

WHAT ARE YOUR SALARY EXPECTATIONS?

Since the introduction of pay history bans across the United States, recruiters have been looking for new ways to ask the old question, “What is your current compensation?” Although it is illegal for employers to pay different wages to men and women for the same work, there is still a significant pay gap between genders. The salary history ban is designed to lessen this inequality by making sure a person’s past salary is not used as an indicator for what they should make in their next position. But companies still need to figure out what to pay you. You will often hear a new phrase designed to get to the same information: “What are your salary expectations?”

Why are they asking this question?

- > Some employers may want to get a sense of whether or not they can afford you.
- > Others may want to know what’s the least they can pay to get you on their team.
- > For some it helps them gauge whether you are at the correct professional level.

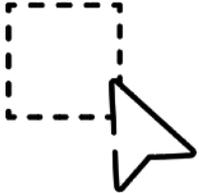
Answering this question without good research comes with risks. While you want to aim high, you also don’t want to aim so high that you put yourself out of the company’s salary range. If your range is too low, you leave the employer room to go even lower and make a below-market offer for your work. By doing some research and preparation you can demonstrate to the employer that you are flexible with your salary, but that you know your worth.

GENERAL GUIDELINES



- **If possible, avoid giving a set amount first.** Job seekers often ask us, “Do I have to give them a number?” Technically, you don’t. If you are at the beginning of a negotiation, it is ok for you to suggest, “Let’s see if this is a good fit for both of us and then we can

discuss the numbers.” On the other hand, as a former recruiter, I have seen conversations extend for too long — only for both parties to realize neither would be happy with the salary range on the table.



- **Offer a range.** If you are ready to have the salary conversation, start by emphasizing your flexibility. Most employers will want to hear specific numbers. When you offer them a range, it allows you to remain flexible while still giving the employer a clear answer. You can create this range based on research or your own experience in the industry. Keep in mind, however, that the employer may opt for the lower end of your range, so make sure your range represents a target number you would truly take.



- **Give yourself a raise.** Ratchet up your current pay by as much as 15–30%. If you were to get an offer in this range, chances are you would take it. Do the research by asking around in your industry to better understand if this is within a reasonable range for your level of experience.



- **Always ask for something.** Many candidates are hesitant to ask for more money because they worry that it could cost them a job offer. This is not true. I have spent many years making offers and working through negotiations. Never once have I seen anyone pull an offer in response to a reasonable salary demand. So ask! One suggestion: hold off on a counterproposal until you have an official offer in hand, not simply a verbal offer.



- **Only give numbers you'd be happy with.** Remember, only specify a range that you find acceptable, that shows the value of your work, and that would incentivize you to make a move.



- **Highlight your skills.** Your response should subtly emphasize why you are a good fit for the position. You can say something like, “Based on my 10 years of experience in this field, I would expect a salary in the range of \$Y to \$Z.” Before mentioning any numbers, remind the interviewer why they should offer you that salary in the first place.



- **Deflect the question.** If it's early in the hiring process and you're still learning the specifics of the role and the expectations that come with it, you may want to deflect the question for later in the conversation. However, keep in mind that you will eventually have to discuss salary expectations! Either way, it's a good idea to be prepared with a well-researched number in mind — even if you're still factoring in additional information.



- **Ask about all of the perks outside of compensation.** In addition to your salary, there are other benefits, perks, or forms of compensation that you should consider to be just as valuable. During the salary conversations, you can ask about other perks and benefits. If you are not ready to answer the question, "What are your salary expectations?" you can simply say, "I would love to learn more about all of the benefits you offer before I give you a range."

PHRASES TO USE DURING NEGOTIATIONS:

If you are looking for specific phrases to use during this part of the negotiations, we have collected a few from our clients over the years of helping job seekers successfully navigate this type of conversation. See which ones fit you best and practice them out loud. Check out "PHRASES TO USE WHEN NEGOTIATING" in our [Education Suite](#).

HIGHLIGHTING YOUR EXPERTISE

"My salary range is flexible, but I want to make sure I'm compensated for my expertise and for what I'm bringing to this position. I have been an award-winning member of our sales team for many years and I know I will bring value to your team."

"With my experience, skills, and certifications, I would expect to receive something in the range of \$Y to \$Z."

“While I am certainly flexible, I am looking to receive between \$Y and \$X annually. Given my skill set and experience level, I feel that this is a comfortable and appropriate range for what I’ll bring to the table.”

Why it works: This response works well because it sets your qualifications and specific skills as a starting point worth premium pay, but it also highlights that you are flexible in terms of salary requirements.

FIRST TELL ME ABOUT THE JOB

“My salary requirements are flexible, but I need to better understand the details of the position before giving you a number. I look forward to discussing them with the team. From there, we can determine a fair salary for the position.”

“Let’s talk about the job requirements and expectations first, so I can get a sense of what you need and better assess what my own expectations should be.”

“This position is not exactly the same as my last job. So, let’s discuss what my responsibilities would be here, and then determine a fair salary for this job.” It’s hard to argue with words like “fair” and “responsibilities” — you’re earning respect with this one.

Why it works: Asking for more information before committing to a salary range is a good way to avoid mentioning compensation before the hiring manager does. You are also asking to better understand the team dynamics and what they expect from you, which reflects well on your desire to be an effective team member. The recruiter’s response is valuable information to take to your peer groups to see what range is appropriate for the demands of the position.

BASED ON MY RESEARCH

“I am open to discussing what you believe to be a fair salary for the position. However, based on my previous salary, my knowledge of the industry, and my

understanding of this geographic area, I would expect a salary in the general range of \$X to \$Y. Again, I am very open to discussing these numbers with you.”

Why it works: With this response, you signal your awareness of what similar positions pay in other organizations. The answer also gives a range, which provides more room for negotiation than stating a set salary requirement.

NOT ANSWERING THE QUESTION AT ALL

“My salary expectations are in line with my experience and qualifications.”

“If this is the right job for me, I am sure we can come to an agreement on salary.”

“I am interested in finding a job that is a good fit for me. I’m sure whatever salary you’re paying is consistent with the rest of the market.” In other words, I respect myself and I want to think I can respect this company.

“I’d appreciate it if you could make me an offer based on whatever you have budgeted for this position, and we can go from there.” This is a pretty direct response, so using words like “appreciate” focuses on drawing out the interviewer’s better qualities.

“I think you have a good idea of what this position is worth to your company, and that’s important information for me to know.”

Why it works: By sidestepping the question you avoid low-balling yourself and ending up with a salary offer lower than what the company was prepared to pay.

BE SPECIFIC

“My baseline salary requirement is \$X. I feel that the value and expertise I can bring to this role supports my compensation expectations. Is this in line with what you’re thinking?”

“Let me start by reiterating how grateful I am for the benefits this job offers, such as generous paid time off and health benefits. That being said, I am expecting my salary for this position to fall between \$X and \$Y annually. My rich background in client services specific to this industry can play a role in strengthening the organization.”

Why it works: Being specific shows that you are clear in your expectations, that you hold true to your values, and that you are confident in your assets. These are invaluable qualities from an employer’s standpoint.

THINGS NOT TO DO

Don’t price yourself out of a job. Don’t ask for a \$200,000 salary if your research shows the job is worth half that. Make sure your number reflects your worth and the market rate and shows that you’ve done your homework.

Don’t be negative. Even if the amount you’re offered seems insultingly low, respond gracefully and ask if there is room to negotiate. Here you can detail other salaries you’ve had in the past and why your expectations are higher.

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