



Salaries: Cashing In On Your Education

When negotiating a salary, maximize your earning potential with the three “R’s”

Reality check on your salary check

If you're in the position to negotiate a salary for your first job, congratulations! You're almost there. But, before you accept the job, how do you ensure that you'll get the best salary possible?

Consider these key steps: research the position; know your salary range; and ask for a review. These three “R’s” of salary negotiation—research, range, and review—will help you “cash in.”

Before the offer: Research!

Before you negotiate salary—or even go in for the job interview—research the company and position as much as you can, including what entry-level candidates with your degree and major are paid in your area. You can use online salary calculators and the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* to get an idea. Plus, many websites offer specific salary data right down to the exact company and job.

Also, don't overlook your own worth. As a new graduate in a competitive job market, you might think that you don't have much negotiating power when it comes to salaries. However, if you have completed internships or worked in a related field throughout college, you can factor this in when determining your total years of experience and employment level. Some positions are listed with a salary or range that's “based upon experience.”

Next, research the company. A large organization may have structured pay rates for all entry-level employees, leaving little room to negotiate; this information can usually be researched online. Or, you may find that the company pays a small salary, but offers a large end-of-year bonus. Whatever the policy, the more you know about the firm before you negotiate, the better.

Finally, research your budget. Once you graduate, expect your personal financial responsibilities to increase. So be realistic: know your bottom line before you interview or negotiate. Create a budget for yourself; determine the minimum amount you need to make in order to pay your bills and meet cost-of-living expenditures, including possible student loan repayments or commuting expenses.

During the offer: Provide a salary range

If you get that highly-anticipated call from an employer offering you a job, don't accept the job on the spot, no matter how excited you are. If possible, take some time to evaluate the offer—including the salary and benefits. And get written confirmation. Your goal is to have the hiring manager offer a salary first. If you're pressed for a number, provide a salary “range,” or estimate, of what you're seeking in pay. You can say, “I'm looking for a salary in the \$40 to 50k range” or “I am looking for \$20-30 dollars an hour.” Companies often expect you to negotiate; aim for a higher salary, but base it on research. A salary range helps you avoid under- or overestimating what that position might pay. And it keeps the negotiation table open for both you and the employer.

If a company wants to pay the lower end of your range, consider additional compensation incentives like healthcare coverage, retirement plan, and vacation days. If an employer is unwilling to budge, try negotiating a range of benefit options. Don't assume a “take it or leave it” stance; it rarely works.

After the offer: Review

Finally, even if your salary is less than what you were hoping for, it's a starting point. Always ask for a performance review 6 or 12 months after your start date, and keep a record of everything you accomplish over this period. You can then use your review to ask for a pay raise or to continue the dialogue.

Negotiating a salary can be tricky and uncomfortable. However, don't be shy. Do your homework and know your options; you'll be more confident. Also, whatever the outcome, always remain professional, polite, and focused on the employer's needs. Remember, this is business; nothing personal.



i n a nutshell:

Negotiating a salary is a balancing act. Don't be caught off guard:

- **Research entry-level salaries in your field and location**
- **Internships and volunteer work count towards experience**
- **Research the company pay policies and benefits**
- **Know your bottom line; don't just settle; weigh options**
- **Be patient; don't reveal your hand or appear desperate**
- **Use the value you bring as part of the negotiation**
- **Get the offer in writing**

Don't let emotions or ignorance dictate your salary negotiations. Otherwise, you risk shortchanging yourself and paying the price.