

# Finding & Making the Most of Shadowing Experiences

**Gain the Best Experience You Can!**



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# Shadowing – Why is it important?

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Shadowing provides opportunities to test your motivation and learn about yourself. It can contribute to your knowledge of the field you are choosing. Most of all it allows you to learn from the professional's personal experience, e.g. how they:

- organize their day
- allow time for the unexpected
- stay current in the profession
- integrate personal and professional life
- manage the financial aspect of their practice

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## WHEN TO START AND HOW MUCH?

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It is never too early and there is no such thing as too much. High school experience is a good foundation but is not usually included on the application. Finding the right balance between academics and extra-curricular activities is key. Stay until there is nothing more to learn! Consider diversifying your experience-cultural competency is important.

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## SHADOWING IS.....

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- A proactive process initiated by you
- Your opportunity to learn more about your chosen profession
- Your opportunity to reflect on what you have learned from the experience

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## GET STARTED – STEPS TO FINDING SHADOWING EXPERIENCES

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### Identify your Connections & Connect!

After you have decided which health professions pathway you want to explore it is time to start finding shadowing experiences and making connections! Identify people to Shadow. Here are some suggestions of where you can start:

- **Easier - Connect with people you know!** Friends, relatives, your own health providers, neighbors, fellow students; where have they found opportunities to shadow, etc. Network! Network! Network! – You may have to start by shadowing different professionals to ultimately get to shadow the specialty you are interested in. Example: Start shadowing your aunt who is a surgical nurse, then from there you could meet an anesthesiologist, who you then shadow and they refer you to an orthopedic surgeon they went to school with.
- **More Targeted - You can investigate and find other people, cast the net far and wide:**
  - ✓ Professional organizations and directories
  - ✓ Your own health care providers and those who treat family members
  - ✓ Health care providers who are parents of your friends
  - ✓ Yellow pages
  - ✓ A Google Search or Reference USA (database available through [UT library online](#))
  - ✓ LinkedIn Alumni search – [linkedin.com/alumni](https://www.linkedin.com/alumni)

### WHO CAN YOU START WITH?

Start with brainstorming the names of at least three people you could potentially reach out to:

1)	2)	3)
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## PREPARING TO MAKE A SHADOWING REQUEST

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Before you reach out to arrange the shadowing experience get your resume ready, think about your availability. Think about what you will say in your introduction, practice it.

- **Arrange the Shadowing Experience:** Contact the person by telephone; or by an email followed by a telephone call.
  - ✓ Think about (and practice) what you will say in your introduction
  - ✓ Contact the individual and ask for shadowing
  - ✓ Make it clear you are seeking shadowing experience and understand the HIPAA regulations and privacy concerns
  - ✓ Be certain to identify a date, time and location for the shadowing and a phone number you can use later to confirm (approximately one day in advance). Remember to be flexible in your scheduling as the health care providers are voluntarily spending their time with you.
  - ✓ If possible, make your first contact in person: Plan your trip – map the locations you will be going to.
  
- **Tips on Making the Call (In person or on phone):**
  - ✓ Introduce yourself
  - ✓ State who referred you (*If you have a direct connection always state their name*)
  - ✓ State the purpose of your call
  - ✓ If this is a “cold call”, ask if they have ever had a student shadow

If speaking directly to the health care professional:

- *“Hi, my name is \_\_\_\_\_. I am a Pre-\_\_\_\_ student at The University of Texas at Austin. I am researching health professions career choices, and I am interested in learning more about being a \_\_\_\_\_. Jane Kim said you’d be a great person to speak with about this profession because of your experience and knowledge. I would like to speak with you more to learn about your profession. Would it be possible to schedule a time to shadow you if you are open to having someone shadow? I am generally free on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. and will be flexible to arrange a time at your convenience.”*

If speaking to a receptionist:

- *“Hi, my name is \_\_\_\_\_. I am a Pre-\_\_\_\_ student at The University of Texas at Austin. I am researching health professions career choices, and I am interested in learning more about being a \_\_\_\_\_ and possibly shadowing \_\_\_\_\_. Jane Kim said \_\_\_\_\_ would be a great person to speak with about this profession because of their experience and knowledge. I would like see if I could speak with them more to learn about their profession. Also would it be possible to schedule a time to shadow them? I am generally free on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. and will be flexible to arrange a time at your convenience.”*

### ○ Handling the Receptionist Response:

**Calling:**

- ✓ **Receptionist says Yes:** Ask them who handles shadowing requests, then ask to speak to or see that person. If you get to meet speak to them, introduce yourself and talk about availability. If don’t get to speak with them, offer to send an email resume and, in the body of the email, type out your shadowing request. Always ask if it is okay to follow up with them. Always ask for their name, email address, and phone number.
- ✓ **Receptionist says No or I do not know:** Ask if it would be possible for you to send in a resume. Then ask if you could follow up with them if you have not been contacted back within a week. You may also ask who you should follow up with.

