



## Graduate College Career Services Office

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# Nonacademic Job Offers and Negotiation

## Receiving a Job Offer

You may suspect in advance that you will likely be offered the job—perhaps it was intimated during an interview that you were the favored candidate, or you’ve heard from a colleague who was contacted as a reference. Sometimes a position will even be offered during an interview. But most job offers are delivered verbally, through a phone call placed by the chair of the search committee.

When an offer is extended via telephone, it is common for the committee chair to present you with some basic details like title, start date, and salary. Make a few notes and ask questions, but *do not* feel obligated to accept or decline the offer on the spot. Ask to have the offer letter mailed or faxed to you, and take time to carefully consider the offer. Request time to consider the offer: two weeks is typical, many organizations will readily grant you that much time to make a decision.

## When is an Offer an Offer?

Beware that a verbal promise of a job does not constitute a formal job offer. Many candidates have heard promises like “the job is as good as yours,” only to have nothing materialize. Formal job offers are ideally made in writing, defining salary and terms of appointment. When possible, wait until you have the written offer letter in your hands before making any other decisions. A written offer letter should detail the terms of the offer, which usually include job title, salary, starting date, a summary of benefits, and any other pertinent information (travel reimbursement, hiring bonuses). More likely, you will be offered a position by telephone, and you will be given the details of the offer in good faith. Circumstances may lead you to negotiate and accept terms without seeing a written offer. If this is the case, you should still expect or request a written offer letter to retain for your personal files, even if you receive this after you have started your new position.

## What to Do When You Receive a Job Offer

After you receive a job offer, you will want to ask yourself several questions and weigh numerous pros and cons before accepting or declining.

## Questions You Should Ask:

### *Is the salary and benefits package fair?*

- Because of a varying cost of living across the country, you should make an effort to determine what is an appropriate entry-level salary in your field, not only on a national scale, but also on a regional scale. The career services office serving your discipline may provide salary data for recent graduates. Often, professional

membership and licensing companies also maintain salary data based on surveys of their membership. Numerous online sources provide salary statistics, searchable by job title and geographic region. For example: [www.bls.gov/oco](http://www.bls.gov/oco), <http://jobstar.org>, [www.salary.com](http://www.salary.com). State salaries are public record; nonprofit companies may also have salary information published. Talking with peers in your discipline may also help.

- [Cost of living expenses](#) are also very important to consider, since these greatly impact the value of the salary you are being offered. See [www.homefair.com/homefair/calc/salcalc.html](http://www.homefair.com/homefair/calc/salcalc.html) for estimates.
- Ask a few questions about the health care package being offered, such as: Do employees pay part of the insurance premium? When does health care take effect? Does the plan cover your partner or dependents? Does the health care package include vision, dental, orthodontic, and psychological services? What are my premium and co-payment or deductible expenses? Can you participate in a flexible spending account?
- How are retirement plans structured? Does the company match my contributions? Is there a vesting schedule?
- Will professional organization membership be subsidized? Can you attend career development conferences?
- Does the company offer child care benefits? What about participation in a flexible dependent care spending account?
- Travel discounts? Fitness membership? Cafeteria plan? Free parking?

### ***Are the terms of the appointment clearly defined?***

- Do you have a clear start date?
- Have you seen a job description?
- Who will be your supervisor?
- Is your company an 'at will' employer, or do you have a contract?
- How and when will your performance be evaluated?
- Will you have opportunities for advancement?

### ***Is this company and position a good "fit" for you?***

- Ask yourself how you see yourself in this environment. Do you think you can thrive and be happy at this company? Does the department seem collegial? Will it be a positive work environment? Are you excited by the opportunity to work with the staff in the department and the leadership?
- Are you supportive of the company mission, vision, and values?
- What do your instincts tell you about the environment, given your interviewing experiences?

### ***What will your working conditions be like?***

- What hours are you expected to work? Evenings, weekends?
- How much travel will be required?
- Are the responsibilities appropriate for the position and compensation?

- Will you be provided an office, computer, clerical support, and all tools/resources necessary for your work?
- Will the workload and time commitment fit with your other obligations and interests?

***Will you be able to have a life outside work?***

- Is the company ‘family friendly’ or supportive of your lifestyle choices?
- Ask questions about local housing, public schools, and the community. Is this a community you will enjoy living in?
- Is the cost of living prohibitive in the area?
- If relevant, will your partner be able to secure satisfying work in the area?
- Will your partner and/or children be happy in this community?
- If the company has a hiring program for domestic partners, can it perhaps identify suitable employment for your spouse?

