

## Evaluating a Job Offer

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Think back to the last time that you made a big decision or purchased anything of value that may have had a long-term effect on your life—like deciding which university to attend or buying a car. You probably wanted to make certain that you didn't get so excited that you rushed into something without doing your research.

Job seekers need to do the same things when they are evaluating a new job. Do you realize that individuals spend more than 60% (often 70-80%) of their waking hours at work? Just imagine not enjoying that job—that's a lot of time spent being very unhappy. Job seekers need to evaluate the job offer from every possible angle.

### Factors to Consider

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Evaluating a job offer involves careful consideration of many important factors, including (but not limited to):

Benefit Packages	Promotion Potential	Work Load	Work Values
Family Considerations	Work-related Responsibilities	Relocation	Professional Development
Managerial/Collegial Support	Organizational Fiscal Stability	Salary	Commute to Work
Evaluation Criteria	Minimum Standard for Job Performance	Team Work	

A job seeker should ask the questions, “Is accepting this new position with this organization worth the investment of my time, money and energy?” and “Will it be a fulfilling next step for me?”

### Questions to Ask to Help Evaluate Job Descriptions

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You should begin evaluating organizations and positions *before* you get an offer. The following questions may assist you throughout the entire application process (deciding to apply, preparing a resume and cover letter, preparing for an interview, etc.):

- Why is the position open?
- How long has the position been posted?
- Do the daily work activities appeal to you?
- What might you expect to be doing over the next three to five years?
- How do promotional opportunities become available?
- How are employees encouraged to continue their professional development over the long term?
- What kind of training is provided for prospective supervisors or managers?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the company's management?
- Is the company growing or downsizing?
- What are the employer's values?
- What kinds of people are most successful or satisfied at the company?
- How are changes to the benefits package made to keep it up to date with employee needs?

### Evaluate Every Position

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It is important to evaluate every job offer very carefully with organizations that hold your interest. Each offer is a negotiation tool you can use to enrich the conditions of the position you seek and can also act as leverage for other job offers.

Remember it is important to accept the kind of position that will fulfill your career goals. If an offer doesn't quite fit you, then you have the right to negotiate the conditions of the job description and responsibilities before you accept the position.

Use any information you can find about the organization to uncover details and descriptions of the employer. Read newsletters, brochures, organizational charts, mission statements, employee handbooks, and/or corporate and annual reports to assist you in your research.

Also, you might want to consider looking at the hiring process and the way you were offered the position. For example, was it open and honest or were there long, unexplained delays, promises, or unanswered questions that confused you?

After evaluating all aspects of the industry and position to determine your "fit" with the job, your next step is to evaluate your entire job offer to determine if you need or want to negotiate. Usually negotiations are done with the Human Resources representative you have been working with, but occasionally they are done directly with the hiring manager. If you are unsure, you can ask. State that you have some questions or concerns about the offer and would like to know with whom it would be appropriate to discuss them.

### Salary

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Salary negotiation is the process of reaching an agreement about what an organization will pay for your skills, knowledge and experience. Contrary to popular belief, this is not an adversarial process. It is in both the organizations' and your best interest to come to a mutually beneficial agreement.

#### Prior to going into an interview:

- Know what you are worth and what the market will bear.
- Do your research on typical compensation packages.

Remember to consider your level of experience when setting your expectations. You should also take into account the size and budget of the organization making the offer. Know what the market will bear. If possible, find out what the salary range is for the specific job you're interviewing for. Information on salaries can be found in:

- Job descriptions
- Web Sites: a list of great resources have been compiled at <http://www.careers.ls.wisc.edu/job-offers-and-negotiation--students.htm>

The only reason to negotiate salary is to get fair market value for your skills, experience, and knowledge. Two things need to happen before salary negotiations take place:

1. You have received a formal offer, preferably in writing
2. You have evaluated the entire job offer package and researched what the market will pay for your services in this field. This research will provide you with the evidence you need to determine if the salary offered is reasonable or whether you should make a case for a higher salary

Your success in negotiating a higher salary is contingent on data you have which suggests your market value is higher than reflected in the offer. New college grads don't always have the experience or expertise to warrant a higher salary. However, there are exceptions. Below are some "positions of strength" for new grads:

- You have gained relevant work experience through internships or summer jobs which positively impacts your ability to do the job
- You have a particular technical expertise which is in high demand
- You have a degree in a specific and sought-after area of expertise
- You have a written offer from another company that states a higher salary

In addition to knowing your market value, you also need to know what you want and where you are willing to compromise. Salary is only one part of a total compensation package.