**Going in Person:**

- ✓ **Receptionist says Yes:** Ask if you can meet the person who handles shadowing requests and then introduce yourself. If they are there, offer to give them a resume and ask about their shadowing process. If the person who you need to speak with is not there, ask if you can leave your resume and if you can follow up with them. Always ask for their name, email, and phone number.

- ✓ **Receptionist says No or I do not know:** Thank them and then ask if it would be possible for you to leave a resume. You should also have a cover letter that addresses your interest in shadowing opportunities. Then ask if you could follow up with them if you have not been contacted back within a week. You may also ask who you should follow up with.

### ○ **Handling the Yes and No Responses after the request:**

- If the response is no, tell them thank you for considering your request
- Ask if you can keep their info for future shadowing
- If yes (and your schedules don't match), thank them for the offer
- If yes (and availability matches), accept the opportunity
- Ask if they need additional information from you before starting

**Create a system for follow up:** Track your shadowing requests in an excel spreadsheet or use a google doc. This will help you know who you have reached out to and help you create a continued plan as you seek more shadowing opportunities.

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## WHEN SHADOWING

While you are shadowing it is very important to be professional. When you are setting up your shadowing opportunity, make sure to ask them their required dress code. Be polite and show enthusiasm. Here are some tips from our Pre-Health Professions Coaches. Please follow them when you are shadowing.

- Wear comfortable shoes
- Wear minimal jewelry
- Use deodorant
- Go light on cologne or perfume (or do not wear it since some people are sensitive to it)
- Turn off or silence your cell phone
- Bring a note pad or padfolio

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## MAKE THE MOST OF THE EXPERIENCE

It is very important to make the most of your shadowing experience. Engage in the process, observe, and ask questions when appropriate. Make your questions count!

Possible Questions for Shadowing Experience:

1. On a typical day, what do you do?
2. How many patients do you see each day?
3. How many hours do you work in a typical day/week?
4. What kinds of problems do you deal with?
5. What percentage of your time is spent doing what?
6. How does the time use vary? Are there busy and slow times or is the work activity fairly constant?
7. What personal qualities or abilities are important to being a successful physician/dentist/ \_\_\_? \_\_\_?
8. Is there a demand for people in this specialty? (if relevant)
9. What types of continued education or training are required?
10. What do you look for in a colleague?
11. Which professional journals and organizations would help me learn more about this field?
12. How do you work with difficult patients?
13. From your perspective, what are the problems you see working in medicine/dentistry?
14. What surprised you most about working in this field?
15. What advances do you think will be made in this field and how will that impact your career?
16. How do you balance work and family responsibilities?
17. How does technology play a role in this field or in your job?
18. How did you choose to pursue this profession? Did you consider anything else?

Consider keeping a journal where you can write down your thoughts immediately following the shadowing experience. Make sure to track your hours in a spreadsheet or google doc. This will help you when you fill out your application later.

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## CLOSING OUT THE EXPERIENCE

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- **Put the Information to Use!** Review your notes and evaluate what you learned. Analyze the information you gathered. Self-reflection is important, reflect on your experience and record the information gathered, check out the self-reflection questions on page 5 to get you started.
- **Request a final meeting:** Make sure to thank the professional for the opportunity and during your debriefing highlight what you learned from the experience.
- **Ask for referrals to more health care professionals:** Ask for permission to use their name when contacting others.
- **Follow Up:** Be sure to send a thank-you note (hand-written if your hand-writing is legible) to the person you shadowed within one week of the experience. Stay in touch with them and let them know how helpful it was.

Dear Dr. \_\_\_\_\_,

### Sample Thank You Note

*I appreciate the time you took to talk with me today about \_\_\_\_\_.  
Shadowing you was \_\_\_\_\_ \*(state something you learned) Your views and  
advice on the field have been very helpful to me. If there is every anything I can  
do for you, please do not hesitate to contact me.*

*Best Wishes,  
Joe Science*

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## REFLECTION - SAMPLE QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR SELF

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Choose several questions that are based on what you would like to reflect on. Most of these are open-ended questions that require more than a yes or no answer so that you can learn more from your experiences.

What am I learning from/about:

- ✓ Patient interactions?
- ✓ The patient's illness?
- ✓ Lifestyle issues that may impact health?
- ✓ How to listen?
- ✓ The health care professional-patient relationship?
- ✓ What the patients teaching me?
- ✓ Myself?
- ✓ What it is really like to be a \_\_\_\_\_?
- ✓ How these experiences are impacting my decision to pursue this career?

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## SHADOWING PREPARATION WORKSHEET

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Complete this worksheet before each new shadowing experience. You may make copies of this worksheet.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Contact Person: \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Company Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone Number (s): \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Who referred you to this contact person? \_\_\_\_\_

What do you know about this contact person? \_\_\_\_\_

Select 5-10 questions you want to ask during your shadowing debrief.

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