

How to Negotiate Salary and Evaluate a Job Offer (by [NerdWallet](#))

You have your first job offer out of college — congratulations! Now it's time to negotiate salary. If you think that sounds uncomfortable, think again. To keep you from missing out on a potential base salary bump, we'll walk you through how to evaluate job offers and work out a package that benefits everyone.

About 45% of employers are willing to negotiate on salary, according to a 2013 [survey by CareerBuilder](#). But nearly half of all U.S. workers accept the first salary offer they're given, especially those ages 18 to 34.

Here are some negotiating tips:

Step 1: Research your own worth

From the moment you get your first interview with a company, you need to start researching median salary levels. Search by industry, position, company, employment level and geographic location. A few good resources:

- The Bureau of Labor Statistics' [Occupational Outlook Handbook](#) provides career information, including median pay for hundreds of occupations.
- [The National Association of Colleges and Employers](#)
- Websites including Glassdoor, Indeed, PayScale and Salary.com
- Your college's career services office

What to say: Make sure you have all your background information before you step into the room to make your argument. “You have to be able to support your request,” says Katie Nailler, director of the Career and Professional Development Institute at the City College of New York. “Then you can go to an employer and say, for example, ‘My expectations are \$41,000 because, according to the research I’ve done, that’s the average starting salary for somebody with my experience level in this industry.’ ”

Step 2: Time your salary talk correctly

Wait until you've been handed a job offer to talk about pay. “For a first-time job candidate, they're dying to know what they're going to be paid, and they don't want to waste time going through the interview process without knowing what the pay is,” says Katie Donovan, a consultant and founder of Equal Pay Negotiations LLC, based in Medford, Massachusetts.

Donovan advises job candidates not to question numbers or a benefits package during the interview process. That just creates an opportunity, she says, for the interviewer to say the candidate “is good, but I don't really need them. I can go to the next person.”

What to say: Make the employer “fall in love with you,” and then talk pay. “You’ll never have more power in your relationship with a company,” Donovan says, “than the time in which you’re offered the job until when you’ve accepted it.”

But if you are asked about salary requirements early in the process, refer to your research to show you know the industry. “It’s always advisable to say, ‘My hope would be it would be comparable to market range from X to Y, and I’d be willing to entertain an offer within that range,’ ” suggests Diane Domeyer, executive director of The Creative Group, a creative staffing agency with locations in major markets across the United States and Canada.

Step 3: Take your time and consider everything

Look over your job offer and consider the entire package, including how it will benefit your career.

“An entry-level salary is generally not a good criterion on which to choose a job, because it doesn’t include any indication of the skills you can develop, the experience you can get and the long-term salary,” says Everette Fortner, associate vice president for career and professional development at the University of Virginia.

You should also weigh the base salary against other perks and benefits, which may include a health package, bonuses, transportation reimbursement, a gym membership or extended vacations.

What to say: When you’re handed a job offer, be gracious and upbeat, but don’t answer immediately.

Step 4: Aim for a win-win

Salary negotiation may feel like a game of tug-of-war, but you’re not trying to beat anybody. Experts say you should focus instead on a win-win situation for everyone since you don’t want to start out your first job on the wrong foot.

What to say: Set up a meeting face to face or over the phone rather than by email. You don’t want anything to get lost in translation. Once you present salary and package negotiations to your prospective employer, it’s best to stop talking, experts say.

“Give them a chance to respond. All you’ll do is negotiate against yourself if you try to fill the silence we’re all so uncomfortable with,” says Donovan, of Equal Pay Negotiations. “They’ll give you some information, and you’ll go back and forth. It’s about figuring out if it’s a good offer to accept.”

No matter how the negotiations play out, always remember to say thank you, and have a smile on your face. It’s more important to ensure you start your first job on a positive note.

Anna Helhoski is a staff writer covering personal finance for [NerdWallet](#)

Resources for negotiating salaries and understanding benefits (Compiled by the Bates Center for Purposeful Work)

[Glassdoor.com](#)

Salaries for Any Company

See what employees earn at over 180,000 companies worldwide

Salaries for Any Job

Learn what kind of salary to expect for any job in any location

Benefits and Total Compensation

Get the full compensation picture with tips and bonuses, as well as benefits

[Understanding Your Employee Benefits](#)

Covers healthcare and medical benefits, vacation, retirement plans and other workplace insurance options.

[Salary.com](#)

Salary.com® is a leading provider of on-demand compensation and talent management solutions. Salary.com's highly configurable software applications and proprietary content help executives, line managers and compensation professionals automate, streamline and optimize critical talent management processes including market pricing, compensation planning, performance management, competency management, and succession planning. Built with compensation and competency data at the core, Salary.com solutions provide businesses of all sizes with the most productive and cost-effective way to manage and inspire their most important asset - their people.

[Payscale.com](#)

Research and compare average *salaries*. Free April 2015 *salary* information matched to your exact job profile. Find out what you are worth.

[Jobsearchintelligence.com](#)

The JSI Open Data System is a platform of salary data and the compensable factors of 130 million workers. JSI delivers to you the most comprehensive, reliable and easiest salary data offering on the market today!

[Occupational Outlook Handbook](#)

The Occupational Outlook Handbook (OOH) provides information on what workers do; the work environment; education, training, and other qualifications; pay; the job outlook; similar occupations; and sources of additional information, for 334 occupational profiles covering about 84 percent of the jobs in the economy.