### Benefits

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Compensation isn't just about the cash, it's also the benefits. Benefits may be worth at least one third of your compensation. As early as possible in the interviewing process, get copies of the prospective employers' benefits booklets, employee handbooks, and summary-plan descriptions. Most entry level employees can expect a basic benefit package consisting of:

- Health, dental, disability, and life insurance
- Paid vacation, sick leave, and holidays

More comprehensive benefits packages may include:

- Cell phone
- Child and daycare services
- Company car or transit pass
- Computer equipment
- Cost of living adjustments
- Desirable office and furnishings
- Education and training programs
- Expense accounts
- Flexible work schedule
- Maternity or paternity leave
- Preferred parking
- Professional membership dues
- Profit sharing and savings plans
- Relocation expenses
- Retirement and 401K plans
- Stock and equity options
- Supplementary pay plans
- Telecommuting
- Termination agreement (severance pay)
- Unpaid leave time

**What are your deal-breakers?** Before you begin discussions, be clear about areas where you won't budge and recognize areas you could possibly make trade-offs to increase the total value of your compensation package. It is also important to stay cool, calm, and collected. When the discussion isn't going your way, don't become angry or lose control. If you push too hard, you risk losing the deal altogether.

It would be nice if everything you verbally discussed would occur, but unfortunately it doesn't always happen that way. To avoid any problems, ask for a letter of employment which states all the employment conditions agreed upon. This way you will have an official document to reference.

## Negotiating the Offer

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Congratulations. Your hard work has paid off! However, you're not done yet. Never accept a job offer right on the spot. Take time to consider the details carefully and to make sure there are no unanswered questions. Get information on the complete package. Be gracious and appreciative.

- Express appreciation in receiving the offer
- Get as many details on the entire package as possible (salary, days off, benefits, start date, title, etc.)
- Ask for time to consider the offer (between a few days and one week are fairly acceptable standards)
- Ask if you can continue to call them before then if you have any questions
- Thank them again for the offer

*"I'm delighted that you want to hire me, and I appreciate receiving your offer. Can you tell me about (benefits, days off, the review process, etc.)? I need to think about it in relation to other possibilities. Can I get back to you (by Monday, within the week, in one week, e.g.)? Is it okay if I call you before then if I have any questions? Thank you again!"*

Now, consider if the position is right for you in a variety of aspects. Some guiding questions can help you make a thoughtful decision:

- Is your interest in the organization still strong?
- Will you gain new skills at this job or bolster old ones?
- Is the position consistent with your long-term goals?
- How will this position affect your personal relationships?
- Is the salary acceptable?
- How are other elements of the package? (days off, benefits, retirement, title, etc.)
- How does this job compare with your ideal job?

If you are satisfied with the package as offered, and you want to accept the position, you do not have to negotiate. You should know, however, that the first offer is not always the best possible offer. Also, most employers expect you to negotiate.

**You should negotiate in good faith only.** If you are considering other organizations, contact those employers, inform them of your offer, and inquire about the status of your application. If they are interested in you and have flexibility, they may speed up their decision-making process. Be aware, however, that you may have to make a decision before you have complete information on all possible offers. And, you should only accept an offer if you intend to stick with it.

## Negotiation: Stage 1

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If you want to negotiate the offer, you must be clear what it is that you want improved. Negotiate from the standpoint of what you bring to the agency. Continue to express enthusiasm.

Before the date you must get back to them, call the employer and say:

*"I'm still very interested in the position, and I believe I can bring \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_ to the organization. I'm wondering, is it possible to enhance the offer in terms of salary (vacation, benefits, opportunities for review, etc.)?"*

• Don't say anything else! Do not fill in the silence! Let them speak first. See what they have to say. (Utilizing this "silence" strategy, oftentimes employers will fill in the silence with a number).

