

Tips for Grad Student Salary Negotiation

Should you negotiate your salary? Salary negotiation is perfectly normal and expected for most full-time job offers. Research what someone of your qualifications typically makes and prepare to make a case for what you believe you should be paid.

Don't be afraid to ask—as long as you are polite and not demanding, an offer is seldom rescinded. But before you ask, study up on salary negotiation techniques.

Seven Steps of Salary Negotiation

1. THANK THE EMPLOYER FOR THE OFFER.

Request time to think about it. Be enthusiastic and appreciative. Ask about benefits (health, dental, retirement), vacation time, advancement opportunities, additional clauses (non-compete, non-disclosure) and a start date. Do not accept the offer on the spot, even if you want to take it.

2. RESEARCH YOUR FAIR MARKET VALUE.

Use tools like *Glassdoor.com*, *PayScale.com* and *Salary.com* to determine what people in similar positions with similar experience make. Federal government salary ranges are listed in the General Schedule Pay Scale, and most state and university salaries can be found online.

Factor in your geographic location (expensive or low cost of living), the type of employer (nonprofit, large company, small start-up, etc.), special skills/certifications/degrees you offer that make you more qualified, and your previous experience/number of years in the field.

3. DETERMINE YOUR NUMBER.

Based on your research, determine your desired salary range. Most employers will expect you to negotiate.

A negotiation method recommended by the AAWU (American Association of University Women) is to use a range. Set the bottom number as the lowest you can accept and the top number no more than 20% higher. That way, whatever the employer offers, you will be happy with the result.

4. MAKE YOUR CASE.

Lay out your position confidently using evidence about your experience and qualifications and explain why you believe a higher salary is appropriate. This is not about what you want, but what you are worth to the company.

If possible, don't be the first person to give a salary number. If the employer asks you what you'd like to make, ask what is typical for the position. If you're pressed further, give your salary range. The risk of giving a number first is undercutting or overshooting what is appropriate.

5. GET READY FOR THE NEGOTIATION DANCE.

Employers will rarely accept your counter offer on the spot. They will typically go back to their manager and check budget numbers and then either accept your offer or counter lower. At this point, it's up to you to accept or decline or ask for something different.

6. REMEMBER NON-MONETARY NEGOTIATION OPTIONS.

If the organization can't budge on the salary, or even if it can, it may be worthwhile to negotiate other aspects such as flexible work hours, vacation time or education opportunities.

7. GET THE OFFER IN WRITING.

Make sure to get a formal offer letter laying out the salary, start date, benefits, location and required acceptance date. Review the offer for accuracy before accepting it.

Avoiding negotiation hurts—big time!

For instance, if an employee received an average annual pay increase of 5% and their starting salary was \$55,000 rather than \$50,000, they would earn an additional \$600,000+ over the course of a 40-year career.

Source: The Journal of Organizational Behavior

Common Negotiation Mistakes

- 1. SAYING YES WITHOUT NEGOTIATING:** When you finish your academic career, it may be the first time you've negotiated a salary and the available openings may be a bit scarce. This can increase the temptation to say "yes" to whatever you're offered. But resist! Your starting salary will affect your earning potential for a long time.
- 2. NEGOTIATING BASED ON YOUR PERSONAL SITUATION:** Your mind may be fixed on how to repay student debt, buying a house or caring for dependents, but don't negotiate around what you need, rather what skills and value you bring to the organization. Highlight your top unique credentials as grounds for greater salary or benefits. These might include special certifications, your degrees, your publishing record, getting a top grant, applicable industry experience, etc.
- 3. THINKING LIKE A STUDENT, NOT A PEER:** You've been in student mode so long that it can be easy to feel like you are still a learner instead of a peer. Remember to speak with confidence and to assert your value as a colleague. You have a lot of knowledge and professional value to offer. Don't sell yourself short or defer to others as the experts.
- 4. FORGETTING TO NEGOTIATE NON-SALARY ITEMS:** Especially if the salary isn't flexible, it's a good idea to think about what else you want or need from the position. Consider:
 - Teaching or research load/allocation
 - Start date
 - Moving expenses
 - Early or delayed tenure format
 - Lab or office space
 - Assistance with spouse employment
 - Student or research assistant support
 - Vacation, benefits, flexible work arrangements
- 5. NOT RESEARCHING YOUR MARKET VALUE:** The nice thing about government or academic positions (at least at state universities) is you can often find real people's salaries online. So before you go into a salary conversation, look up what others have earned in similar positions. Check out *Glassdoor* and *Salary.com* for more information. Research trends in your field. Ask around. Put that research mind of yours to work.

