



OCS

# EVALUATING JOB OFFERS

***Undergraduate Resource Series***

Office of Career Services | 54 Dunster Street  
Harvard University | Faculty of Arts and Sciences | 617.495.2595  
[www.ocs.fas.harvard.edu](http://www.ocs.fas.harvard.edu)

© 2016 President and Fellows of Harvard College

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced in any way without the express written permission of the Harvard University Faculty of Arts & Sciences Office of Career Services.

8/16

Office of Career Services  
Harvard University  
Faculty of Arts & Sciences  
Cambridge, MA 02138  
Phone: (617) 495-2595  
[www.ocs.fas.harvard.edu](http://www.ocs.fas.harvard.edu)

## CONGRATULATIONS!

### You received an offer. Now what?

- How do you prioritize the offers you've received, and those you're still working on?
- How do you weigh job offers against other options such as starting graduate school right away or accepting a fellowship that will allow you to travel and/or study abroad for a year or two?
- When is it appropriate to negotiate compensation packages, and how do you do that?

### Getting the Offer

- **Once you receive an offer, say thank you** – Many employers will give an initial offer over the phone. Show gratitude that you were selected from among many candidates and express your continued and sincere interest in the position. Key point: You don't have to make a decision right away!
- **Ask to get your offer in writing** – To thoroughly consider an offer and compare it to others, you need to have the details. Request the offer in writing when discussing the position over the phone. Any employer should be able to mail or email official documentation to you. The written offer should include details such as start date and salary, but may not include all information.
- **Keep in touch** – Regardless of how much time you need to make a decision, it's essential to keep in touch with the employer. Make sure to return phone calls and emails from the employer in a timely manner. If you feel they're contacting you too frequently, you can be proactive and suggest the date and time for your next conversation. Then you can also plan ahead and ask questions that will help you make the right decision.
- **Be an ACTIVE decision-maker** – To make an effective decision, you may need to speak with other people at the organization, negotiate some details of the offer, consult friends and family, and/or do more self- and career-assessment regarding your current and future goals. While you should be given time to make a thoughtful decision, you also have a responsibility to use your time wisely and not wait until the last minute.

#### **Advice from Harvard's President:**

*"You are at a moment of transition that requires making choices. And selecting one option – a job, a career, a graduate program – means not selecting others. Every decision means loss as well as gain—possibilities foregone as well as possibilities embraced...if you don't try to do what you love—whether it is painting or biology or finance; if you don't pursue what you think will be most meaningful, you will regret it. Life is long. There is always time for Plan B. But don't begin with it."*

**Drew Gilpin Faust**

## Review Your Goals

Making decisions requires knowledge about what direction you want to take. Before making a decision, ask yourself the following questions:

- Where do I see myself every day for the next couple of years?
- What skills do I want to use? What skills do I want to gain?
- What do I think will make me happy?

The goal is to reach a decision that is consistent with who you are and what you value. This is true whether you're comparing job offers, have been admitted to a graduate program, or have received a fellowship for post-graduate study/travel. The decision to accept a job or other career option is a personal one, and often involves a combination of weighing the facts, following your instincts, and in some cases, taking a leap of faith.

## Assess Your Options

When considering job offers, also ask yourself:

- What are the potential career paths that could follow after accepting the position? Are there growth opportunities? What will I learn from this job? Where could those skills and experiences take me in the future?
- Do I like and respect my potential coworkers? Do I feel comfortable with the culture of the organization? Do people seem happy working there?
- Will I have the opportunity to meet new people in the field, and expand my network of professional connections?
- Am I happy with the job location, in terms of cost of living, climate, proximity to family, and opportunities for social life or cultural activities?
- Does this opportunity align with my other priorities...work/life balance, time off, etc.?

## Understand the Commitment

As you are making this immediate career decision, think about where it will lead you. While this may well be your first full-time job, it most certainly will not be your last. OCS often refers to the first job as "Next Steps" because you will likely change jobs and even careers as you develop new skills and reality test your interests. Many people stay in their first jobs for an average of two years. It will take time for you to gain both the quantity and quality of experience needed for your next career evolution.

## Make a Decision

- **How to Accept an Offer** – You can accept an offer with an employer over the phone, but be sure to follow any instructions that they provide via email or mail. There is often a fair amount of paperwork that takes place to make you an official employee of the organization.
  - **Once you accept, STOP LOOKING!** Never accept an offer and continue looking for additional opportunities. This strategy is considered an **egregious breach of ethics**, and can seriously harm your reputation in your chosen field and Harvard's reputation. It's not unheard of for a firm to rescind an offer if they find out that you've already accepted one from another organization. Keep in mind that people within fields usually know one another, and often compare notes. If an opportunity has come along that you would like to pursue after you've accepted a job offer, contact an OCS adviser for help in navigating the situation. While some employers may not want to go forward with a potentially unhappy employee, be prepared for them to ask that you honor the commitment you've made.

- **How to Decline an Offer** – When you know you are no longer interested in an offer, withdraw from the applicant pool or decline the offer **as soon as possible**. Interviewing with or holding onto an offer from an employer that doesn't interest you wastes both your time and the employer's, may impact other students who are hoping for that opportunity, and may damage your own professional reputation. You should decline an offer over the phone (not by email or voicemail), but be sure to reiterate your appreciation as you do so. You should also follow up with any person at the organization who you've come to know during the job search process. *Do not leave a voicemail message to decline an offer.* If the contact person is not available, leave a message for them to call you back or use email to schedule a phone call at a specific date and time.
- **Remember, It's a Small World** – In all your interactions with employers, always be polite, professional, and respectful of people's time. Even if you ultimately decide not to work with a particular organization, you never know when your professional paths may cross again. It is in your best interest to keep the people you meet during the job search process in your network. A strong network is the best job security you can have and vital to your own professional development. Consider connecting on LinkedIn with those who have helped you through the process.