If the employer says "Yes":

- If they give you what you want, thank them and tell them you'll get back to them by the deadline.

If the employer says "Maybe":

- If they say they'll have to get back to you, ask when you should be hearing from them or when you should call them back.
- If they ask "what did you have in mind?:"
  - Ask "*what do you think is possible?*"; or
  - Give them a range of what you are looking for

If the employer says "No":

- If they say no, say: "*Okay, thanks, I'll still get back to you by \_\_\_\_.*"

## Negotiation: Stage 2

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Many people choose to continue to negotiate. They have found that coming back to the negotiating table a second time can bring added rewards. After the first try, but before the date you must give your decision, here's what you can do:

- If the package was enhanced, you can say: "*I really appreciate that! It is certainly helpful. Would you also be willing to consider \_\_\_\_\_?*" or "*Is this the very best that you can offer regarding \_\_\_\_\_?*"
- If the initial response was "maybe": "*Have you given any thought to whether the offer can be enhanced in any way?*"
- If the initial response was "no": "*What if instead of \_\_\_\_\_, would you consider \_\_\_\_\_?*"
- If nothing more is offered: "*Hmmmm. Well, I'll call you as promised by \_\_\_\_\_.*"

## Negotiation: Stage 3

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Some people have successfully negotiated by going through this process three times but it's generally not advisable. However, after you have begun negotiating, recognize when an employer has gone through considerable efforts to accommodate you. Remember that some employers may be limited as to how much they are able to make their offer flexible.

Once the negotiations are finished, it is appropriate for you to ask the employer to put the offer in writing.

## Accepting and Rejecting an Offer

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### How to Formally Accept

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You should not have to accept a job offer on the spot. Remove yourself from the situation in order to have a clear head and evaluate every aspect of the work setting and offer.

As the job seeker, you should ask for a couple of days to evaluate the offer and discuss it with family members and significant others. If you are waiting for another offer to come through, ask the employer when they need to know your answer and ask for an extension if you need one. Employers know you are interviewing with other organizations and will appreciate you being honest and careful about your decision.

### Guidelines for Accepting an Offer

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Accepting the job offer in a professional manner requires certain strategies and common sense behaviors. The following are some guidelines we recommend:

- Follow up the offer with an acceptance letter to the employer that expresses your appreciation for the offer, and spells out any specifics that were discussed (in the event that a contract is not provided). The specifics *could* include: an agreed upon start date, flexible schedule of hours, starting salary, evaluation at six months instead of twelve months, sign-on bonus, relocation expenses, etc.

- Follow up via the phone in a few days with the employer to ensure that the acceptance letter was received and the specifics are agreeable to all parties
- Establish a start time with your supervisor and expectations during the first week. Try to gain as much information as possible about what will be expected during the first days on the job

## Turning Down Other Job Offers

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Once you have accepted an offer, it is appropriate, professional and ethical to inform all other employers (to which you have applied) of your decision and to withdraw your application from consideration. Your withdrawal letter should express appreciation for the employer's consideration and courtesy. It may be appropriate to state that your decision to go with another offer was based upon having a better fit with your professional goals at this stage in your career. DO NOT say that you obtained a better job. DO NOT continue to interview after you have formally accepted an offer. People talk and you don't want to burn any bridges or waste anyone's time.

When you want to officially turn down an offer, it is recommended that you put it in writing. Rejecting an employment offer should be done thoughtfully and carefully. This could be a future employer one day. Indicate in the letter that you have carefully considered the offer and have decided not to accept it. Also, be sure to thank the employer for the offer and for consideration of you as a candidate.

## Sample Job Offer Rejection Letter

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Dear Mr. Smith,

Thank you for your employment offer to be an Assistant Director with XYZ, Inc. Unfortunately, I am writing to inform you that I am unable to accept the offer. After evaluating all opportunities available to me for the best fit at this point in my career, I have decided to accept another position.

I truly enjoyed meeting and speaking with you and other representatives from XYZ, Inc. and learning firsthand about your experiences. Best wishes for the continued success of XYZ, Inc.

