

Job Shadow Guide for Students



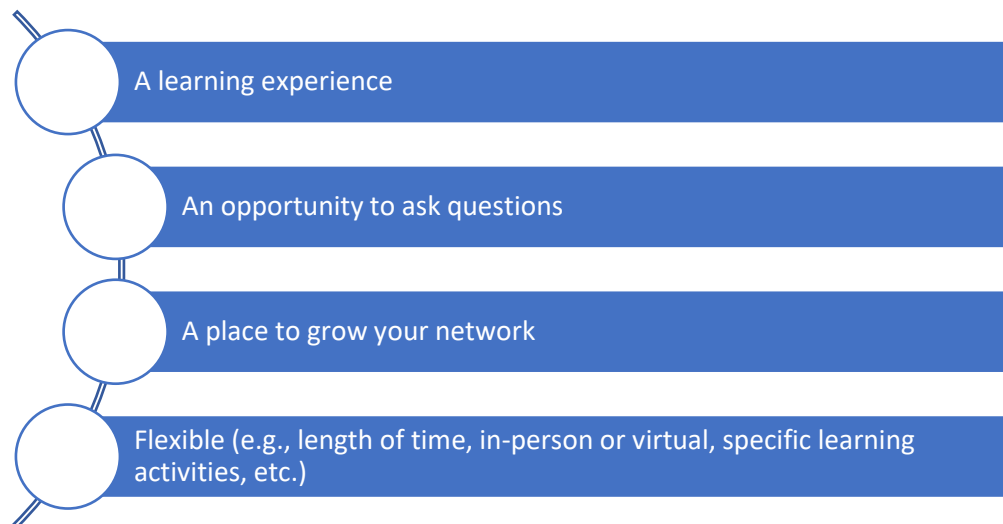
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Job Shadowing – What & Why

Job shadowing is an opportunity to get to know more about a professional role, organization, or industry by spending a short amount of time with someone in their work environment. It is a learning experience that allows you to see first-hand the skills utilized by an experienced professional and to ask questions aligned with your learning goals. With a bit of preparation and reflection, this brief (often 1-day, but flexible) career exploration technique can provide valuable insights that will inform the next steps of your career development.

A job shadow is...



Reasons to do a job shadow

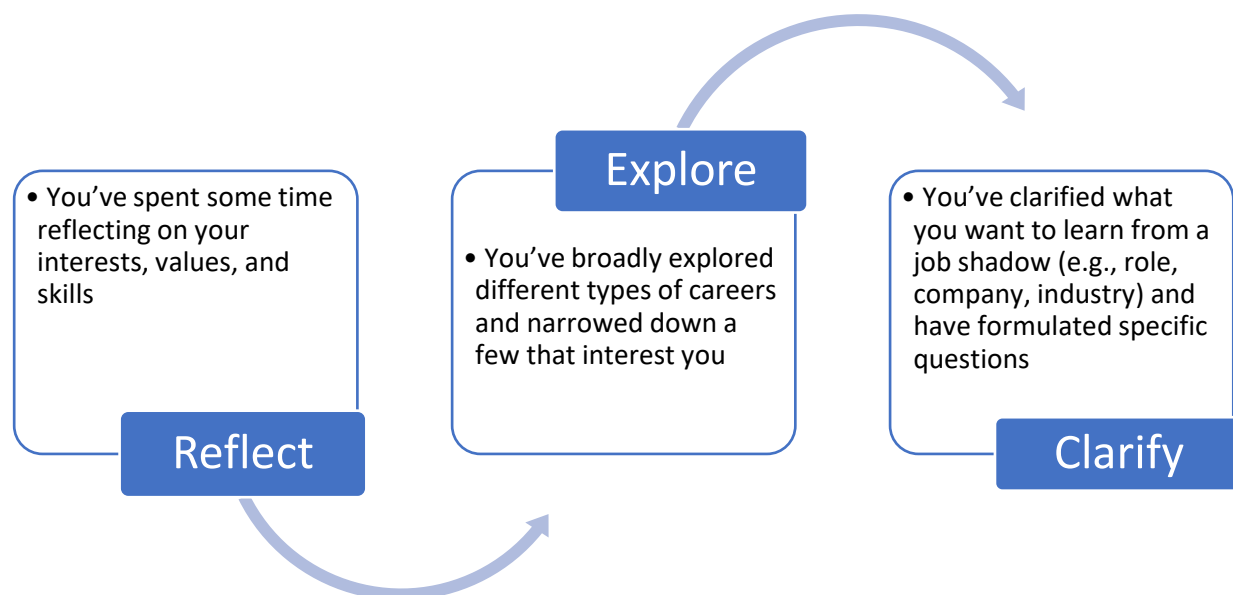
There are many reasons to do a job shadow and they may change as you progress through your career exploration (e.g., from learning more about an industry in general to more about the work culture at a specific organization). Below are some of the main reasons why individuals participate in a job shadow.

