ASDA
American Student Dental Association

Shadowing Guide and Log

Shadowing dentists serves as a critical experience in determining if dentistry is a good fit for one's career. Inquire at the admissions or student affairs office of the schools you are interested in applying to about the number of observation hours required for admission. If a school does not require a certain number of hours, still pursue shadowing opportunities. Shadowing will help you learn more about dentistry and give you experiences to talk about in your applications and interviews. Pursuing diverse observation experiences exploring different paths in dentistry will help you solidify *your* path in dentistry. However, it may be difficult to find a shadowing experience. This guide will help you in finding, pursuing and maximizing your shadowing experience.

Arranging the Opportunity

Find a dentist to shadow:

- Ask people you know (your dentist, dentists of your family members, family friends that are dentists). Branch out in your network.
- Ask your university's pre-health advisors, career office and academic advisors.
- Talk to officers and members of your predental club about dentists they've shadowed.
- If your university has a dental school, contact the admissions office or faculty members from contact information on the dental school's website. Some dental schools may allow you to shadow or even assist in the student clinics. Reach out to the ASDA chapter leaders. Contact information is available at www.ASDAnet.org/leadership-directory.
- Contact your local or state dental association to see if they can provide names of dentists that provide shadowing opportunities. Contact information is available at http://ebusiness.ada.org/mystate.aspx.
- Go to ADA's site at http://www.mouthhealthy.org and use the "Find a Dentist" tool or do a general search online to find nearby dentists.

Don't be afraid to reach out to dentists. Dentists will remember when they were predental students searching for shadowing opportunities and will be more than happy to help you out. Send a professional email or call the dentist. Make sure to carefully write your email and to prepare what you will say before you call. Don't be discouraged if a few dentists say no. Keep looking and be persistent in finding a shadowing opportunity. Dentists are busy. If the dentist does not respond at first, follow up in a few days to ask again.

If the dentist agrees to have you shadow, set up a clear time and date to shadow. Make sure to ask about the expectations of the shadowing visit. Do you want to make this a one-time visit or a regular opportunity? What clothes should you wear? Is there anything else that you need to do to prepare?

Here is a template email to get you started:

Dear Dr. Dentist,

My name is Eager Predental and I am a second year undergraduate predental student at Outstanding State University. I am interested in a career in dentistry and I would like to learn more about the profession. I learned about your practice by searching online for local dentists.

I was wondering if I would be able to shadow in your office. You can reach me by email at abc@123.com or by phone at 123-456-7890.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Eager Predental

Preparing for the Opportunity

Get a basic understanding of the opportunity:

- If you know the practice type, specialty or any other details of the dentist you are shadowing, go to www.ASDAnet.org/postdoc/career-paths.aspx to learn more. This page gives an overview of different specialties and career paths in dentistry. You can also go to the specialty organization's website for more information. For example if you are shadowing a pediatric dentist, check out the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry website at www.aapd.org.
- Gaining a basic understanding of your shadowing experience before you set foot in the clinic will help you ask questions beyond the basics. Try to get a list of questions you are curious about written down.

Dressing for the opportunity:

- Ask the dentist about proper dress code. Remember, you are not only representing yourself with your dress, but also the dentist you are shadowing.
- Always play it safe. Follow a general guideline of business casual: collared shirt, golf shirt, blouse, dressy top with sleeves, a nice pair of professional pants, and closed-toe shoes. Don't wear sandals or open-toe shoes. Make sure to check about jewelry and piercings or keep it minimal.

During the Opportunity

Keeping a journal of your shadowing experience will help you maximize what you learn by putting your thoughts to words and serve as a reference during your admissions process. Make sure to note **specific details**, such as interactions and moments that stood out to you. The learning gained from your experiences is extremely important in your development as a dentist and can enhance your personal statement and interview for dental school. Referring to these concrete examples from your shadowing log will help you to avoid vague and fluffy ideas and create a strong application for dental school.

Follow these guidelines in creating your shadowing log:

- It's always safer to ask before doing. Check with the dentist if it's fine to take notes in your journal. Clarify patient privacy guidelines with the dentist, as well.
- While you're shadowing, write your observations and questions down. Take a look at our example shadowing log (Appendix 1).
- Think about the following prompts as you log your shadowing experience: Do you have any questions? Do you have any thoughts or feelings? Do you want to learn more about a specific procedure, skill or aspect that you observed? What did you

like? What did you not like? What did you learn that you didn't know about dentistry or what changed what you thought you knew?

- Ask the dentist questions about the daily routine, balancing life outside of work and dentistry in general. You can integrate your thoughts and experiences from shadowing into your personal statement.

After the Opportunity

Send a handwritten (ideally) thank you note or a thank you email to the dentist. The dentist went out of his or her way to have you shadow them. Follow up the day of or soon after you shadow.

Review your shadowing log. Add any afterthoughts or details you may have missed.

Pat yourself on the back! Shadowing is a great way to take the initiative to learn more about dentistry and being a dentist. You've taken a step towards strengthening and solidifying your future career in dentistry.

Additional Resources

Below are a list of additional reading material from ASDA and ADEA to help you make the most of your shadowing experience:

- "Five things every predental should know" Aug. 27, 2014, Mouthing Off
- "Five tips for the best dental shadowing experience" July 1, 2014, ADEA GoDental
- "Shadowing in a dental office" June 1, 2014, ADEA GoDental
- "Shadowing in a dental office, part II making the most of your experience" June 1, 2014, ADEA GoDental
- "Choose a dentist to shadow" November 2012 ASDA News

Appendix 1 – Clinical Experience Shadowing Log

Ideally, you should record all your dental clinical experiences in a centralized location, in addition to your shadowing experiences, including volunteering at clinics and internships. Use the following template to log your experiences with the dentist you shadowed.

Name and title of dentist:	
Contact information:	
Date and hours shadowed:	
Name and address of setting:	
Type of setting (private practice, hospital, critical care):	
Specialist type (pediatric dentist, orthodontist):	

Fill this observations section with ALL of your thoughts, questions, and feelings throughout the experience:

At the end of your experience, what would you say was the most important and influential moment?