



Salary Negotiation Cheat Sheet

Congratulations, you got the job! All your preparation has finally paid off and an offer is on its way. So are you done now? I'll give you one guess. That's right, your work isn't over yet. Even when an offer is expected—or received—you're still being evaluated. This is the final touch, and how your first days and months on the job go depend on how you handle this part.

Step 1: Get the offer in writing

Hearing someone tell you over the phone that an offer will be extended is awesome. But until it's in writing, it's not real; so don't be afraid to ask for it in black and white. This is what you need to look for:

- **Salary** – Unless you plan to volunteer this should be within the first few sentences of the offer.
- **Basic job info** – Things like title, working hours, office location, and expected responsibilities should be included in an offer. Make sure these basics are clear.
- **Benefits** – Yes, they can be boring, but benefits are part of your compensation, and you need to take them seriously. Is healthcare, dental, and vision included? What about transportation and retirement?
- **Perks** – These are the fun ones. Free lunches, weekly massages, education benefits, and quarterly outings are all part of the package. Make sure any perks that attracted you to the company in the first place are mentioned.
- **Time off** – There's no industry standard when it comes to vacation and sick days, so make sure it's clearly stated, including when you'll start to accrue time off, and when you can begin to use it.
- **Start date** – This may seem like a formality, but you'll want this in writing too. It will help motivate you to give your notice at your existing job if you have one, and sets expectations for your new employer as well.

Step 2: Evaluate the offer

When you have the offer in hand, it's perfectly acceptable to do a little victory dance. After that, it's time to sit down and pick it apart.

- **Your gut reaction** – Getting an offer is exciting, and it's easy to let that shape your opinion of an offer. Don't do that. Pay close attention to how you feel when you first read through the offer. Are you flattered? Did it feel anticlimactic? Are you disappointed or insulted? Take note of your emotional reaction and jot down a few notes before moving on.
- **Salary** – Your initial gut reaction will be a big tell, but read through the offer again and just focus on the salary. How do you feel when you see that number? If you're flattered and excited, it's probably enough. If you're slightly disappointed, you may want to shoot for more, and if you're insulted you definitely want to consider negotiating—or declining the offer.
- **Nuts and bolts** – After letting yourself go through the emotional process of reading the offer, read through it again purely to check the boxes. Does the offer include everything in step 1? Does it answer any questions you raised during the interview process? Does it raise any new questions? Jot down anything that you feel unsure of.
- **Location and hours** – This can get overlooked during the excitement of the interview process, but now is the time to consider it closely. Is your office location convenient? Are the hours different from what you're used to? Consider how your life will change depending on these factors and evaluate whether or not you're willing to make any sacrifices.
- **People** – The offer isn't just about the numbers and benefits. It's also about your new team and your manager. After the interview process you should have a good idea of what those people are like. Think about whether or not you'll enjoy working with those people.

Step 3: Respond to the offer

The moment you receive an offer, the clock starts ticking. Your prospective employer is eager to get moving, so it's important to respect their time at this stage of the process, while still giving yourself enough time to fully evaluate the offer. As eager as you'll be to respond, it's crucial you go through the first two steps *before* taking on step 3.

- **Don't accept on the spot** – No matter how amazing the offer is; never ever accept on the spot. Everything is negotiable. Give yourself the time to comb through the offer and determine if there's anything you'd like to change.
- **Respond no matter what** – Regardless of how steps one and two panned out, your prospective employer deserves the respect of

- acknowledgement of receipt of the offer. Let them know you've received the offer and are excited to consider it.
- **Set a timeline** – When you respond, you'll need to set expectations. Depending on how steps one and two went, you'll need more or less time for this, so come up with a reasonable timeframe to respond with your answer to the offer. Anytime between 24 hours and one week is an acceptable range for most employers.
 - **Stick to your timeline** – If you tell your prospective employer you're going to give your answer within 24 hours, do it. There's no cushion here, so set your date and stick to it.

Step 4: Negotiate

This is the hardest step in the process, but also the most important. It may feel awkward, but your prospective employer is expecting it, so don't be afraid to ask for what you want—within reason.

- **Salary** – Obviously this is the first piece we look to when negotiating. If the salary isn't what you'd like, respond with a number that's in line with what you want. But keep in mind this is not the time to be greedy. Employers typically offer 15% less than the salary they can offer which means they likely have some wiggle room. *Some*, not gobs of it. Come up with a reasonable bump and suggest it. As a rule of thumb an increase of around 15% generally is good place good place to consider.
- **Benefits and perks** – If the salary isn't quite up to par—but close—consider benefits as an alternative bargaining chip. If your commute will be less than great, offer to accept a lower salary in exchange for the ability to work from home a few days per week. Find a way to make it worth your while—and your employer's—and suggest it as part of the offer.
- **Everything else in step 1** – If you can't find anything else you'd like to change with the offer, check through everything else. Is the title a little blah? This is your chance to give yourself a step up without actually costing the company a penny. They may seem intangible, but it will make a difference when it comes review time or you're ready to apply for a new job.

Step 5: Accept or reject the offer

After you've gone through everything, it's time to give the final go, no-go decision.

- **Accept** – If you're happy with the final (possibly revised) offer graciously accept in kind (e.g. if the offer was made via email, respond in the same way). Reiterate the highlights of the offer and include your start date and title. Be sure to express your excitement and appreciation for the opportunity.
- **Respectfully decline** – If everything you've evaluated at this point doesn't make you excited about the offer, you should probably decline. Your potential employer doesn't want someone who only mildly wants to work there, and you don't want a job you're taking just because nothing better has come up.