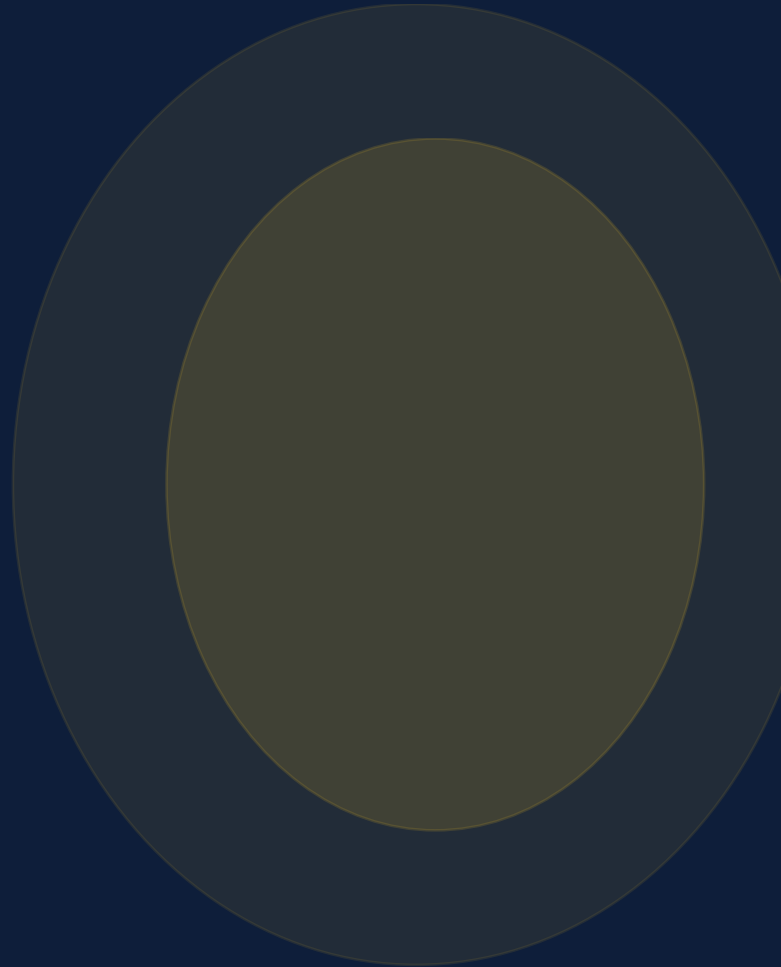


YOUR GUIDE TO

Dental Office Shadowing

Everything you need to know before your first day.

Pre-Dental Institute of Chicago · predentalinstituteofchicago.com



What We'll Cover

01 What Is Dental Shadowing?

02 What a Dental Office Looks Like

03 How a Typical Day Runs

04 Procedures You'll Likely See

05 Key Terminology

06 The Dos and Don'ts

07 Dress Code & Presentation

08 How to Make the Most of It

01 What Is Dental Shadowing?



Shadowing is the experience of observing a licensed dentist at work in a real clinical setting — without participating in patient care. You watch, listen, and learn.

Why It Matters for Dental School

- Dental schools require 100+ shadowing hours before applying
- Shows admissions committees you understand what dentistry actually involves
- Helps you confirm dentistry is the right career path for you
- Gives you real stories and experiences to draw from in interviews and essays

02 What a Dental Office Looks Like

Reception & Waiting Room

The front desk where patients check in. Staff schedules appointments, handles insurance, and greets patients.

Operator (Treatment Room)

Where all clinical work happens. Each operator has a dental chair, overhead light, instrument tray, suction, and X-ray equipment.

Sterilization Area

Where instruments are cleaned, packaged, and autoclaved between patients. A critical infection control zone.

Consultation Room

Where treatment plans are presented and financial discussions happen. Usually quieter and more private.

Lab Area

For some offices, an in-house lab for fabricating temporary crowns, models, or digital restorations.

X-Ray / Imaging

May be a dedicated room with a panoramic X-ray machine (CBCT) or digital sensors in each operator.

03 How a Typical Day Runs

1

Morning Huddle

The team meets briefly before the first patient to review the day's schedule, flag any complex cases, and coordinate roles.

2

Patient Appointments

Typically 45-minute to 1-hour blocks. Each patient goes through check-in, seating, procedure, and check-out.