***What if this position is not your first choice?***

If you receive an offer from a company that is not your first choice, and you are hoping for good news from another company, request more time from the company making an offer. While a few days is standard, you can sometimes negotiate for more time. After you’ve received an offer, you may wish to telephone the company(s) that you would most prefer to work at and explain that you have received an offer from another employer (without naming the specific company). Sometimes the decision has been made but the paperwork is slow, and a phone call can help speed up the process and provide you with an answer more quickly. If the other companies you are waiting to hear from cannot give you an answer in the timeframe you require, however, you may be forced to make a difficult decision.

**Negotiation**

After you have received a hard copy of the offer letter, you can begin negotiation. Negotiation is the process in which two parties decide upon the resources they will give and take in an exchange. Your goal in negotiation is to satisfy your preferences. However, for success, the tactics used must be collaborative and both parties should end negotiation feeling that they received something of value. According to Pinkley and Northcraft, only about 25 percent of job applicants attempt to negotiate. Women are often more reluctant to negotiate than men, and this disinclination accounts, in part, for continuing wage discrepancies between the sexes. However, virtually all employers agree that it is appropriate to negotiate as long as it is done professionally. Many companies report that the first offer extended to an applicant is less than what they are willing to pay because they expect the applicant to negotiate.

**When to negotiate**

Negotiate only after a company has given you a formal job offer. At this point, you can be certain that they are fully invested in you and that they want you as a part of their department. The time between when you are given an offer and when you accept the offer is your prime window of opportunity for negotiation. At this point, many departments would prefer to satisfy your requests (provided they are reasonable), rather than

reconvene to decide upon their next course of action—to present an offer to their second choice or begin a new search.

### **Possible Topics for Negotiation**

**Salary.** Salary is the number one thing applicants negotiate, yet a negotiation that focuses only on salary will not be nearly as effective as one that considers all possible options. Always ask if salary is negotiable. Many companies have a salary range for the position being offered, but offer letters usually will not offer a salary at the top of this range. As a result, it is often possible for the department to move a little bit within this range, especially if you are in a high demand field. Salary negotiation is very important because, for many professional positions, most future salary raises are derived from your starting value. Salary increases are normally awarded annually, based on cost-of-living adjustments (and sometimes with small merit increases), and as a *percentage* of your salary, rather than a fixed dollar amount. Larger lump sum increases to your base pay do not typically occur unless you are promoted or commence another job search and receive an offer from another company. The higher salary you start with, the more significant each salary increase will be. For some corporations, and often for nonprofit organizations, salary ranges are narrowly defined and inflexible. In these instances, job seekers should focus their negotiations on other issues.

**Moving expenses.** Companies may reimburse you for some or all of your moving expenses. Before negotiating, educate yourself about moving costs—either moving yourself or hiring a moving company. Having some idea of the costs will aid your negotiation. Save all receipts related to your move—your moving expenses may also be tax deductible.

**Spousal or partner assistance** can sometimes be requested, especially if the job being offered is in a remote location. This assistance can range from the company providing the applicant's partner with resources for embarking on his/her own job hunt to actually locating a job for him/her. Generally a department will locate jobs only for the partners of highly recruited applicants, but if an applicant's partner is qualified for a company position that becomes available, the partner candidate may receive some advantage. Investigate the programs available at the companies you are considering.

**Benefits and health insurance.** Benefits packages are often non-negotiable, as many companies have standardized (and comprehensive) benefits policies. However, take time to learn more about the benefits package being offered. You may have bargaining points, particularly if you have multiple offers.

**Professional development.** Many professions have one or more popular membership organizations. Perhaps your employer will pay all or a portion of annual dues, or subsidize your attendance at professional conferences. Consider the expense of joining the Chamber of Commerce, or a civic organization, and asking the company to support your membership.

**Housing.** Sometimes candidates can negotiate for the company to pay for a second trip to the community to search for housing. Some large companies, especially those located in communities with a shortage of affordable housing, have lodging arrangements to temporarily house employees or feature programs to help new staff locate and purchase homes. Other companies will have special arrangements with a realty agency or relocation firm. You may wish to inquire about a company's housing provisions.

**Start date.** If you are ABD and working to complete your dissertation, or you will need to relocate, you may consider negotiating your start date. Sometimes you can delay the start date by a semester or two.

