

Responding to questions about salary

Responding to questions about your salary expectations

Don't be taken by surprise

Occasionally, an employer may ask you to give a salary requirement or preference. This question is appropriate for (and more likely to be asked of) 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.

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?

Negotiating salary

Many 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 "case" 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 on 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?

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.