- Learn more about a role, organization, or industry
- Gain a deeper understanding of skills used in a professional environment
- Contextualize your skills in another environment
- Practice talking about your professional self in a low-stakes situation
- Broaden your professional network
- Learn the language of the industry
- Confront preconceptions you have about a role or industry – is it what you thought?
- Discuss how to deal with career challenges
- Evaluate your professional development plan – are there new areas you want to focus on?

Job Shadowing – When & How

When to do a job shadow

The best time to do a job shadow may differ for individuals, but often yields the most value when you've had a chance to reflect, explore options, and clarify what you hope to get out of your job shadow. Another consideration is to make sure you will have the time to fully participate in the job shadow. This includes time to prepare, be meaningfully engaged during, and reflect afterward. A job shadow is brief but should be strategically placed in your calendar so that you can get the most out of it.

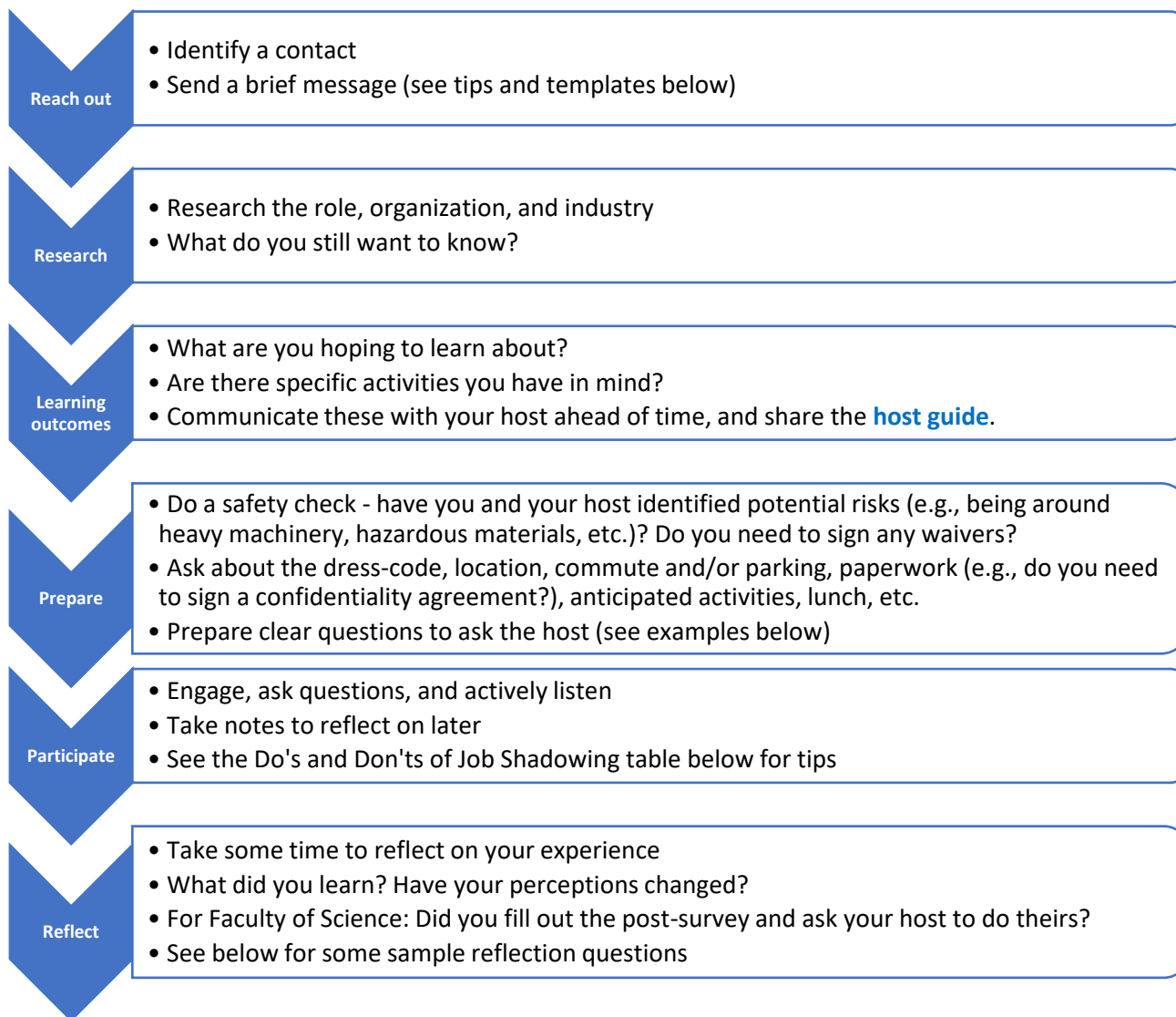


A Successful Job Shadow

There are a few steps along the way to a successful job shadow and it is the responsibility of the person seeking the job shadow to engage the host and help you both be prepared, enjoy the experience, and optimize the benefits. Forethought and clear communication are key, as are mindful engagement and reflection. Below is a detailed (non-exhaustive) list of steps that outline a typical job shadow experience. Keep in mind that this list serves as a guide, and that each individual experience varies and therefore may bring alternate or additional steps.

