



WHAT IS IT?

An informational interview is a conversation to investigate a career. It lasts between 20-30 minutes, sometimes longer, and is between you and a person working in the career of interest. The purpose is to gather information about careers, industries, jobs, or organizations you might like – to see if they fit your interests and personality. Conducting informational interviews not only provides you with information about potential careers, it also builds your professional network. Think of it as relationship building.

HOW CAN IT HELP YOU?

- Explore careers and clarify your major/career goals
- Expand your professional network
- Build confidence for job interviews
- Learn the most up-to-date career information directly from a source
- Discover what skills are required for certain jobs and match them with your abilities and strengths
- Learn about the realities of working in a particular occupation
- Decide among different occupations or choose an occupational specialty
- Discover careers you never knew existed
- Find different ways to prepare for a particular career
- Gain confidence in your networking skills, and become more comfortable in the interviewing process
- Most importantly: the people with whom you speak will remain contacts and lead you to other, perhaps even better contacts and sources of job or internship opportunities

HOW DO YOU ARRANGE AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW?

Interviews are generally in person, this gives you the best sense of the working environment and helps the person to see and get to know you better.

- **Set up an appointment with a Career Advisor in the Career & Employment Hub** – Career Advisors have connections to community members in the Greater Portland area and beyond.
- **People you already know** – faculty, family, friends, or co-workers (present or past) may work in the occupation you want to explore, or they may know people who do.
- **LinkedIn** – Allows you to search for people with you same interests, and alumni from USM by job title, industry, college major, and geographic location. You might also find connections through your own LinkedIn network.
- **Professional associations** – these associations maintain and often publish membership directories. Many also produce journals, trade magazines, or newsletters describing the activities of specific members. These members might be potential interview subjects.
- **Directly contacting businesses and organizations** – research places that do the work you want to do and who hires the type of workers you hope to consult.



HOW TO ARRANGE FOR AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW:

Be flexible about when to meet, the person is doing you a favor so meet when it is convenient for them.

- **Mutual acquaintance introduction** – career advisor, faculty, staff, friends, family, or acquaintances might be willing to make the initial request for an interview for you or allow you to use them as a referral – using their name when emailing or calling the person yourself.
- **Email** – The most common way to ask for an interview. Be polite, let them know you are a student at the University of Southern Maine, what you are interested in learning, and how much time you will need (20-30 minutes).
- **Telephone** – Faster, but often more stressful way to arrange an interview. Practice your introduction and request once or twice before making calls.

HOW DO YOU PREPARE FOR AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW?

- **Research** – Use LinkedIn and the company website to learn all that you can about the person and the company where you'll be interviewing.
- **Bring a resume** – It will give the person an idea of who you are, and something to remind them of you in the future. If there is time, and they are willing, you may ask for their feedback on your resume.
- **Develop questions** – The most critical part of preparing for an informational interview is to compose the questions you want to ask. **See the Career Hubs handout on Informational Interview Questions.**
- **Dress professionally** – If you are meeting in person, dress as if you were interviewing for a job. It's a sign of respect for the person you are interviewing.

WHEN ASKING QUESTIONS

- Ask open-ended questions that allow the other person to explain and describe.
- Ask a question and then stop talking, let the other person answer.
- If you don't understand something, ask for clarification.
- If the direction of the interview diverges from your set of questions, go with it unless you begin to lose focus.
- Your list of questions is only a guide.

HOW DO YOU ADDRESS QUESTIONS FROM THE RESOURCE PERSON?

The person whom you are interviewing may want to know something about you as well as share information about her/himself. They may even tell you of job openings or inquire as to whether or not you are interested in hearing of any. How you answer will depend upon where you are in your job search. You may or may not be ready to commit yourself to a particular occupational field. In any case, try to keep options open for yourself and respond accordingly. Answer questions regarding your skills and background honestly, and with a positive attitude.



AFTER THE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

- Send a thank you note. A thank you note will help you be remembered by the person in a positive light.
- Keep in touch – cultivate the relationship.
- LinkedIn.com is a great tool for staying connected and continuing to grow your network. Keep them posted on your job search efforts, and let them know when you've found a job.

TIPS FOR THE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING

- Seek to interview people working in the occupations you are considering.
- **Emphasize** that you are not looking for a job!
- Keep the interview to 20-30 minutes. Don't be surprised if the interview lasts an hour; people like to be helpful and enjoy talking about themselves.
- Maintain a notebook of the interviews; the person's contact information, the questions asked and responses received. This will help you reflect on each experience and assist you with your major/career exploration.
- Always ask for two more contacts before the conclusion of your discussion. This referral is sometimes the best lead you can get!

DID YOU KNOW?

The concept of informational interviewing was conceived by Richard Nelson Bolles, author of the bestselling career handbook, *What Color is Your Parachute?* Bolles describes the process as "trying on jobs to see if they fit you." He notes that most people choose a career path without taking the time to speak with professionals in their field of interest. As a result, they find themselves in careers that are not a true match for their skills, values, interests, and abilities.