



Job Shadowing Guide

Job shadowing is the experience of **following a professional through his or her day**. It may include observing client meetings, participating in projects, touring facilities, and conducting informational interviews. A job shadow **varies in length** from a few hours to an entire work week. It **differs from an internship** in that it is short-term, offers no payment, and helps you gain an insider's view into a particular field.

The Value of 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 are my educational goals for a job shadow? In other words, what do I hope to learn?
- 2 What specific aspects of the industry, company or position do I want to learn about (i.e. day-to-day activities, typical schedule, workplace culture, work-life balance, advancement opportunities, required skills, etc.)?
- 3 What jobs should I consider shadowing? If you have not already, take the **CareerExplorer** inventory for possible career matches. Which job would be the best to observe at this point?
- 4 What companies have the type of job I would like to shadow?



If you make a good impression during your job shadow, you may **open the door for future internship or job opportunities** within that company or field. You may also gain valuable information about how best to apply to a particular company.



How to Discover a Job Shadowing Opportunity

IDENTIFYING SOMEONE TO SHADOW

- **Make an appointment via Handshake to meet with a staff member in the Compass Center.** He or she can ask you questions about your professional interests, suggest members of the **Northwestern Network** or **Northwestern College alumni** with whom you could connect, and help you take tangible steps to inquire into job shadowing opportunities.
- **Consult your personal network.** Reach out to faculty mentors, former internship or job supervisors, previous coworkers, members of organizations to which you belong, friends, or family members who 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 are great for finding and connecting with people in your desired field. If you have a strong profile, confidently approach a contact by sending a personalized message. Check out the [Compass Center LinkedIn Profile Guide](#) and the [Compass Center Handshake Profile Guide](#) for more tips on utilizing these networking tools.
- **Contact a specific company about job shadowing.** If you do not know someone at a company where you would like to shadow, you can still reach out directly to the company. Email or call someone in the human resources department, or reach out to someone in the department where you would like to shadow. (See a sample email below that you can send to a cold contact, which is someone you have never met before.)

REQUESTING A JOB SHADOW

- If you are reaching out to someone you do not already know about a job shadow opportunity, **start by establishing rapport.** Introduce yourself and explain your professional interests. You may want to request an informational interview before jumping straight to a request for a job shadow. (Check out the [Compass Center Informational Interview Guide](#) for more information.) If the informational interview goes well, you could follow up by requesting to shadow that person for a few hours on the job.
- If working with someone in the Compass Center to reach out to a Northwestern College alumni or member of the Northwestern Network, follow their advice in **drafting a request for a job shadow.** Introduce yourself, explain your professional interests, and communicate what you hope to gain from a job shadow experience.
- Make your job shadow request **several weeks in advance** of when you hope to shadow so the person you are asking has time to add you to his or her schedule.

Sample Job Shadow Request Email (Known Contact)

Follow-up and Job Shadow Request



Nora Northwestern <nora.northwestern@nwcsiowa.edu>
To: Susan Johnson

Dear Ms. Johnson,

Thank you again for sharing information with me about your professional journey. I loved learning about your current role and the unexpected doors that opened at key moments in your life. After hearing your story, I am even more interested in a career in non-profit management and would love to learn more about your work at the Lake County Chamber of Commerce. I could gain helpful insight into what a typical day of work at a chamber of commerce looks like. Would you be open to letting me shadow you for a few hours in the next month?

If you are open to having me shadow you, what type of schedule would be most convenient? I am grateful for the investment you have already made in my professional growth, and I look forward to hearing back from you.

Best,

Nora Northwestern

Sample Job Shadow Request Email (Cold Contact)

Job Shadow Inquiry



Nora Northwestern <nora.northwestern@nwcsiowa.edu>
To: Susan Johnson

Dear Ms. Johnson,

I found your contact information on the Lake County Chamber of Commerce website. I am a sophomore at Northwestern College in Orange City, Iowa. I am pursuing a business degree, and I have a strong interest in non-profit management. After considering a variety of careers within non-profit management, I am most interested in the work that chambers of commerce do to promote the businesses within their communities. My grandparents have a summer home in Lake County, and I would love to job shadow you or someone in your office for a few hours this coming summer to learn firsthand about your day-to-day work. If you are open to this possibility, please feel free to suggest a day or week that could work best for you.

Thank you for reading this email and considering my request. I will follow up with a telephone call if I have not heard back from you by May 1.

With appreciation,

Nora Northwestern

Preparing for Your Job Shadow Experience

BEFORE STARTING YOUR JOB SHADOW

- **Research** the person you will be shadowing, as well as the company or organization. Be familiar with your job shadow host's background, and spend time on the company's website and LinkedIn page. Search the organization on Google to see if it has appeared in the news lately. Any insight you gain into the company or field will give you helpful context for conversations and meetings during the job shadow itself.
- **Prepare a list of questions** you can ask the professionals with whom you interact during your job shadow. Check out the list of questions in the [Compass Center Informational Interview Guide](#).
- **Be ready to talk about yourself.** The people you meet will have questions for you, so be prepared to introduce yourself, talk about your career interests, and explain why this job shadow is beneficial.
- **Confirm the date and time** of your job shadow with your host a few days prior. You may even want to do a "test run" of your commute to make sure you allow enough time to get there, park, and walk to the entrance.
- **Ask about the company dress code** in advance so you can dress in a way that is both professional and compatible with the organization's culture.

ON THE DAY OF YOUR JOB SHADOW

- **Dress professionally** and in accordance with the dress code shared by your host.
- **Bring a notepad and pen** so you can jot down names, notes and questions.
- **Bring copies of your resume.** But only offer a copy if someone requests one.
- **Arrive 10-15 minutes early.**
- **Keep your cell phone muted** so that you can give your undivided attention to what you are learning.
- **Be prepared to sign non-disclosure agreement forms** requested by the company, and then keep the details of what you hear and learn confidential.
- **Treat this opportunity as the privilege it is** by giving everyone you meet your full attention, smiling, introducing yourself, offering firm handshakes, making eye contact, and asking thoughtful questions. Impress new contacts with your professionalism and enthusiasm.
- **Be mindful of your job shadow hosts' priorities.** Give them space to do their work while you are there.
- **Collect the business cards of any new contacts** so that you can follow up with them after the job shadow by sending thank you notes and connecting on LinkedIn.

After Your Job Shadow Experience

- **Send a handwritten thank you** within 24 hours. If a handwritten note is not possible, a thank you email will suffice. Send this note to the professional who hosted your job shadow, but consider sending thank you notes to all who assisted with your visit or with whom you would like to stay in touch. Reference a highlight or your biggest takeaway. Graciously express your appreciation for the investment this job shadow required.
- **Request to connect with new contacts on LinkedIn.** Send them a personalized invitation on LinkedIn, and connect with them regularly to nurture the relationship.
- **Add this job shadow experience to your resume.** Find the most appropriate place to include it, and be prepared to share a story or two about what you learned from this job shadow in an interview.
- **Reflect on what you learned.** Ask yourself these questions, and consider talking through your answers with someone in the Compass Center:
 1. *What day-to-day activities come with this role?*
 2. *What did I learn about this company and field?*
 3. *What was the highlight of the experience?*
 4. *Could I enjoy this type of position? Does it align with my personality, strengths, interests and values?*
 5. *What surprised or disappointed me the most?*
 6. *Am I still interested in pursuing this line of work?*
 7. *What concerns do I have about this career?*
 8. *What skills or additional education do I need to pursue in order to succeed in this role or field?*
 9. *Is there another job shadow I should do?*
 10. *What are the next steps for my professional future?*