Thank you again for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Chris Badger

## FAQ's

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### **Q: What if they request salary information during the application process?**

**A:** As a general rule, when salary information is requested in the cover letter and/or application your options are to: 1) Ignore the request; 2) Explain you'd be happy to discuss salary once you have a more detailed sense of what the job entails; or 3) Indicate that your salary requirements are negotiable and flexible (but do this only if you are, indeed, flexible). \*\*Be aware that there is another school of thought that says ignoring an explicit request for salary information is risky. However, remember the first 2 principles of salary negotiation:

- 1) Salary is best discussed only when an employer is ready to make you an offer, and
- 2) Salary should be viewed in the context of a host of issues related to employment.

### **Q: What do I say if asked for my salary requirements in the interview (or before the organization makes a formal offer)?**

**A:** The rule of thumb is that you want the company to mention a salary amount first. You want to avoid discussing your specific requirements until a formal offer has been made. If you are asked about salary, reply with, "If it's okay with you, I'd like to set that question aside for now and focus on the content of the work. I'm interested in knowing more about the specific duties and responsibilities of the job." If the hiring manager insists, you might say something like, "I assume a range has been established for this position and wonder what the organization had in mind?" or, share the range you identified through research you have already done! Just make sure it is reasonable and researched. Keep in mind that your tone of voice and body language can make all the difference in the world. You should be affable, non-threatening, and friendly.

**Q: What do I do if all my requests are rejected in the negotiation process?**

**A:** Your decision to accept or reject the offer must then be based on the original offer.

**Q: How committed am I to a job offer I have accepted, if a better offer comes along?**

**A:** First, if you are unsure about accepting a job offer, it is better to negotiate for more time to make your decision than to accept the offer prematurely and later rescind your acceptance. Second, it is important to honor your commitment once you've made it; backing out of the agreement is highly unprofessional and might later reflect negatively on you in your chosen field. Another consideration should be the job offer contract. If you were given a signing bonus, examine the contract for clauses that state you must pay back the full signing bonus if you leave the organization before the stated duration. The signing bonus amount that you receive will be the total amount, minus taxes, but the amount you must repay will be the full amount of the bonus.

**Q: How do I request an offer in writing?**

**A:** If a verbal offer is made, a response could be, "I'm very excited about the opportunity to work for you and this organization. Since this is such a significant decision for both of us, I'd be more comfortable if the offer was formalized in writing and I could look it over."

**Q: What if I don't understand something on the employment offer letter?**

**A:** Companies are usually happy to clarify or answer any questions about the job offer. Students may also seek legal advice regarding binding job offers or other professional commitments. Career counselors in our office may also be able to help (though they are not legal experts!).

**Q: How do I go about delaying response on a job offer?**

**A:** Make sure you have a concrete reason for asking for an extension. Are you waiting to hear from another employer about an offer, or are you just hoping to get more interviews? Don't wait until the last minute to ask for an extension; this looks like you don't think ahead and may indicate that you might behave the same way on the job. Be tactful and diplomatic in your wording. You may need to explain your reasons to the employer. For example, if you have an upcoming, previously scheduled interview with another employer, you may explain that it is important to you to keep your commitment to the other employer, and that in order to make the best decision; you need to attend the other interview. For the sake of speed, call the employer to discuss the situation. For the record, you should follow up with an e-mail to confirm your request.

**Q: After accepting a job offer, are there any other ethical obligations?**

**A:** Accepting a job offer ethically obligates you to cease job search efforts and to notify other prospective employers as soon as possible that you must withdraw your name from their consideration. As soon as your decision is made, promptly notify employers with a courteous phone call. Make every effort to speak to your contact in person rather than leaving a voice mail message for this purpose. Failing to notify employers that you are withdrawing from the job search is discourteous, and potentially dishonest. It essentially leaves the employer believing that you are still interested in the job. After you have spoken, follow up with a written confirmation (by e-mail is typically fine unless otherwise directed).

**One last thing...**

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If a position is acceptable to you as it is offered, don't feel like you must negotiate! In the final analysis, a job seeker's "gut feeling" will often be the deciding factor in determining the acceptance of a valid job offer!