Evaluating a Job Offer: Salary, Environment, Benefits, etc.

Starting Salary Figures
Most people want some idea of what to expect as a starting salary in their field. A salary for a single job title may vary considerably by program of study and type of employer. The offer may depend upon your prior professional experience, degree level, GPA, leadership activities, and the employer’s internal salary range or schedule. You can research starting salaries using the following resources:

- Salary.com: http://www.salary.com/
- Glassdoor.com: https://www.glassdoor.com/index.htm
- O-Net Online: http://www.onetonline.org/
- National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) Salary Calculator: https://www.jobsearchintelligence.com/salary-calculator-intro-etc

Tactfully Handling an Employer’s Request for a Salary Requirement
Occasionally, an employer may ask you to give a salary range. This question is typically asked of people with professional experience and a salary history. For a student being hired directly out of an undergraduate or graduate program, the question may seem awkward because many new graduates were hourly rather than salaried employees in previous jobs.

There is more than one way to approach outlining your salary requirements:

- It is perfectly acceptable to say “negotiable” on applications or cover letters.
- You may choose to suggest a range to the employer. If you do, make sure to do your research first! Also, tell the employer the sources of information on which you based your request (i.e. US Department of Labor Statistics or cost of living index for the employment location).
- If you ask for a salary well above average, explain your request. Stating why your background and experience qualifies you will show that you have the ability to perform at the same level as others earning that salary.

What’s the Difference Between a Salary Requirement and a Salary History?
A salary requirement is the minimum annual salary or range that you will accept. Unless an employer requests otherwise, it’s a good idea to offer a range versus an exact figure to leave the door open for salary negotiation. You would state it in your cover letter or in a salary requirement letter, depending on the employer’s request.

A salary history is a list of the starting and ending salaries/hourly wages (or ballpark annual ranges) you have earned at each employer you have listed on your resume. You would include it with your cover letter or send it separately, depending on the employer’s request.

In either case, ballpark salary figures will do. In both cases, never volunteer the information unless or until the employer asks. You might strictly limit your negotiation power if your number or range is low. Worse, even if it is only slightly high, you might never receive interview offers in the first place.
Salary Requirement Example

Scott A. Johnson
123 Any Street, Any City, WI 54321 • 715-555-5555 • sjohnson@xyz.com

January 1, 20XX

Mr. John Doe, Manager
ABC Company, Inc.
123 Industrial Park
Any City, WI 54321

Dear Mr. Doe:

In response to your request, my salary requirement is $34,000-39,000/year. After conducting research on Salary.com, this seems to be an appropriate salary range for my level of education, experience, and this position type. The salary range is negotiable especially depending on the benefits ABC Company offers. If you need more information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

[Signature—No signature needed if sent electronically]

Scott A. Johnson

Salary History Example

Scott A. Johnson
123 Any Street, Any City, CA 54321 • 715-555-5555 • sjohnson@xyz.com

DEF Company
678 Any Parkway
Any City, CA 12345
Main Phone 123-555-3000
Title: Customer Service Manager
Starting: $35,000
Ending: $40,300
Plus benefits and semi-annual bonuses

CDE Company
567 Any Drive
Any City, CA 12345
Main Phone 123-555-2000
Title: Customer Service Representative II
Starting: $32,000
Ending: $34,200
Plus benefits and semi-annual bonuses

XYZ Company
123 Any Lane
PO Box 123
Any City, WI 54321
Main Phone 715-555-1000
Title: Customer Service Representative
Starting: $35,000
Current: $39,000
Plus benefits
Factors for Consideration
Before making your final employment decision, consider the following factors.

