



OCS

**DECIDING ON
A JOB OFFER**

Undergraduate Resource Series

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CONGRATULATIONS!

You received an offer. Now what?

- How do you prioritize the offers you received, and those you are 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 among many candidates and express your continued and sincere interest in the position. Key point: You do not have to answer right away!
- **Ask to get your offer in writing** – To thoroughly consider an offer and compare it to others, you need to have access to the written details. Request the offer in writing when offered the position over the phone. Any employer should be able to mail or email the official documentation to you.
- **Keep in touch** – Regardless of how much time you need to make a decision, it is essential to keep in touch with the employer. Make sure to return phone calls and emails from the employer. If you feel like they are contacting you too frequently, you can be proactive and suggest the date for your next conversation. Then you can also plan to 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 to more people at an organization, negotiate some details of an offer, consult friends and family, and/or do some 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

2008 Baccalaureate Address

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 year or two?
- What skills do I want to use?
- What do I think will make me happy?
- How do I want to make an impact?

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

Career Assessment

When considering job offers, also ask yourself:

- What are the potential career paths that could follow after accepting the position? 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?
- What other priorities have I established such as life/work balance, time off, etc.?

Once You Make a Decision

- **How to Decline an Offer** – When you know you are no longer interested in an employer, withdraw from the applicant pool or decline their offer **as soon as possible**. Interviewing with or holding onto an offer with 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 can decline an offer over the phone, 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.
- **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 member of the team.
- **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 employer, 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.

What to Do ...

IF...	THEN...
You receive an offer that you are really excited about...	Don't delay! There is no reason to drag out the process if you have 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 are 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 do not 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 is respectful of their time and allows them to give an offer to someone else.
You have an offer, but you want to hold out for something else...	It is 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 and let them know you have another offer. If they really want to have you they may be able to speed up the process. Also be prepared for what you will do if the employer does not give you more time.
You accepted an offer, but something better has come along...	Once you have accepted an offer, you have 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 accepted, you can initiate honest and open communication with your employer for advice and counsel.

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

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 are 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, Glassdoor.com, and the NACE Salary Calculator available to Harvard FAS students through *Crimson Careers*.

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)
- 401K or Other Retirement Saving
- Education Benefits
- Relocation Benefits
- Health, Life, and Disability Insurance

Making a 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 or career decision, it most certainly will not be your last. Barring unforeseen circumstances, you can expect to stay in your first job for approximately two years. It will take time for you to gain both the quantity and quality of experience to use as leverage for your next career evolution.

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. Competitive organizations usually 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 is unlikely that you will be able to negotiate additional monetary compensation. This is especially true in a down economy when many organizations have frozen salaries or reduced staff. 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
Never wait until the last minute to negotiate	Research the industry to best represent yourself during negotiation
Never misrepresent yourself or a competing offer in any way	Get advice from recent alums, professionals in the field, OCS advisers, and family members
Never negotiate over email (some exceptions for negotiating across time zones)	Listen carefully for tone of voice and other cues that will help you navigate the negotiation
Never get confrontational and always behave professionally	Know what your deal-making and deal-breaking factors are ahead of time

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. Employers in competitive fields worry about this practice to the extent that it is not unheard of for a firm to rescind an offer if they find out that you have already accepted one from another organization. Keep in mind that people within fields usually know one another, and have been known to compare notes. Similarly, employers often self-police the practice of renegeing on offers by rescinding any offer to a candidate who has reneged with another firm. If an opportunity has come along that you would like to pursue after you have accepted a job offer, contact the employer that made you the offer, let them know about the situation, and ask to discuss your options. 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 made.

Maintain Relationships

When you ultimately come to a conclusion, it is 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 towards building a network of contacts that will stay with you a lifetime.

Trust Yourself

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