**Start-up package.** High demand fields may offer 'sign on bonuses' and other cash incentives upon hire, after completion of a probationary period, annually, or at other intervals. Find out how bonuses are determined and distributed.

### **Negotiation Strategies**

**Look before you leap.** When you receive a job offer, ask for time to consider it and do not make an impulsive or hasty decision. Take time to decide whether you want to negotiate and develop your action plan before actually beginning the negotiation process.

**Do some research.** You will need information to decide how to conduct your negotiation, since having data to corroborate and justify your request is also important in establishing credibility. Be sure you understand your justification for asking for more, and you also have a clear idea of what details you first need to clarify before attempting to negotiate.

**Don't hesitate to ask!** Many applicants are reluctant to even attempt negotiation. Some feel so grateful to have a job that they fear losing it, and others feel timid or guilty at the prospect of negotiation. Remember that you are not taking anything away from anyone else and that the employer obviously really does want you (or else they would not have extended the offer in the first place). The worst answer you can receive during a negotiation is "no," and as long as you conduct yourself professionally, negotiating will not negatively impact your future with the organization.

**Negotiate professionally.** You always want to be polite and professional in your negotiations, since the people with whom you negotiate may be your colleagues for a long time. It is preferable to negotiate verbally, either in person or on the phone, but if you are more comfortable, you might inquire about negotiation possibilities in writing. Your tone must always be collegial and collaborative; you want the person you're negotiating with to understand that you are working *with* them to find the best possible solution. You never want to appear combative or hostile. Keep this in mind when you contact other companies where you have applied, even if you do not expect to receive an offer.

**Don't fixate on one aspect of a negotiation.** Many job applicants make the mistake of negotiating only for an increased salary. In reality, there are many other aspects of a job

offer to negotiate, and while salary is the most obvious one, it might actually be the least successful. You may have much more room to negotiate for other terms, like office space, clerical support, and leave time, and it's even possible that these aspects will make the job even more attractive than a slight increase in salary. Do not feel that your negotiation failed if the company cannot increase your salary; sometimes it simply is not possible, especially if you are negotiating with a tightly structured organization or if budgets are tight. You must be willing to accept that the employer cannot honor your request.

**Have negotiated terms put in writing.** Following negotiation and the verbal agreement of terms, ask the employer to put these in writing. Review the revised terms carefully before accepting/declining the job offer.

### **Accepting and Rejecting Jobs**

Ultimately, you will have to either accept or reject every job offer that you receive. The best way to do this is to first call the employer, since that will allow them to know of your answer in a timely manner, and then to follow up with a written letter of acceptance or rejection.

#### **Acceptance**

When you accept a job, be certain that your official letter of acceptance confirms all terms that were decided upon for the job, including start date and any negotiated benefits. If you have applications currently under review at other companies, it is courteous to withdraw your name from candidacy. If you have other pending job offers, you should certainly also notify those departments and reject them as soon as you accept your offer. You should begin to familiarize yourself with your new employer, and it is never too early to start building relationships. This can be done by contacting some of your new colleagues and introducing yourself and learning as much about the new department as possible. Send thank you notes to everyone who supported you in your job search, including your references. Try to stay in touch with your new employer between the time of acceptance and your start date.

#### **Rejection**

Sometimes you will end up rejecting a job offer. This may occur for multiple reasons:

- You receive and accept another more attractive job offer.
- You accept a post-doctoral position instead.
- You realize that your dissertation will not be completed by the promised date.
- You realize that the position will not be a good fit for your skills, personality, and/or family.
- You cannot accept the terms of the offer.
- You are confident that you will receive an offer from a company that is more attractive to you.

When you reject a job offer, be extremely polite and courteous. Notify them of your alternative plans and focus on the aspects of their department that were positive to you. It is important to conduct yourself professionally and leave a positive impression with the

company; you may likely encounter these individuals again in another setting or even another job search.

### **Job Search Ethics—Can you Back Out on a Job Acceptance?**

Sometimes a situation will arise where you accept a job offer, and then you are offered your “dream” job at another company. Applicants often wonder if they can ethically break their commitment to the first company and accept the position they really want. Some people will tell you that you are ethically obligated to meet the commitment you made to the first employer; others will say that you need to do what is best for you, your career, and your family. Ultimately it is your decision, and you must be comfortable with your decision and be prepared to live with the consequences. Backing out of a job you have accepted will likely not ingratiate you with members of the search committee, and it could have negative ramifications for your future career. Carefully consider your personal ethics and values, and perhaps get some advice from a faculty member whom you trust.

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