| **Job Content** | The first test for any offer is the nature of the work. Ask yourself, "Am I proud of the products or services of the employer?" "Is the job interesting to me?" "Does this position fit into my long-range career plans and personal goals?" No matter whether the job is a lateral move or promotion, job content is important. You can explain to your next employer what skills you learned no matter what your job title. |
| **Your Boss** | Don't dismiss this concern. Ask yourself honestly, "Can I work and get along with this person?" Almost as important as the chemistry is how the boss will serve as a mentor. You will want to feel comfortable with their interpersonal and management style. You will want to work for a supervisor who is capable and interested in your growth. |
| **Salary and Benefits** | Is the salary at market level? If you are not increasing your salary against your current or previous jobs, have you at least been offered the going rate? Would taking this position create economic hardship? How are individual increases determined (performance, job level, length of service, etc.)? How are salary reviews and promotions handled? Your salary should be reviewed on a regular basis; many organizations complete a salary review annually. Your potential for salary growth quickly becomes more important than your starting salary. Do not think of salary as the only compensation you will receive. Think of the benefits package also as benefits can account for 30-40% of an offer. Benefits can include vacation, holidays, retirement plans, life and disability insurance, medical insurance, tuition assistance, stock purchase or savings plan, child care, bonuses, relocation expenses, and more! |
| **Your Co-workers** | Will I fit into the company or organizational culture? Sometimes peers can be more difficult to mesh with than a prospective boss. Talk to your potential boss about the office culture before you accept the position. Get a sense of personalities and work styles. |
| **Typical Work Week** | What is a typical work week like? How many hours a week does the position require? Remember your other commitments to family, friends, and outside activities. Ask yourself, "Can I really coach soccer and be a star in the workplace?" Which matters most to you? Are you expected to work overtime? |
| **Location** | Do you like the location or region where you'll be working and living? What is the commute like? Do not underestimate location as a satisfaction issue. Will you be traveling? |
| **Organizational Flexibility** | Is the organization rigid? Does it work strictly by the book? Will the employer be flexible during emergencies? How will this position alter your lifestyle? If it will, can you effectively manage such changes? |
| **The Industry** | How stable is the industry? Is there a history of industry growth? Will there be a continued demand for goods and services produced? Have there been recent layoffs, or has the industry/company experienced significant downsizing? |

Searching for a position is difficult. After spending many hours on a search, making a careful decision regarding a job offer is important. Receiving an offer does not necessarily mean you will accept the position. Most employers will not expect you to make a decision on the spot. You will probably be given up to a week to make a decision. Weighing the advantages and disadvantages of the job will help you make a more informed decision, rather than deciding on impulse.
Responding to a Salary Offer: Is It Negotiable?
If an employer makes you a salary offer, and you are interested in the position but believe you may have a basis to request a higher salary, do the following:

1. Base your argument on facts. Consider:
   - Any higher salary offers you have received.
   - The salary ranges and averages for your field.
   - Your own background and qualifications. If you are asking for an above average salary, are you above average in your credentials?

2. If you have a strong argument to ask for a higher salary than was offered, you may do the following:
   - Start by thanking the employer for the offer.
   - Ask the employer, in a tactful and diplomatic way, if their salary offer is open to negotiation.
   - Make sure you convey to the employer that you are truly interested in the job you have been offered. Do not sound as though you are just shopping for the best salary.
   - If the employer says no, accept the answer gracefully. You can then weigh the option you have.
   - If the employer indicates the salary offer might be open to negotiation or asks why you are asking, you can present your argument.
   - Be prepared for the possibility that the employer still may not change the salary offer.

Be sure to present your argument tactfully; if the employer does not change the salary offer, you can still accept the original salary offer if you so choose.

Never Burn Your Bridges
Keep in mind the importance of diplomacy when rejecting an offer. In today’s fast-paced world, you never know when your path and that employer’s may intersect in the future, and your professionalism while declining the offer is being evaluated. Here is an example for diplomatically declining an offer: “I really appreciate the offer; however, I am declining your offer as I have been offered another position that I feel will better fit my goals at this time. I am very impressed with your company, and I have enjoyed everyone I had the opportunity to meet. Thank you again, and I hope to stay in contact.”

Ethical Dilemma
If you are offered a position that you feel you “should” accept because you fear you will not have other options, think carefully before you accept. Do not accept an offer before you are ready. Acceptance of an employment offer should be made in good faith and with the sincere intention of honoring the commitment.

Once you make a commitment to start a job, it would be viewed as unprofessional and unethical should you revoke on your commitment.

If you have any questions about evaluating job offers, contact UWRF Career Services.