Notes: Job shadowing is optional and is not a part of your academic program. Job shadowing is unpaid experiential learning, with the main purpose being to observe and try where appropriate, not to perform labour. Should you decide to partake in job shadowing, you are not considered a trainee of the organization in which you are shadowing (for more information on how "trainees" are defined in Quebec, see [Bill 14, An Act to Ensure the Protection of Trainees in the Workplace](#)).

The Process





Additional Resources

- [Individual Development Plan \(IDP\)](#) (Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies)
- [Career Planning Service](#) (CaPS):
 - [Networking resources](#); [How to find McGill alumni on LinkedIn](#); [How-To Guides](#) (e.g., [How to Navigate Career Conversations](#)); [Industry Insider event recordings](#); [Job Search Series videos](#); [Career Skills videos](#)
- McGill PhD alumni career outcomes:
 - [TRaCE McGill](#); [McGill Science Career Briefs](#)
- [Skillsets](#) (Teaching and Learning Services):

- [Individual Development Framework](#) and [workshops](#)

Do's and Don'ts of Job Shadowing

	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrive on time, dress appropriately, and remain courteous during your stay • Ask questions (clear and open-ended, so that they may elaborate on the answer) • Actively listen • Participate in activities when invited (if you feel comfortable doing so) • Respect workplace restrictions and confidentiality agreements • Leave time at the end to debrief with your host • Send a thank you note and follow up on items (e.g., LinkedIn connection, article you promised to share, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask yes/no questions (clarify those instead to allow for elaboration) • Ask for a job (even indirectly) • Spend more time talking about yourself than listening • Ask questions you could have easily found the answer to online • Give them a resume (unless they ask you for one and/or voluntarily offer to give you feedback) • Ask about specific negative experiences at their job (shared experiences are ok – e.g., how they handled the COVID-19 pandemic and work responsibilities)

