

Job Shadowing



Why Do It and How It Works

Job shadowing is an excellent way to test your career goals by seeing “a day in the life” of a particular field or position by spending a few hours, a day, or several days on-site literally “shadowing” a specific professional or a group of professionals within an organization. Not only can you see what the work is like from day to day, but you have a chance to talk with professionals who can give you information about related positions, about a particular organization, or about the job market in a specific industry or geographic region. You can also use it to get advice on strategies for pursuing a particular job or career path and to make connections/get referrals for people to contact about potential jobs, internships, or more job shadowing!

Whom to Contact

- Ask people back home (parents, friends of the family, relatives, people from your community or from your church, parents of friends, etc.) if they know of anyone who would let you follow them for a period of time when you are on a break from school.
- Ask faculty at St. Olaf if they can recommend anyone, particularly alumni.
- Use the **Online Alumni Directory** to locate alumni within the geographical region that is most convenient for you. Search by occupational field, major, employer, and more! Stop in the CEL for assistance if you are having trouble.

What to Say

You may call, write, or email your candidate and simply say something like this:

“Hi, my name is _____. I am a (*class year*) at St. Olaf College exploring career options and am interested in your career field. I found your name in the alumni directory (or Your name was passed on to me by _____) and I was hoping you might be someone I could talk with about job shadowing. Is now a good time to discuss this, or should I get back to you another time? I will be free the week of _____ and was hoping to spend a day or even just a couple of hours watching a day in the life of a (*job title*). Is that something that might work with your schedule?”

How to Prepare

- Research your field of interest by reviewing resources available at the CEL or on our website.
- Be prepared to answer questions about yourself that relate to your experiences, skills, interests, and goals.
- Think through several areas you’d like to know more about and generate specific questions you many want to ask during the day. Here are some basic questions you may want to ask; others are available on the CEL’s website.

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Questions to Ask

- What do you do in a typical day?
- What kind of background is required for this type of position? What kind of background do you (the contact person) have, and did it help you in this field?
- What kind of experience (internships?) would be advantageous in this field?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of this field?
- What motivated you to pursue this work, and what motivates you to stay in it?
- What are the typical working conditions of this job? (Probe for specifics about workload, expectations, dress codes, degree of independence, amount of supervision, closeness of relationships, pressures, degree of cooperation or competition)
- What kind of compensation can one expect when deciding to pursue this career (salary & benefits)?
- Is there something you would recommend I do to test whether this type of job is a fit for me? Is there any other information you can give me to help me understand what it might be like to work in this sort of job?
- Who else would you recommend I contact for more information about this career track/organization?
- Could you recommend a person or organization that might provide an internship experience?

Etiquette

- If you are unable to keep the appointment you made, cancel ahead of time – chances are the person has arranged special and/or interesting things for your visit.
- Be on time, or a few minutes early (15 minutes at the most).
- Remember proper attire. Dress pants/skirt or khakis and dress shirt/sweater are usually safe, but ask the professional you intend to shadow her/his opinion of what is appropriate to wear. In some professions, you may be out in the field or doing things that require different attire.
- Be professional: While at your job shadow, you are representing yourself and St. Olaf College. Use a firm hand shake, be attentive, show enthusiasm, and keep a positive attitude!
- You may be taken out to lunch, so remember your table manners, and don't assume the professional will pay for lunch!
- Remember issues of confidentiality. What you hear/see may need to stay on site.
- Respect the limits of what a person can do for you, how much you can see, and how many people you can meet.
- Get business cards from the professionals you meet for follow-up and future contact.
- Thank your host before you leave!

Following Up

Send a thank-you note! You should always thank your contact person for their valuable time and for any referrals with which they may have provided you. It can be personalized by commenting on information that was especially helpful to you.

St. Olaf College – Center for Experiential Learning

Career Connections

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www.stolaf.edu/services/cel