**In-Depth Informational Interviews for Professional Development of Best Health Literacy Practices** (COMET #80)

Pamela Zubow Poe, PhD, MPH, CHES - p.poe@usciences.edu

DIRECTOR, Graduate Certificate in Health Education & Communication, University of the Sciences, Philadelphia, PA, USA

---

**BACKGROUND**

In-depth interviews are a recognized qualitative research approach for gathering information about professions, evaluating programs or exploring ideas.

Although future healthcare professionals seek to learn more about health literacy practices, much of the available literature addresses print, social media and reading levels. Students need to establish new connections and conduct interviews with experts to gain new insights on improving health literacy oral communication skills with target populations and address these unique challenges.

**METHODS**

For each student, this process of designing in-depth informational interviews with experts in relevant areas of health communication uses a three-pronged approach: Identify, Conduct, Synthesize.

**STRATEGIES**

Students are tasked with using this 3-step approach as a motivational tool to complete an otherwise difficult process.

For those having difficulty with access to experts, back-up planning is discussed in the first week of class, so students can adapt when facing challenges. Mapping of the immediate network can promote awareness of additional resources not previously identified.

---

**PROJECT SUMMARY**

This project was developed for undergraduate and graduate health literacy and health communication classes during several terms. The main goal for students was to forge new connections and tap experts to learn health literacy and communication strategies at work.

The results often provided significant new professional strategies, employment or internship connections, and the equivalent of “virtual guest speakers” for peers hearing the response reports in class.

**SUGGESTED COURSE SCHEDULE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 1</th>
<th>LOCATE and DESCRIBE A Range of “Experts”</th>
<th>Brainstorm in Pairs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 3</td>
<td>PRACTICE and DEVELOP Good Questions</td>
<td>Whole Class Exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 5</td>
<td>DISCUSS and SELECT Your Best Choice</td>
<td>Small Group Discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 7</td>
<td>CONDUCT the INTERVIEW With the “Expert”</td>
<td>One-on-One Meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 9</td>
<td>WRITE SUMMARY REPORT Share Peer Briefings</td>
<td>Whole Class Presentations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**RESULTS**

Students were cautioned that for an informational interview, proper etiquette means *not* asking for a job.

However, many students still reported unexpected results, including:

- Internship offers
- Job offers or previews of future openings
- Mentoring or advising
- Additional new leads and connections
- New career paths or suggested next steps
- New knowledge of future career options

Even when students were forced to interview family members because of cancellations, results could be acquired, expanded and utilized to their advantage.

---

**FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Training to develop oral communication skills:
[https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3140080/](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3140080/)

Oral communication skills and benefits for healthcare professionals:
[https://www.nursingtimes.net/clinical-archive/assessment-skills/communication-skills-1-benefits-of-effective-communication-for-patients/7022148.article](https://www.nursingtimes.net/clinical-archive/assessment-skills/communication-skills-1-benefits-of-effective-communication-for-patients/7022148.article)

---

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Many thanks to my Health Literacy and Communication students at University of the Sciences in Philadelphia, PA; Communication students at Drexel University in Philadelphia, PA and Public Relations students at Villanova University in Radnor, PA. These students were willing to participate in real-world learning with zest, enthusiasm, and solid results.