4 points into interview questions tailored to the person's particular situation. Over the course of the interview, add at least 3 more questions directly related to the person's story.

Important: this assignment is about stories of recovery from crisis; there should be a crisis-event but also a *narrative of recovery* –reconciliation, personal growth, deepened self-awareness, some indication of overcoming the crisis. In short, your interview should not be about spiraling deeper and deeper into meaninglessness, it should feature a person "on the way up and out."

Ethical Considerations: Choosing the right person to interview and the proper topic is the key. Please use your discretion when choosing a topic and approaching your potential interviewee with the chosen topic. Just because someone "has been through a lot" and seems to be doing fine does not mean that they are willing to share their story. Make sure the person you interview is comfortable talking about a particular event in his/ her life. You should be very clear about the purpose of the interview and let the interviewee know that if he/she wants to delete any part or edit later he/she will have that option.

Please let me know if you would like to be partnered up with someone in MoL class for this assignment. If you have a good candidate for an interview outside of class, talk to that person first. If no one comes to mind and/or you would like to tell your own story, working with a classmate could be an excellent option.

¹ This option is justified only if you want to share your own CM story. In this case, you will still be responsible for all the questions, recording, transcribing and editing of the interview, as well as writing the intro and concluding paragraphs.

Examples of events that may trigger a crisis of meaning

Changing a major	Putting down/the loss of a pet
Moving to a new place	Major accomplishment/ pressure of success
Losing a house/foreclosure/being homeless	Relationship pressures/ conflicts
Getting into a car accident	Bad drug experience
Being arrested	Betrayal of a friend/ lover
Confronting a sexual identity issue	Chronic illness/ disability
Experiencing a divorce/breakup	Mental health issue

Etiquette & Tips

As part of this assignment you may be called upon to handle a potentially difficult, revealing story. You need to be able to listen carefully, respond to non-verbal cues, be mindful of signs of discomfort, and remain attentive and respectful at all times. Here are some useful tips adapted from <http://www.legacyproject.org/guides/lifeinttips.html>

- During an interview, ask questions slowly, giving the person time to answer.
- You can use some “closed” questions (which prompt a respondent to give only a “yes” or “no” answer), but most should be “open” questions like: ‘Tell me about...; Describe...; What was it like when...?; In what ways...?; Why...?; and How...?’
- Start with easy, friendly questions and work your way up to more difficult or sensitive questions.
- Listen carefully to what the person says; don’t interrupt or correct.
- As you listen to answers, other questions will come to mind. Asking follow-up questions will enhance your conversation.
- If someone is talking about an unhappy or painful experience, show them empathetic understanding and compassion. If the person doesn’t want to talk about something, go to the next question.
- Expect moments of silence or emotion. A person’s life is important and a meaningful conversation is bound to have emotional gravity.
- Do not forget to thank the person you’ve interviewed. Let them know you value their time and their willingness to share their story. You may send them a thank you note and even a copy of the interview (for corrections and additions).

Interview stages and due dates

Identify the issue and the person to interview. Contact the person, explain the assignment and schedule the interview.

March 6 Submit interview outline describing the theme and listing your questions

Conduct the interview and record it. Transcribe the interview; show it to the interviewee, if this is what you agreed upon. Proof-read and edit the interview; write introductory and concluding paragraphs.

April 28 Submit edited interview as part of your course portfolio

Assessment

The interview is worth 25% of your final grade. It will be assessed based on

- Understanding, originality, and depth: clear focus on a crisis of meaning (see CM definition); interesting, open-ended questions conducive to a meaningful conversation; respect for the interviewee and his/her story (see “Etiquette”); well-planned interview process.
- Formal requirements: minimum 7 questions (4 required and at least 3 optional); all core questions should be open-ended (requiring a more complex answer than “yes” or “no”); the final version must include a short paragraph introducing the person you interviewed, the interview itself, and two concluding paragraphs relating the interview to some of the themes or ideas introduced in MoL course.
- Quality of writing: thorough organization of the material; well-chosen, well-integrated questions; clear writing, no spelling mistakes or grammatical errors.

Extra-curricular

You may use this assignment as a basis for a larger project. For instance, you may participate in the “Listen To A Life Contest,” get your story published online and even win a prize.

<http://www.legacyproject.org/contests/ltal.html>