

Job Shadowing Guide

An in-depth explanation on how to approach the concept of job shadowing

What is job shadowing?

Job Shadowing, in simple terms, is the experience of following and observing a working professional through his or her day. This may include attending client meetings, participating in various projects, touring the facility, or more. A job shadow varies in time, with some individuals shadowing for a day while others may shadow for a week. Job shadowing differs from an internship in the sense that it is unpaid, short-term, and helps an individual to gain quick insight into a particular field.

The Value in Job Shadowing

- Job shadowing is an ideal way to learn firsthand about the day-to-day work of a professional in a career field of interest to you.
- A job shadow offers you the chance to “try out” a field or observe a company’s culture without long-term commitment.
- What you observe during a job shadow can clarify your career interests or goals, even if you learn that your dream job is not exactly what you thought!
- Job shadowing may help you connect your coursework to career opportunities and future plans.
- Job shadows also provide opportunities for you to build professional relationships with people in your desired career field. By having in-depth conversations with a professional and meeting his or her colleagues, you are expanding your professional network significantly. You may even find a professional mentor.

Questions to ask yourself before pursuing a Job Shadow

- 1 What am I hoping to learn from a job shadow?
- 2 What specific aspects of the position do I want to learn about (i.e. daily activities, schedule, workplace culture, work-life balance, advancement opportunities, etc.)?
- 3 What jobs should I consider shadowing within my career field? Which job would be the best to observe?
- 4 What companies have the type of job I would like to shadow?



Remember: Making a good impression during your job shadow could lead to new opportunities for an internship or job within the company or field. You may also gain valuable information on how to best apply to a particular company for a future position.



How to Discover a Job Shadowing Opportunity

HOW TO IDENTIFY SOMEONE TO SHADOW:

- **Make an appointment via Handshake to meet with a staff member in the Academic and Career Development Center.** An advisor can ask you a series of questions that pertains to your professional interests, or suggest WKU alumni with whom you could connect.
- **Consult your personal network.** Reach out to faculty mentors, former internship or job supervisors, previous coworkers, members of organization to which you belong, friends, or family. Any one of these individuals may have connections in your desired field. Even if they cannot offer a job shadow experience, they may be willing to introduce you to someone who could host you.
- **Tap into professional-focused social media sites like LinkedIn and Handshake.** LinkedIn and Handshake offer a great opportunity for connecting with people in your desired field. By having a strong profile, you can increase your chances of gaining a job shadow opportunity. Do not be afraid to confidently approach a contact by sending a personalized message and job shadow inquiry.
- **Contact a specific company about job shadowing.** Call or email an individual in the human resources of a company at which you wish to job shadow. You can also reach out to someone in the department.

REQUESTING A JOB SHADOW:

- Before reaching out to someone you do not know to inquire about a job shadow opportunity, be sure to **establish a rapport**. Introduce yourself and explain your professional interests. You may want to consider requesting an informational interview before immediately requesting a job shadow. If the informational interview goes well, you could then follow up by requesting to shadow the person you conversed with.
- If you need help or advice when drafting a request for a job shadow, **reach out to the Academic and Career Advising Center to receive advice from a career coach**. Introduce yourself, explain your professional interests or desires, and communicate what you are hoping to gain from a job shadow experience.
- Do not wait! Be sure to make your job shadow request **several weeks in advance** of when you hope to shadow. By doing this, the person you are asking can ensure that they have time to add you into their schedule. Being proactive also appears professional!



Preparing for your Job Shadow Experience

BEFORE STARTING YOUR JOB SHADOW:

- **Research** the individual you're scheduled to shadow along with their professional background, and dedicate time to exploring the company or organization they're affiliated with. Familiarize yourself with their credentials by perusing their LinkedIn profile and any relevant company materials on their website. Additionally, conduct a Google search to uncover recent news or mentions of the organization. This comprehensive research will provide valuable context for discussions and interactions during the job shadowing experience.
- **Prepare a list of inquiries** you can pose to the professionals you encounter during your job shadow experience.
- **Be ready to talk about yourself.** During your job shadow, expect individuals to inquire about you. Be ready to introduce yourself, discuss your career interests, and articulate why this job shadow experience is valuable to you.
- **Confirm the time and date.** A few days before your job shadow, ensure the date and time with your host. Consider conducting a trial commute to verify that you allocate sufficient time for travel, parking, and reaching the entrance.
- **Reach out to a particular company** regarding job shadowing by contacting either a designated individual in the human resources department or someone directly within the department you wish to shadow. This can be done via phone or email.
- **Inquire about the company's dress code** ahead of time to ensure that your attire is both professional and aligns with the organization's culture.

