

Job Shadowing 101

What is a job shadow? It is an opportunity to spend time with a professional on the job to help you learn more about what it would be like to do that career. Job shadows are a great way to observe different jobs and help you decide which careers would be best for you.

What do you do during a job shadow? It depends on where you do the experience. Typically, you will follow one employee or mentor around for a day as they go about their work. It is mostly observing, listening, and asking questions. Sometimes though, they might give you a chance to perform some simple job duties, but you won't be able to do things that require special training. During your job shadow, you'll be able to see what your mentor's schedule is like, how much of their time is spent doing different duties, who they interact with during the day, and what knowledge and skills they use.

Usually a job shadow lasts one day and may focus on one job within the company, however sometimes an employer may have you spend time observing multiple jobs within the company to help give you a good perspective on career positions within that business. Many times, these may be easier to schedule on your own during the summer when you are not in school or as heavily into sports. If it is during the school year, you may have to schedule to miss a day of school to attend the job shadow opportunity.

What are the benefits of job shadowing? There are many benefits, but one of the greatest is you learn more in-depth about a certain job so you can decide if it's really something you would enjoy. It is a risk-free way to learn about a career before you begin paying to take college classes to qualify for that career. It also can help you decide if that's the trade that fits you best before you go out to try to find a position and the needed training for it.

A job shadow is also an opportunity to network with professionals in a career area of interest. Sometimes it can be more about who you know, than it is about what you know. Job shadows are a great way to get to know employees and managers of a company that you may want to work at someday. Use this experience as an opportunity to help you get your foot in the door in the future.

Job shadows also help you see what the workforce is like and what it will take to be a successful employee someday. You will be able to see what it's like to have coworkers and a boss and the job shadow can give you a better idea of what to expect when you begin working.

Are there down sides to a job shadow? Yes, sometimes. Job shadows can give you a great experience and teach you a lot, but if you have a negative experience or mentor, it can turn you away from a job you may have been really interested in. It's really important to keep in mind that you only spent one day at one place, and that does not necessarily represent an entire career by any means. If you have a negative experience, try to set up another job shadow elsewhere and try again. You may find a different company or a different mentor provides a completely different experience.

How do I find a job shadow opportunity? The simplest, fastest way is to be sure to look at our shadow day link on the school's website to see what job shadows are pre-setup for you on the day registration for those opens. If you miss that date, you can always set one up on your own.

Sometimes, kids are lucky enough to have a parent, guardian, older family member, or family friend in their career interest area. If so, many times, they can help you network and find a good place and position to job shadow. Many times, these important people in your life are happy to help you set up a job shadow experience.

There are many other ways to set up an experience as well. You can check the college and career board in the front hall to see if anything is posted, check other community boards to see if there are companies looking for workers or interns, check or professionally inquire through social media friends, or use your investigative skills. Keep reading to find out what to do to proceed once you have an employer in mind.

How to Setup Your Own Job Shadow:

1. **Contact a company** about job shadowing. You can start with companies you know of, specifically those where you know someone personally. Reach out to those individuals first to see what job shadowing opportunities are available there. If you don't know anyone at the company, don't be afraid to call or email someone in the Human Resources department. If you can't reach someone in HR, contact someone directly in the department with which you're interested.
2. **Know what to ask.** Explain that you're a student interested in that particular career or field and would love to spend some time following someone in the company if possible – whatever works for the company.
3. **Talk logistics.** Once you get the go ahead, discuss who, when, and how long you can job shadow. Be sure to know the specifics for the experience like exact times (so you can be early), where to park, where to report to upon arrival, any dress code requirements, etc. Don't be discouraged if all you can squeeze in with them is an interview. Any face time is time well spent.
4. **Say thank you.** Regardless of whether or not you can go there, be sure to thank them for their help and time helping you. It's important to make a good impression, you'll never know when you may be in contact with them again.

Before your shadow:

- **Research the company** so you're prepared when you go. Make sure it's a company you'd truly be interested in maybe working at someday. Check out their website and learn basic facts like what they do, how many people they employ, when they were founded. Also read the company's goals and mission statement if they have them to

get a better sense of where you'll be working. If you know who you'll be shadowing, research their position so you have a better idea of what to expect as well.

- **Be prepared to discuss yourself and your career goals.** They'll want to know about you too. If you're unsure about careers, that's fine too, just mention that you're gathering information still because you're unsure, if they ask.
- **Prepare some questions you'd like to ask while shadowing.** These questions can be about the job itself, the career field, advice you're interested in getting, etc. Remember, to have a good list in case you are nervous or distracted once you arrive and start forgetting what you wanted to ask. Job shadowing experiences are a great way to show people your professionalism and personality in case you look for an interview from them someday. Sample questions include:
 - What caused you to choose this job?
 - What do you like about this job? What do you dislike about this job?
 - What makes a person successful at this job?
 - What classes can I take to help prepare me for a job in this field?
 - What skills are useful for this job?
 - What is something about this job that not everyone thinks of when deciding whether or not to go into this career?
- **Know the specifics for your job shadow experience.** Make sure you know exactly when and where the job shadow will be taking place. You'll want to be sure to know what time to be there (be a little early), where to park, where to report to when you get there, how long you'll be there, and if there are any dress code requirements. And, don't forget to confirm with the company a few days beforehand to make sure your experience is all set to go.

During Your Job Shadow:

- Know how to get to the location and **allow extra time** to ensure you are not late. **Be sure to keep your appointment.** They are taking time out of their schedules to help you, make sure you show your appreciation by making the time you set up with them work and be there.
- **Dress appropriately.** Unless you will be getting dirty, dress similar to how you would for a job interview. Don't wear t-shirts, shorts, or flip-flops.
- **Bring a notepad** so you can take down notes and things you learn.
- **Keep your phone off** during the job shadow and resist the urge to text or check your Facebook messages until you're back home.
- Be enthusiastic and participate in each activity suggested. **You want to learn as much as possible from this experience.**
- Speak to as many people as you can and **ask for their business cards** if you're interested in talking with them more.
- Shake hands and introduce yourself to every person you meet.

- **Remember to be respectful of people's time.** While most people you meet will be happy to talk with you, remember that you are at someone's workplace and they need to work as well, so try not to take up too much of any one person's time.

After Your Job Shadow:

- **Send thank-you notes** to the person or people you shadowed, and mention a few things you learned.
- **Write up a few sentences on your job shadow experience** for your own personal use. Describe what you did, what you enjoyed, what you didn't enjoy, and what you learned. This will be useful information to have in the future when you don't remember the details of your job shadow as clearly.
- **Store contact information and business cards** in a safe place so you can reference them if you need to contact the company again for more information, ask follow-up questions, or if you end up applying for a job there.

Key Facts About Job Shadowing

- Job shadowing is a great way to observe specific jobs and help decide which careers you are most interested in.
- Job shadows are a great opportunity for high school students because they can help you plan your future and decide what to major in at college.
- During a job shadow, you will observe a typical workday at the company.
- Beforehand, research the company and career field you'll be observing so you can ask relevant questions.
- During your job shadow, make the most of the experience by speaking to as many people and participating in as many activities as you can.