NEGOTIATION CONVERSATION

_____, I am so appreciative and excited to receive this offer for the _____ position with your company. I am specifically pleased with the _____ feature that we discussed last time we met.

After researching my position in the market I discovered that the average starting salary, with my level of education and experience, is between \$65,000 and \$70,000, which is \$5,000 higher than the salary offered.

I'd like to counter your offer with this range. Is there an opportunity to negotiate to align with the value I will bring to this position?

Thank you so much for your time and consideration.

Frequently Asked Questions

WHAT GOES INTO MY MARKET VALUE?

Level of Education + Years of Experience + Skills

in the context of

Industry Norms + Size of Company + Region

WHAT ASPECTS OF MY BACKGROUND ENHANCE MY MARKET VALUE?

- Skills where you excel, computer programs, languages you know, etc.
- Positive results/significant projects achieved for previous employers
- Awards, degrees, recognitions or certifications, etc.

HOW DO I KNOW HOW MUCH TO ASK FOR?

1. Use your network! Ask advice from friends, alumni, professors or LinkedIn contacts in the field.
2. Research salaries for people in similar positions using **Salary.com**, **Glassdoor** or the **Payscale Calculator**.

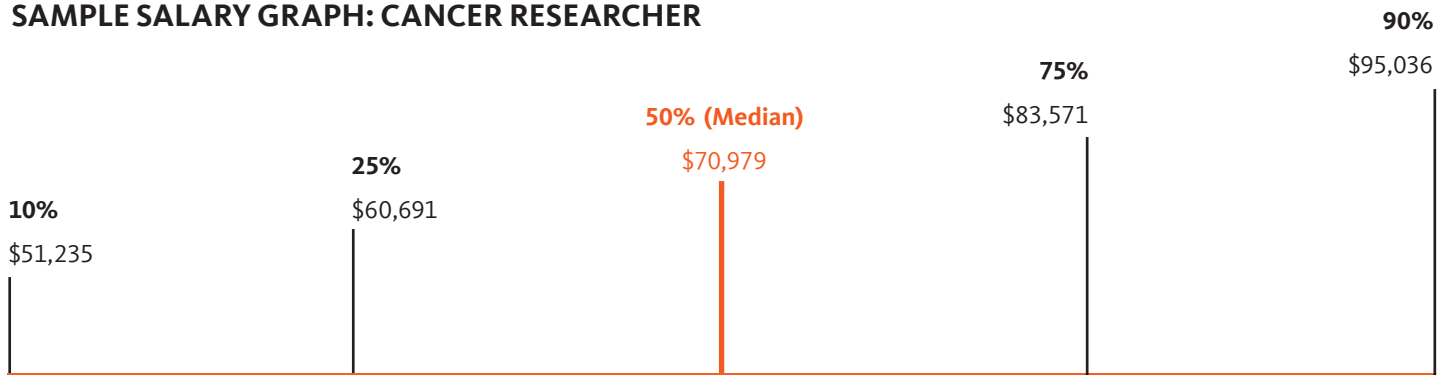
HOW CAN I AVOID BEING THE FIRST TO GIVE MY SALARY NUMBER IF ASKED?

- **Return the question:** “What has been the typical range for employees in similar positions?”
- **Buy time:** “I’d like to learn more about the position before getting too far into salary.”
- **Redirect:** “I’d be curious to hear what is budgeted for this role.”

CAN I NEGOTIATE A FEDERAL OR STATE GOVERNMENT JOB?

Yes! Government jobs often have structured pay steps and salary ranges, but you can negotiate within established ranges or for starting at a higher step (see federal General Schedule Payscale [federalpay.org/gs/2020](https://www.federalpay.org/gs/2020)).

SAMPLE SALARY GRAPH: CANCER RESEARCHER



The graph captures all the people in the role for any number of years. Estimate if you’re below, at or above median. If you are new to the field, you will likely be below median. (Cancer Researcher/Clinical Trails Research Associate, Portland, Ore., **Salary.com**, August 2020)

WHAT DOES THE SALARY NEGOTIATION PROCESS LOOK LIKE?

