



Shadowing Tips

for Princeton prehealth students

Shadowing provides a glimpse into the day-to-day responsibilities of a health professional. It can help you start to learn about specialties of interest, provide insight into doctor-patient communication, prove to admissions committees that you know what you're getting yourself into, and keep you motivated toward your profession.

Identify potential professionals to shadow

- Your own and family members' physicians are a great place to start, since they know you.
- Family and friend connections (congregation members, coaches, high school teachers, parents of kids you babysat, anyone who has seen you in a professional role who could confidently refer you to health professionals they know).
- Peers who have had positive shadowing experiences—reach out to individuals they shadowed.
- HPA's Shadowing List for local doctors and dentists ([email us to request a copy](#))
- HPA "Doctor is In" guests and other Princeton alums
- [Center for Career Development's Princeternships](#)
- Summer opportunities often include shadowing. When negotiating internship or research opportunities, inquire about the possibility of shadowing.

Reach out early

It can take time to find someone who agrees to be shadowed and can fit you into their schedule. Start reaching out at least a month in advance.

Introduce yourself professionally

- To establish the first connection, call the office or send an email ([see sample below](#)).
- Start with a brief introduction, then describe how you found them and let them know what you hope to learn from them. Be specific about why their work interests you.
- Attach a resume if you've connected by email. If you call, have your calendar ready in case they can schedule you immediately.

Having trouble finding people?

- If someone cannot accommodate you for shadowing:
 - See if they are willing to talk with you about their career path—you'll still gain helpful insight. See HPA's [Networking Tips: Informational Interviewing](#) handout for details.
 - Ask if they have colleagues you might contact.
- If someone seems interested but is not available in your desired timeframe, ask when they may have time, make a note of it, and follow up.

Prepare for your experience

- Be sure you know where to go, what to wear, and what other expectations they may have of you.
- Brainstorm [questions you can ask](#).
- Map your route to the site so you can arrive on time.

Maximize your experience

- Research your contact so that you can make your questions more specific/tailored.
- Wear [business casual attire](#) (unless otherwise instructed) and arrive a few minutes early.
- Lead with a handshake, make eye contact, and introduce yourself, stating your name clearly.
- Ask if there is a protocol that you should follow if you'll be observing interactions with patients. Generally, expect to stand quietly and attentively in the background.

- Pay close attention and jot down notes in quiet times if you're allowed to do so.
- Thank them for their time and ask if they're willing to follow up in the future.

Follow up

- Write down what you've learned right after shadowing. Capture reflections when they're fresh in your mind.
- Send a thank you email or card with details about what you gained/learned from the meeting.
- Stay in touch and let them know how their advice helped you (if they're open to staying in touch).

Pay it forward

- Help your peers prepare for similar shadowing opportunities. Be open to networking requests now and as you move forward in your career. Be a mentor and a mentee at every stage of your life.

More resources

- [Princeton Career Development Networking Tips](#)
- [Princeton LinkedIn Community](#)
 - [Career Development LinkedIn Tips](#)
- [Princeton Alumni Directory](#)

Sample outreach email

Dear Dr. X,

I am a premed junior and a Neuroscience major at Princeton University. I received your contact information from Y. I am interested in combining research and practice as a physician and hope to see how others have done the same. I saw on your website that your professional interests in [ABC] align with my experience [add more details]. I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to shadow you for a day or two. I have a lot of flexibility between May 4 and June 1, during Reading Period and finals. I'm happy to send you my availability in the coming weeks if you're available. I have attached my resume so that you can learn more about me. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Chris Tiger '27

Princeton University

Sample questions to ask

- What initially drew you to this profession?
- What is your educational background?
- What is a typical week like for you?
- How did you know this was the right health profession for you compared to others?
- How do you manage your time and stress?
- What do you wish someone had told you before you started health professions school?
- What skills, abilities, and personal attributes are best suited for this career?
- What do you find most rewarding about this profession? What do you find the most challenging?
- How did you choose your specialty? What are some lifestyle considerations for this profession/specialty?
- How do you see jobs like yours changing in the future?
- I'm worried about X—do you think this is realistic? Are there things I should be thinking of in relation to it?
- How did you find mentors in your profession?
- If you could start over, would you still become a _____? Why / why not?
- Is there anyone else you recommend I speak with to learn more?

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