*"Decisions are a way of defining ourselves. There comes a time in life when there is nothing else to do but go your own way. Where you are headed there are no trails, no paths, just your own instincts."*

**Sergio Bambaren**

## What to Do ...

IF ...	THEN...
You receive an offer that you are really excited about...	Don't delay! There's no reason to drag out the process if you've received an offer that meets your needs and expectations. Examine the details of the written offer, clarify or negotiate if necessary, and accept in a timely manner.
You have multiple offers, but none stand out as the best choice...	Even if you're unsure which option is best, don't wait until you have all possible offers in hand to start making decisions. Actively evaluate options against each other and your ideal and don't hold more than two or three offers at a time. Declining offers in a timely manner helps you maintain good relationships with employers, even if you decide not to work for them. It's respectful of their time and allows them to make an offer to someone else.
You have an offer, but you want to hold out for something else...	If the offer is from a company participating in the Campus Interview Program, a set timeline applies. Outside of campus interviews, it's acceptable to ask an employer for more time to make a decision on an offer, but don't do so unprepared. Have a realistic sense of how much time you need, and always express appreciation and enthusiasm for the existing offer. If you are granted more time be sure to call the other employer that interests you and let them know you have another offer. If they really want to hire you, they may be able to speed up the process. Also be prepared for what you'll do if the employer doesn't give you more time.
You accepted an offer, but something better has come along...	Once you've accepted an offer, you've given a good-faith commitment to honor it. Reneging on an offer is a breach of your agreement and can jeopardize your professional reputation. If you're convinced that you would not be happy with the offer you've accepted, stop by OCS drop-in hours or make an appointment with an OCS adviser to discuss your options before contacting the employer.

Remember to consult an OCS adviser for guidance, whether you are in the midst of any of the scenarios above or experiencing a unique situation.

## Salary

While compensation shouldn't be the sole focus of your analysis, it is an essential component of any job decision. Keep in mind that if you're looking at more than one type of job, you may be looking at different sets of numbers. One cannot compare, for instance, an entry-level position in publishing with one in consulting. The starting salaries are simply too different. Salaries may also vary by location.

Many websites offer a combination of salary data by job title, industry, and/or field, as well as salary calculators to help determine how salaries may be affected by cost of living in different geographic regions. A few examples include: Payscale.com, Salary.com, and Glassdoor.com.

Also remember that compensation includes more than base salary. **Bonuses** and **benefits** may seem like a minor piece of the puzzle, but they can come with a considerable price tag once you begin paying the bills. Benefits to consider include:

- Bonus Structure (Yearly, Performance-Based, etc.)
- Stock Options or Profit Sharing
- Paid Leave (Vacation Time, Sick Time, and Personal Days)
- 401(k) or other Retirement Savings Plan
- Education Benefits
- Relocation Benefits
- Health, Life, and Disability Insurance

## Fielding Salary Questions

Sometimes employers ask for your "salary requirements" or "expected salary" as part of the application or interview process. Organizations typically do so to avoid spending time on a candidate that they will not be able to afford to hire. For example, if someone applies to a position but indicates a salary \$20,000 above what they have budgeted for the position, the employer may assume that the candidate is overqualified or mismatched for the opportunity. However, this often puts students and candidates in a tricky position because you don't want to undersell the value of your skills or end up underpaid for your work.

When asked for your required salary, the best thing to do is try to avoid giving a discrete answer. If asked as part of an online application, try to skip the question. If asked in person, try a neutral statement like "I'll consider any reasonable offer." If you must give an answer, try to give a salary range rather than a specific salary, and base that range on research you conducted. Remember, just because you share an expected salary figure, it does not mean you cannot try to negotiate once an offer is made. Your time to negotiate is after you have received a formal offer but before you make a verbal or written commitment.

## Negotiating

Think carefully before negotiating a job offer and actively seek outside benchmarks and guidance from industry research, your personal and professional network, and resources at the Office of Career Services. If you do negotiate the salary offer, be sure to research and prepare to discuss a salary range that would be acceptable to you. Some organizations offer a **set package** that is identical to those offered to all new hires. Unless you offer something significant in terms of additional relevant education or experience over and above the others receiving an offer, it's unlikely that you'll be able to negotiate additional monetary compensation. However, there are several aspects of your offer or decision timeline that you may want to negotiate instead of, or in addition to, salary. If you do decide to

negotiate, plan to have the conversation over the phone. Have notes in front of you, and try practicing beforehand with a friend, parent, or OCS adviser.

### Some negotiation guidelines:

NEVER...	ALWAYS...
Wait until the last minute to negotiate.	Research the industry to best represent yourself during negotiation.
Misrepresent yourself or a competing offer in <i>any</i> way.	Get advice from recent alums, professionals in the field, OCS advisers, and family members.
Negotiate over email (exceptions include negotiating across time zones).	Listen carefully for tone of voice and other cues that will help you navigate the negotiation.
Get confrontational.	Behave professionally. Know what your deal-making and deal-breaking factors are ahead of time.

### Maintain Relationships

When you ultimately come to a conclusion, it's important to remember that it is a small world. The opportunity you don't take today may well be right for you in a few years. Being as gracious when declining an offer as you are when accepting one can go a long way toward building a network of contacts that will stay with you for a lifetime.

### Trust Yourself

In the end, only you can decide whether or not a job is right for you.