

Shadowing Guide

Helpful Hints:

Before Shadowing

1. Locate a few contacts through the yellow pages, Career Center, or personal contacts. If the first person you call is unable to participate, ask them if they can refer you to a colleague.
2. When you arrange the shadowing observation time, be prepared to explain your purpose. Be clear that you are interested in learning about the profession and that you are an SDSU student.
3. Before hanging up, restate the date, time and location. Write down any special instructions you are given.
4. Ask about parking, checking in, and directions as needed.
5. Prior to the shadowing experience, conduct some basic research on the profession and industry setting. This will give you some basis for understanding what to expect.
6. Prepare 5-10 topics or questions that will help you focus your observations. Your goal is to get a sense of the day to day life in that profession.

While Shadowing

1. Be a few minutes early so you can get to your observation area on time.
2. Before beginning observations, ask about the ground rules. Depending on the setting, there may be certain parameters about where you can observe from or when you communicate.
3. Observe actively. Note as much as possible about the environment, such as the other workers, the manner in which interactions with co-workers and customers occur, and the general pace.
4. Ask questions to clarify what you are observing and to learn more about the professional's career progression. Transition times are often ideal for these conversations.
5. Take brief notes, if possible, but do not write everything down.
6. Monitor the time. If you are concerned about exceeding your time, politely note the time and thank the professional for sharing their day with you.
7. Ask the professional for their business card for future follow up.
8. Expect to be asked about your interests, goals, or academic experiences.

After Shadowing

1. Send a brief note or email thanking the professional for letting you observe their work day.
2. Write up your impressions and reactions as soon as possible. Memory erodes quickly, and you will want to preserve as much detail as possible.

Sample Observation Topics and Filler Questions

Entry Into the Profession

1. How did you get into the profession? Tell me about your career progression.
2. What degree/academic training is needed for a job in the field?
3. What preparation would you suggest for someone interested in this field?
4. What, if anything, would you do differently if you could start over and why?

The Professional

Observe what the professional is doing, who they interact with and how. Note the skills required and level of responsibility.

1. How does this compare to a typical work day?
2. Tell me about the business cycle in this profession.
3. What skills and abilities do you find are most important in your work?
4. What are some of the problems you encounter and what does it take to solve them?

The Organization

Observe the physical environment, other workers, and the working conditions for different areas.

1. How does this position fit into the overall organization? Is this typical?
2. With whom in your organization do you have the most contact? What is that contact like?
3. Where do you see windows of opportunity within the profession/organization in the future?
4. How long does it take to move from one step to the next in this field?
5. How does this organization compare with some of the other's in which you've worked?

Advice for You

1. Do you have any special advice for someone entering this field?
2. Which of your college courses do you use most in your work?
3. What out-of-class experiences (work or other) would you recommend to test an interest in this profession?
4. Tell the professional a little about your goals, personality and future goals. Ask them how well someone like you might fit in the profession/organization. Be sure to ask for elaboration if they give you a simple "well or not well" response.