Tips, Examples, & Templates

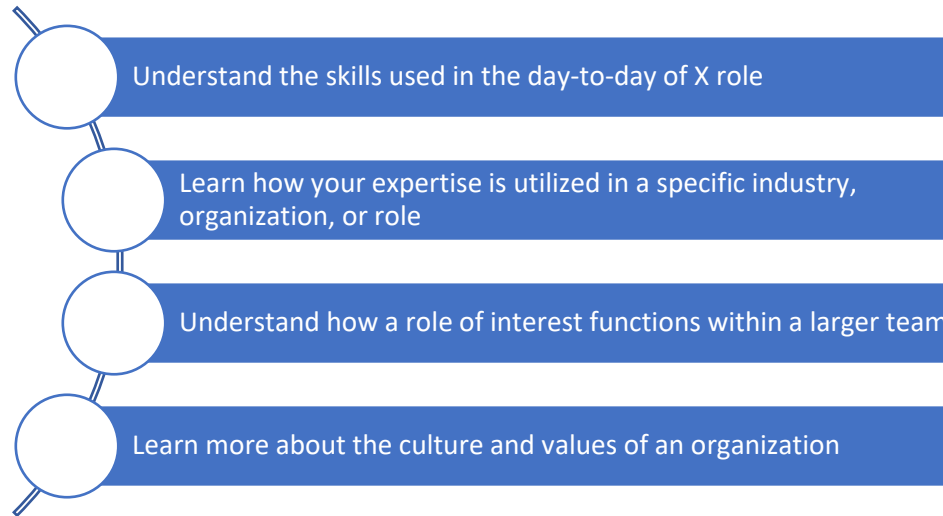
Tips for reaching out

It's common to first have an informational interview with someone and then, if you're still interested to learn more, reach out to them and inquire about a job shadow. However, it is also ok to let someone know you are interested in a job shadow right away and offer to meet with them briefly beforehand. The tips below apply to reaching out for either a job shadow or an informational interview (see Informational Interviews section below).

- Prioritize “warm” connections over “cold” ones (i.e., you have something in common, such as having attended McGill University)
- Connect with people who are active online
- Be mindful and sensitive about who you approach (e.g., did their company just have a lay-off?)
- Take a humane and authentic approach (e.g., acknowledge that this is a challenging time)
- Keep your message brief and to the point
- Make the conversation about them, not you (give before you take)
- Give people an “out” or the option to reschedule (see Job Shadow Alternatives below)

- Cultivate emotional connections with deliberate warmth (include language that personalizes you to avoid frigid emails)

Examples of learning outcomes



Examples of activities to suggest

- Discuss your host's career path and professional/educational background
- Observe daily activities and discuss regularly occurring activities that you may not see the day of the job shadow (your host can help guide a discussion on important tasks and how often they occur, e.g., daily, weekly, quarterly)
- Participate in reviewing a project, or components that can be summarized in the time allotted
- Try hands on activities, where appropriate
- Sit in on meetings or presentations
- Lunch or meeting(s) with colleagues (if they are available – your host can help arrange)

Example questions for host

- What led you to a role in [X]? (beyond their LinkedIn profile – e.g., I saw you have a background in [W], how did you wind up doing [X]?)
- What skills do you use on a regular basis, or do you find are the most important for your role?
- How do you balance your work responsibilities?
- What are the most interesting parts of your work (or what motivates you)?
- What does your day-to-day look like? Does it change throughout the year? (e.g., I understand this role typically involves [A, B, C] responsibilities, how do you spend most of your time?)
- Is there something you didn't know prior to your position that you wish someone had told you?
- What do you need to have patience for in this job?
- In what ways does teamwork play a role in your position?

Example Reflection Questions

Reflection post-job shadow is an integral part of learning from the experience. Make sure to take time to reflect on the experience and any notes you took soon after the job shadow, and even after some time has passed and you've had a chance to contemplate your initial reactions.

