

SALARY NEGOTIATIONS

College seniors and recent college graduates often wonder if they should negotiate their starting salary or accept the first salary and benefits package offered. Before you do anything, make sure you find out if the salary offered is competitive. If not, consider negotiating. The Office of Career Services conducted an informal survey among several companies who recruit on campus and asked each of them their opinion on salary negotiations. Here are the results:

- As long as nothing is stated up front that discourages salary negotiations, most employers in the survey do not mind when a candidate tries to negotiate his/her salary, as long as they are polite and do not issue an ultimatum. One employer suggests the candidate first ask if there is room for negotiations. If the employer says “No,” then it is unwise to continue the discussion. If, however, the answer is “yes,” then it is worth a try;
- If an employer states in the beginning of the interview process that salary is not negotiable, then it is unwise to try to negotiate;
- Employers generally have a set, non-negotiable salary level for entry-level positions based on careful research and the cost of living found in particular cities;
- In many instances, entry-level salaries are not a good indicator of your salary range 3-5 years after hire.

Below are additional suggestions that will help you to decide whether or not to negotiate your salary.

Salary Research

“Every job seeker can negotiate, but not every job seeker should negotiate. When deciding what is right for you, it is important to first have a clear understanding of your market value” (Anderson and Bennett, “The Art of Negotiation,” *Choices and Challenges: Job Search Strategies for Liberal Arts Students*, Indiana University, 1998, p. 157). What kinds of skills, education, and experience do you have, and what is the employer looking for? Preparing an answer to these questions helps you when the subject of salary is raised by a potential employer. You do not want to discuss salary without a clear understanding of the salary range and benefit package for this industry, job, and geographic region.

The following resources are useful when researching salary:

1. **Job Choices**—published yearly by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE). It provides job-search information, including average starting salaries by major. NACE also publishes a more detailed salary survey in the spring of each academic year. The Office of Career Services has a copy of both *Job Choices* and the salary survey in our Career Resource Center.
2. **Dynamite Salary Negotiations**—this book by Ron and Caryl Krannich is available in our Career Resource Center. It goes into great detail about the salary negotiation process.
3. **Salary.com**—provides advice, articles on salary, and a salary wizard. In addition, you can search for salary ranges of positions in specific geographic locations.
4. **Vault.com**—Salary surveys for specific jobs, locations, and companies. *Career Services is a subscriber to Vault, and Vault’s site can be accessed through Career Services’ Web site (www.muohio.edu/careers/).*
5. **CareerBuilder.com**—click on “Advice & Resources” to access salary information and their salary calculator.
6. Talk with people who have a job similar to the one for which you are applying, and ask them the salary range for someone with your experience.

It is important to understand that certain jobs in state and federal government, nonprofit organizations, and public education have salary ranges that tend to be non-negotiable, but you may still be able to negotiate within the accepted range. During a weak economy, when there are more job seekers than jobs, it is more difficult to negotiate salary and benefits with an employer. Be aware of job market conditions as you contemplate your negotiation strategy.

Salary Discussions

Keep the following tips in mind when discussing salary:

- It is best not to talk about salary prior to an actual offer of employment. An employer, however, may raise the issue early on in the process, or as a part of the employment offer. If the employer insists on knowing your salary requirements, give a salary range based on careful study of the typical pay ranges for this job, in this particular geographic region.
- Make sure you understand the overall benefit package (e.g., health insurance, vacation, 401(k)/403(b), pension plan, tuition reimbursement, domestic partner benefits, etc.) and factor this into the total compensation package. A larger salary with no health benefits may end up costing you more than a lower salary with health benefits.
- Know how much you need to make in order to pay your bills (e.g., rent, mortgage, car payment, insurance, student loans, etc.) relative to the location where you will live. If the job does not pay you enough to live on, and you have no supplemental income, you should think long and hard about accepting the job. Do not volunteer this information to the employer. You do not want them to use the figure as a starting point for your salary discussions, especially if the amount is lower than they are prepared to pay.
- Be positive and flexible during salary negotiations. Discuss what you can do for the employer (i.e., your skills and experience), not how much money you need to live on.
- Request that the employer put everything in writing: job offer, starting date, salary, benefits, job title, and all other pertinent details. They may be reluctant to honor your request, but it is worth asking. If the employer demurs, send a letter confirming the details of the offer and request any clarification that may be necessary.

How to Answer Specific Salary Questions

The following* are typical questions you may encounter during an interview, but they are certainly not exhaustive:

Employer Question or Comment	Suggested Reply:
<p><i>“What salary are you looking for?” or “What are your salary requirements?”</i></p>	<p><i>“What is the salary range for this position?” or “How much is budgeted?” or “How much would someone with my qualifications and experience normally receive in this position in your organization?”</i></p>
<p><i>“We are prepared to offer you a salary of \$_____ a year. Would that be satisfactory?”</i></p>	<p>(a) You can accept the offer; (b) you can negotiate for more money; (c) you can delay your answer and ask for additional time to think it over. A possible response for (b) is, <i>“Yes that does come near what I was expecting. My research suggests a range of \$_____ to \$_____. Is this possible?”</i> Consider pausing for a few moments to think about any offers before responding. Silence is an effective negotiating tool.</p>

* adapted from *Dynamite Salary Negotiations* by Ron and Caryl Krannich, Impact Publications, 2001, pp. 122 & 147.

Salary negotiations are never easy, but it is worth spending time researching and thinking about your salary expectations and related compensation issues before you are faced with a job offer. You are encouraged to conduct additional research for a more in-depth understanding of the nuances of salary negotiations. The Career Services staff is available to discuss your concerns or help you plan your strategy.