

# Salary questions and negotiating



## Responding to questions about your salary expectations

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Don't be taken by surprise!

It is possible that a prospective employer may ask you to give a salary requirement or preference. This question is appropriate for experienced people with a salary history. For a student being hired directly out of college or a graduate program, the question can be awkward. But don't be unprepared. There are several ways you can respond:

- It is perfectly acceptable to say "negotiable."
- You could suggest a range to the employer. Do your salary research first using

- If you state a salary request, tell the employer the sources of information you used (i.e., the Virginia Tech Post-Graduation Report, National Association of Colleges and Employers Salary Survey, Salary.com, etc.). This backs up your request with hard data – not just your gut instinct or rumors.
- If you ask for a salary well above average, justify your request. State what in your background and experience qualifies you. Can you be just as productive as other employees earning that salary?
- You can also ask the employer questions that might advance the goal of having a cordial and professional conversation on this topic, such as, "how do you determine salary offers for your new hires?"

- Be aware that salary is not the only part of compensation. You could indicate to an employer that you would consider the benefit package along with the salary if you were to have options to consider. This might prompt the employer to share information on benefits. Some employers might offer signing bonuses or provide other funds that would help you with initial costs of moving and obtaining housing. Of course those amounts would not be part of your base salary on which increases would be based. You might ask the employer how often and on what criteria employees are evaluated and given salary increases.
- Keep these other forms of compensation in mind if you are in a position to compare two salary offers; look at the total package and the potential for earnings over time.

- Most students who seek advice on comparing two salary offers are doing so because the position with the lower salary is the one the student really desires, and they want to be sure they are making the best decision. Consider the value and importance of your happiness in the job and fit with the organizational culture, and weigh that in your decision-making.

## **Negotiating salary**

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Some employers do not negotiate salary with graduating students. Some do. If an employer makes you a salary offer, and you are interested in the position, but believe you may have a reason to request a higher salary, do the following:

First, prepare a case based on facts. Facts could include:

- Another higher salary offer you've received. Be prepared to show evidence of that salary, such as a copy of an offer letter. The employer with whom you're negotiating may want proof.
- Comparison of the salaries relative to cost of living.  
Research using

Don't overlook other forms of compensation and benefits in making your comparisons between offers. Consider vacation and sick leave, retirement plans (starting to invest when you are young has huge payoffs later), signing bonus, moving allowance, frequency and basis of salary increases over time, etc.

- Your own background and qualifications. If you are asking for an above-average salary, are you above average in your credentials?

Next, if you have a strong case to ask for a higher salary than was offered, present your case:

- Ask the employer, in a tactful and diplomatic way, if the salary offer is open to negotiation. Convey to the employer that you are truly interested in the job. Don't sound as though you are just shopping for the best salary.
- If the employer says no, accept the answer gracefully. You can weigh the options you have.
- Be prepared for the possibility that the employer still may not change the salary offer.
- Present your case tactfully, so if the employer doesn't change the salary offer, you can still accept the original salary offer if you choose.

## More information

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- [Salary Negotiation Tips for Recent College Graduates](#)  
[RobertHalf.com]
- [Salary Negotiation Tips for Recent College Graduates](#)  
[Monster.com]
- [Salary Negotiation Tips for Recent College Graduates](#)  
[SalaryNegotiators.com]