



Shadowing

Experience in an optometric office is essential to decide if optometry is right for you. You cannot commit to a profession to which you have had only minimal exposure and therefore, shadowing experience is a topic fully explored in the interview phase of the admission process.

A goal would be to shadow at least five optometrists. There is no one typical optometric practice and there are different subspecialties within optometric practice: vision therapy, low vision, pediatric vision, ocular disease and cornea/contact lens.

Don't limit your shadowing experience to only optometry. It's helpful to shadow other healthcare providers. You can get valuable shadowing experience from an ophthalmologist, a physician whose specialization is the eye. All shadowing experience in healthcare environments is educational.

The best way to approach an optometrist about shadowing is to make a request in writing. Hand-address the envelope and write "personal" on the outside of it because front office staff often perform the task of opening the doctor's mail. If they see your request for shadowing and, there's no polite way to say this, don't want to be bothered, you'll run the risk of having your request end up in the waste basket.

In your request letter, explain what you hope to gain from a shadowing experience specific to that doctor. Include brief personal information; explain how you became interested in optometry. Include a photo of yourself. Explain to the doctor that you'll be calling within the next week to discuss your request in more detail and schedule an appointment for a shadowing experience.

Show respect for the doctor's time by asking to shadow for a limited 1-2 day period. A request for a shadowing opportunity will be better received if the term of the commitment is defined and brief. Make sure the doctor has your handwritten request for at least a week before you follow-up with a phone call.

Follow-up with a thank-you note either after your request is granted or after you've completed the shadowing experience.

Use the Phrase, "Tell Me....."

A great phrase to use when seeking information is: "Tell me about...." You can talk to anyone about almost any subject by using this phrase.

The "Tell Me" phrase gives permission to the person being asked the question to answer it any way they wish. There is no right or wrong answer to the "Tell Me" request. The person answering feels relaxed and willing to share their perspective without threat of judgment.

Here's an example: let's say you're relaxing and enjoying a cup of coffee, wearing a raggedy old red sweatshirt. You love this sweatshirt because it is the one your mom gave you when she sent you off to college. It is your lucky red sweatshirt, so cozy and comfortable. You love to wear it. Let's say a stranger walks up to you and asks, "Hey, what's up with that red sweatshirt?" This is not necessarily an

offensive question; however, this is a stranger and you don't know where he or she is coming from. You're fully aware that your beloved sweatshirt is showing some wear. Can't you just imagine how defensive you would feel if a stranger came up and asked that question? Even though it is harmless, it may have an offensive tone. The result could be that you'd shut down.

Given this stranger has a sincere desire to know more about your sweatshirt, what if he or she had rather said, "Hey, tell me about the red sweatshirt you are wearing." Can't you just feel how much more responsive you would be to that request? You would probably say something like, "This is my favorite sweatshirt. I wear it every Saturday morning when I have coffee. My mom gave it to me and it reminds me of a special day!"

Use the "Tell Me" phrase with the optometrists you plan to shadow:

- "Tell me about optometry past, present and future."
- "Tell me about *your* experience with optometry, past, present and future."
- "Tell me if optometry is fulfilling your career goals."
- "Tell me, would you be an optometrist if you had it to do all over again?"
- "Tell me about where you went to optometry school."
- "Tell me about the optometric program at the optometry school you attended."

When you shadow, your goal is not to learn about patient care and procedures. You are there to converse with the optometrist and learn about the profession.

Perspectives to Explore While Shadowing:

Experience optometric subspecialties practiced: ocular disease, contact lens, pediatrics, low vision and vision therapy.

You will have done enough shadowing when you can speculate about how you see yourself in optometry's future. In the interview, when asked about your shadowing experience, don't recite a "laundry list" of your shadowing experience but rather, be able to describe each experience and how your opinion of optometry was changed by it. Articulate thoughts about how you see yourself one day fitting into the profession. Explain how optometry is a good fit for your temperament and personality.

Phone-interviewing an optometrist is another way to expand your exposure to the profession. This is known in the professional world as an Informational Interview. Given the current responsibility a doctor has to protect a patient's privacy, it may be difficult to find a doctor willing to allow you to witness a patient encounter. In that case, augment your shadowing experience by doing an interview in addition to actual shadowing.

For a blog article about the technique known as an Informational Interview, go to:

<https://optometryadmissions.com/2013/10/16/shadowing-try-the-informational-interview/>

For more blog articles about shadowing objectives, go to:

<http://optometryadmissions.com/category/admissions/shadowing/>

Shadowing helps to develop your own story in optometry. When it comes time to interview, you'll be glad you spent the time in this all-important activity. There is no substitute for the experience and the enthusiasm you will have as a result of shadowing.

Unable to Find a Shadowing Doctor?

If you are unable to find an optometrist to comply with your request for shadowing, email ODadmissions@ketchum.edu with "Alumni Shadowing Program" in the subject line and we will be happy to provide you with more information.

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