

Job Offers and Negotiating Your Salary

Once you receive an offer, you must decide if this is the right position for you. If so, you must fully understand the terms of the job offer and determine if you must negotiate.

Evaluating a Job Offer

You may be tempted to accept the first job offered, but it is important not to make a decision in haste. Give yourself at least a day or two; in some cases, you might need a week or longer. Here are some points to consider:

- Is the position interesting and challenging?
- Do you know specifically what you'll be doing?
- Does the job offer advancement opportunities?
- Has the company experienced recent growth, and does it have future growth potential?
- Is the salary satisfactory?
- Does the organization offer an attractive benefits package?
- Does the company offer training programs or pay for continuing education?
- Will the job allow adequate time for interests?
- Will you be required to travel? How often? Where?
- Will you need to relocate?

Always get an offer in writing.

A formal offer should include salary, job title, start date, eligibility for benefits and a signature from the organization's representative.

What if I like the offer, but I'm still waiting to hear from other employers?

On average, an employer will allow two weeks for you to evaluate and sign an offer. Depending on the job, the company size and the job market, this time frame may be negotiable. You can ask the employer who has given you the offer for an extension to give your response. This is a common practice, and you do not have to go into much detail about why you are asking for an extension; it is enough to say that you need more time to ensure you are making the most informed decision for yourself. Do not make them wait for too long though; they will also need time to offer the position to someone else if you decline.

You can also ask potential employers if they have an idea when you will hear about their decision (to offer you the position or not). You can let them know that you have received another offer and are expected to respond by a certain date. Note: This strategy works best when you are finished or near the end of the interview process with the employer you are waiting to hear back from; this will generally not work if you are early in, or have not yet begun, the interview process with an employer.

Occasionally, an employer will pressure you with a "short fuse" deadline. These are sometimes called "exploding" offers that have a signing bonus contingent upon accepting in 24 to 48 hours. Some employers may extend the time.

The OCS has guidelines for "exploding" offers on the website.

What if I don't like the offer and want to turn it down?

Make sure to show your appreciation and respect for the organization by turning down a job as quickly as you can. Call the employer to verbally decline the offer, or write a brief letter releasing the position (see Letters guide, page 28).

How do I find out what the salary range is?

Do your research. Median salaries offered to previous Mudd graduates are in the Impact Report found on the OCS website. Also use these sites:

- Educate to Career Salary Calculator
- Salary.com
- Glassdoor
- PayScale

Take into account differences in the cost of living, which may be significantly higher in a large, metropolitan area than in a small city. There are many online resources available to find this information.

THE JOB SEARCH

As a new college graduate, should I negotiate my salary?

You are not expected or obligated to negotiate salary. You should not negotiate simply for the sake of it. On occasion, an employer may be willing to come up with more money or additional benefits to accommodate particular skills and abilities. Employers have a range and they rarely exceed it unless you are an exceptional candidate. Be realistic and don't worry about what your friends are making.

How do I handle salary questions?

Outline three value statements about yourself (accomplishments, experiences, skills). It's inevitable that you will be asked about salary during the interview process or on an application. If you were able to defer the topic, you can start negotiations, if any, with a clean slate. However, if you agreed upon a specific salary or a very narrow range, you have very little room for negotiations, unless the final offer came in below that amount. There are other elements to the offer, such as benefits.

Be Objective. Be Strategic. Be Persuasive.

If discussions result in any changes to the offer letter, ask for a new letter or be prepared to meet in person so you and the company representative can manually make the changes and initial them.

For more information and persuasive responses, please visit OCS.

Some Questions You May Be Asked

What are your salary requirements?

An appropriate response might be that you understand the current rate in Los Angeles for this job is \$70,000 to \$72,000. Another approach would be to summarize the requirements of the position as you understand them and then ask the interviewer what the company's normal salary range is for that type of position.

How much did you earn at your last job?

Tell the interviewer that you would prefer to learn more about the current position before you discuss compensation. Explain that you are confident you will be able to reach a mutual agreement if there is a good match between your qualifications and the company's needs.

The salary range for this position is \$60,000 to \$70,000. Is that what you expected?

Tell the interviewer that it does come near your expectations, then offer a range that places the top of their range into the bottom of your range, "I was thinking in terms of \$70,000 to \$80,000." This keeps you within their price range but shows you are interested in somewhat more compensation. It is important that the range you were thinking about is consistent with what you learned about the market rate.

What about benefits?

Your total compensation is more than the money in your paycheck. Some benefits are considered standard. They come with the job and are not subject to negotiation. However, an increasing number of companies offer flexible benefit packages which give employees a variety of choices and perks.

Previous graduates' Top 3 criteria for choosing an organization

1. Intellectually challenging work
2. Work/life balance
3. Colleagues



The Steps of Negotiation

Knowing your monthly budget is essential to preparing your negotiation strategy. You need to know your bottom line for accepting the offer. There are many online tools to help you plan your budget. Don't leave out entertainment expenses and the cost of eating out when you're calculating housing, utilities, food, transportation, health expenses, phone, clothing, credit cards and student loans.

If I decide to negotiate, how do I go about it?

1. Look at the salary range for the job title on a site like Salary.com using the 25th to 75th percentile and identify a target salary. Aim high but be realistic.
2. Calculate the take-home pay from your target salary at Paycheckcity.com. Compare this with your basic budget to identify the minimum acceptable salary.
3. With a salary amount in mind—decide what you want and what you will accept. This means knowing three important figures: your dream salary, your bottom line and your goal.
4. Ask if the organization has any flexibility to increase the offer. Be polite and keep it impersonal.
5. Emphasize your skills and abilities, not your needs—employers do not care if you have loans and need to buy a car. Talk about how you will benefit the company and the contributions you will make.
6. Seek creative alternatives. If the salary is not what you want, perhaps a bonus could be arranged or other perks, such as starting a graduate program or going to a professional conference. Consider flexible hours or telecommuting part of the week.
7. Don't negotiate everything. Decide on one or two things that are the most important to you.
8. Be ready to compromise to reach a solution. After all, this is the beginning of a working relationship.

What if I accept an offer and then decide I'd rather accept a different one?

First, do not accept before you are ready or out of fear that you don't have another option. Do not accept an offer to "hedge your bets" if you are unsure you will receive your preferred offer. If you are being pressured and aren't ready, and the employer is unwilling to extend your offer response deadline, consider turning the offer down. You've successfully made it through an application and interview process to secure an offer and you can do it again.

It is your responsibility to self-reflect and research employers as much as you can to ensure you are making the best informed decisions for yourself. HMC alumni are great resources to ask about their experiences and you may be able to find Mudders that have worked at the employer you received an offer from.

Acceptance of an offer should be made in good faith and with the serious intention to honor the commitment. It would be viewed as unprofessional and unethical should you renege (decline an offer after having previously accepted it). Furthermore, once you accept an offer, you should stop all other interviewing. However, if you find yourself in an ethical dilemma because you now realize the position you accepted wasn't the best decision, please discuss this with an OCS staff member. **Your actions affect future HMC students.**