3

Between Patients

Instruments are cleared, the room is disinfected, and the next patient's chart is reviewed.

4

Lunch Break

Offices often use this time for team meetings, supply orders, or lab work review.

5

Afternoon Block

Same rhythm as the morning. More complex procedures (like extractions) are often scheduled here.

6

End of Day

Sterilization runs, notes are finalized, next day's schedule is reviewed, and the office is cleaned and reset.

04 Procedures You'll Likely See

Prophylaxis (Cleaning)

Routine cleaning performed by a dental hygienist. Includes scaling, polishing, and fluoride.

Dental Exam & X-Rays

The dentist examines teeth and reviews X-rays for decay, bone loss, and other concerns.

Composite Filling

Tooth-colored resin used to restore a cavity. You'll see isolation, etching, bonding, and curing.

Crown Prep & Delivery

The tooth is reduced, an impression taken, a temporary placed, and later a permanent crown cemented.

Extraction

Removal of a tooth. May be simple (forceps) or surgical (sectioning). Local anesthetic always used.

Root Canal (RCT)

The pulp is removed, canals cleaned and shaped, then filled with gutta-percha. Often multi-visit.

Implant Surgery

A titanium post is placed in the jaw. Requires sterile surgical protocol and local anesthetic.

Teeth Whitening

In-office bleaching using high-concentration peroxide activated by light or heat.

05 Key Terminology

Occlusion:

How the upper and lower teeth come together when biting.

Caries:

The clinical word for tooth decay (cavities).

Periodontal:

Relating to the gums and bone supporting the teeth.

Prophylaxis:

Professional teeth cleaning.

Radiograph:

X-ray image of the teeth and jaw.

Suction / HVE:

High-volume evacuator — the tube that removes water and debris.

Retraction:

Using an instrument to move soft tissue (cheek, tongue) out of the way.

Amalgam vs. Composite:

Two types of filling material. Amalgam is silver-colored; composite is tooth-colored.

Anesthetic:

The numbing agent injected before procedures. Usually lidocaine.

CBCT:

Cone Beam CT — a 3D X-ray machine used for implants, surgery, and orthodontics.

Perio Chart:

A record of gum pocket depths measured in millimeters around each tooth.

Crown / Bridge:

Crown covers one tooth; a bridge spans a gap using adjacent teeth as anchors.

06 The Dos and Don'ts

✓ DOs

- Arrive 10–15 minutes early
- Introduce yourself to front desk staff
- Stay quiet and out of the way during procedures
- Ask questions between patients, not during
- Bring a small notebook to jot observations
- Follow every infection control instruction you're given
- Thank the team at the end of the day
- Send a thank-you email within 24 hours

✗ DON'Ts

- Touch any instruments, equipment, or supplies
- Touch or interact with patients without permission
- Use your phone during patient care
- Discuss what you saw with anyone outside the office (HIPAA)
- Offer opinions or suggestions on treatment
- Crowd the dentist's working space
- Eat or drink in clinical areas
- Show up unannounced or without confirmation

07 Dress Code & Presentation

First impressions matter. You represent yourself and every future pre-dental student who might shadow at this practice.

✓ Business casual attire — slacks, a collared shirt or blouse

✓ Closed-toe shoes (required in clinical areas)

✓ Minimal, subtle jewelry

✓ Clean, pressed clothing — wrinkles send the wrong message

✗ Open-toed shoes or sandals

✗ Strong perfume or cologne — many patients have sensitivities

✗ Excessive jewelry or dangling accessories

✗ Casual clothing: jeans, t-shirts, athletic wear, hoodies

08 How to Make the Most of It

Before You Go

- Confirm the date, time, and location the day before
- Review basic dental terminology (you just did — great start)
- Prepare 3–5 thoughtful questions to ask between patients

During Shadowing

- Observe everything — how the team communicates, how patients are treated, how stress is handled
- Notice what the dentist does between the clinical work and the people skills
- Write brief notes after each patient if possible

After You Leave

- Write up your observations while they're fresh — these become your application essays
- Send a thank-you email to the dentist and their front desk coordinator
- Reflect: did this experience confirm dentistry is your path?

You're Ready.

Shadowing is the first real step toward a career in dentistry.

Show up prepared, stay curious, and make a strong impression.

Questions about your dental school journey?

predentalinstituteofchicago.com

Pre-Dental Institute of Chicago