- What are my initial reactions/thoughts to the job shadow?
- What new things did I learn?
- What surprised me the most?
- Did my experience match my expectations?
- Did I learn everything I wanted to? Do I have unanswered questions?
- Do I have new questions knowing what I know now?
- Might I enjoy working in this or a similar role, organization, or industry?
- If not, should I do some informational interviews in another area? (Other job shadows are also an option)
- If so, should I consider an internship?

Templates

LinkedIn message

Dear Dr. Xavier,

My name is Jaya, and I am currently pursuing a PhD in Earth and Planetary Sciences at McGill University. I came across your profile as a McGill alumnus, and I am interested in learning more about your role as a Policy Analyst at Environment Org. Canada.

Would you be interested in sharing your expertise and hosting me for a one-day job shadow so that I can learn more about the role of a Policy Analyst? If you're interested, I can arrange a brief, 20-minute meeting for us to discuss at your convenience. I'm happy to accommodate your schedule and am flexible on the date and amount of time we spend together.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

[Name, affiliation, contact information]

First contact email

[Subject line: Career advice inquiry]

Dear Dr. Xavier,

My name is Jaya, and I am currently pursuing a PhD in Earth and Planetary Sciences at McGill University. I came across your profile on LinkedIn as a McGill alumnus, and I am interested in learning more about your role as a Policy Analyst at Environment Org. Canada.

I am exploring career options in the non-profit sector and would like to learn more about the role of Policy Analysts in organizations such as yours. Would you be interested in sharing your expertise and hosting me for a one-day job shadow? Mainly, I'm hoping to gain a better understanding of the range of skills used in policy analyst roles in non-profit organizations and what your day-to-day experience is like.

If you are interested, please let me know and I can arrange a brief, 20-minute meeting for us to discuss. I'm happy to accommodate your schedule and am flexible on the date and amount of time we spend together.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

[Name, affiliation, contact information]

Thank you note

[Subject line: Thank you]

Dear Carlo,

Thank you for hosting me for a job shadow yesterday at Environment Org. Canada. It was a pleasure to meet you and your colleagues, and to learn more about your role as a Policy Analyst. I particularly appreciated learning about the wide range of skills you use on a weekly basis. I have a much better understanding of how teams work together to support a non-profit organization.

Here is a [link](#) for that article I mentioned if you're still interested. I'd also like to take this opportunity to thank you for your advice on translating academic terms to industry terms in my resume when the time comes for me to apply for jobs.

I look forward to keeping in touch on LinkedIn. Please don't hesitate to reach out if ever you would like to chat again.

Best wishes,

[Name, affiliation, contact information]

Job Shadow Alternatives

If a job shadow is not the right option for you or a potential host at this time, you could also explore informational interviews or an internship.

Informational Interviews

An informational interview is a shorter alternative to a job shadow, where you meet with an experienced professional for 20-30 minutes to learn more about their career path, or a specific role, organization, or industry. While an informational interview does not include the hands-on learning activities that come with a job shadow, the two are similar in that informational interviews are an opportunity to ask questions, learn, and expand your professional network.

As with a job shadow, an informational interview involves reaching out to potential interviewees and arranging a meeting (in-person or virtual) with the purpose being to learn through prepared questions after doing some background research. Many of the do's and don'ts of job shadowing from the table above apply to informational interviews.

To learn more, consult the [CaPS guide on how to conduct informational interviews](#).

Internships

Internships can provide valuable hands-on experience in a workplace and can last from a few weeks to a few months (or longer). Perhaps you've done a job shadow already and have decided you're ready to get more in-depth experience, or perhaps you've already determined a place where you're ready to spend a more significant amount of time.

There are several funding opportunities for participation in an internship. One option is the [Doctoral Internship Program](#), which offers McGill University doctoral students at the end of their degree the opportunity to learn and grow outside of academia through a remunerated internship of a period of 1 to 3 months.

As with job shadowing, internships are an opportunity to ask questions, learn, envision your skillsets in a new environment, and develop your professional network. To learn more about internships, visit the [CaPS internship webpage](#).