ON THE DAY OF YOUR JOB SHADOW:

- **Dress appropriately** and adhere to the dress code provided by your host.
- **Carry a notepad and pen** to take down names, notes, and questions.
- **Bring copies of your resume**, offering one only if requested.
- **Aim to arrive 10-15 minutes early.**
- **Keep your cell phone on silent** to maintain focus on your learning experience.
- **Be ready to sign any non-disclosure agreements** requested by the company and uphold confidentiality.
- **View this opportunity as a privilege and demonstrate professionalism** by engaging with everyone you meet, smiling, introducing yourself, offering firm handshakes, maintaining eye contact, and asking insightful questions.
- **Respect your job shadow hosts' priorities** and give them space to carry out their tasks.
- **Collect business cards** from new contacts for follow-up after the job shadow.

Sample Job Shadow E-mail Templates

Initial Shadow Request E-mail

The provided template is crafted to assist you in drafting an email to request an opportunity for shadowing and/or conducting an informational interview. Fill in the relevant information in the blank spaces, tailored to the individual you are contacting. While you're encouraged to personalize the language, maintain a professional tone throughout. Before sending the email, review the content to ensure accuracy, eliminate any typos, and remove any template text that should not be included.

Dear Dr./Ms./Mr. [Last Name],

I hope this email finds you well. My name is Allison Mattingly, and I am a [year in school] student at Western Kentucky University. Currently, I am exploring career opportunities in healthcare, with a keen interest in the field of [specific field, e.g., dentistry, occupational therapy, pediatric oncology, etc.].

During my search for insights into this profession, I came across your contact information on the [specific source, e.g., hospital/clinic/office] website. Alternatively, I was referred to you by your colleague [Colleague's Name]. I am reaching out to inquire whether your hospital/clinic/office allows students to shadow professionals like yourself.

I am enthusiastic about the prospect of observing your work and gaining firsthand knowledge of the responsibilities and dynamics involved in [specific field]. Additionally, I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to meet with you over coffee or tea at your convenience (my treat!). I am eager to hear about your experiences and seek your valuable advice on preparing for a career in [specific field].

I understand that your schedule may be hectic, and I truly appreciate any time you can spare. Should you have any questions or require further information, please feel free to contact me via email or phone at ###-###-####.

Thank you very much for considering my request. I look forward to the possibility of learning from you and benefiting from your insights.

Warm regards,
Allison Mattingly

If the answer is "No."

You might encounter rejection multiple times before securing a positive response, and that's perfectly normal. Utilize each "no" as an opportunity to explore other avenues and expand your network. You can repurpose the email template to request informational interviews or broaden your connections. Remember to express gratitude for any response received, even if it's not the one you anticipated. Maintaining a positive relationship can potentially lead to future opportunities.

Dear Dr./Mr./Ms. [Last Name],

I want to express my gratitude for taking the time to respond to my email. While I understand that it may not be feasible to shadow with you at this time, I genuinely appreciate your consideration of my request. I remain enthusiastic about the opportunity to learn from your experiences as a [specific role]. Additionally, I would like to inquire if you could kindly connect me with a colleague or two who might be open to hosting a shadowing opportunity. I am eager to explore various perspectives within the field and continue my learning journey.

Thank you once again for your assistance and willingness to engage with me.

Warm regards,
Allison

After Your Job Shadow Experience

After you complete your Job Shadow, there are a few things that you will want to do to ensure success:

- Within 24 hours, **extend your gratitude** by sending a handwritten thank-you note. If this isn't feasible, an email expressing your thanks will suffice. Address this note to the professional who facilitated your job shadow, but consider sending appreciation notes to all who contributed to your visit or with whom you wish to maintain contact. Mention a memorable moment or significant takeaway from the experience, and convey your sincere appreciation for the time and effort invested in hosting the job shadow.
- Kindly request to **connect with new contacts** on LinkedIn. Craft a personalized invitation on LinkedIn and continue to engage with them regularly to foster the relationship.
- **Incorporate this job shadow experience into your resume**, selecting the most appropriate section to highlight it. Be prepared to share anecdotes or insights gained from this experience during future interviews.
- **Take time to reflect** on your job shadow experience by pondering the following questions. Feel free to contact Career Coach at the Advising & Career Development Center:

1. What are the day-to-day responsibilities associated with this role?
2. What insights did I gain about the company and the field?
3. What was the most memorable aspect of the experience?
4. Can I envision myself thriving in this position? Does it complement my personality, strengths, interests, and values?
5. What aspects surprised or disappointed me?
6. Do I still have a genuine interest in pursuing this career path?
7. What concerns or reservations do I harbor about this profession?
8. What skills or further education do I need to excel in this role or field?
9. Should I consider shadowing another position?
10. What are the next steps in my professional journey?