

How to Answer, 'What's Your Expected Salary?'

By Robert Half on November 8, 2021 at 7:12pm

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The job interview is going as you'd hoped. You meet the required qualifications, you have a rapport with the interviewers, and those practice sessions you and a friend ran through helped you present smoothly and confidently. You have a real shot at landing this job.

Then you hear that awkward question: "What's your expected salary?"

Many job candidates dread this question about salary requirements. There's the worry that, if you lowball a figure, you're leaving money on the table. But if you give a number that's too high, you might price yourself out of consideration for the role. No matter where you are in your career, that's a tough calculation.

The good news is that when you are discussing compensation expectations during the hiring process, there are strategies for giving figures that will be fair to you and within the employer's budget, too. Timing, tact and research are all key to your success when discussing money with a potential employer.

Here's what to do:

1. Research the market and salary trends

No matter what type of position you are seeking, or at what level, the job interview is your opportunity to convince the hiring manager that you deserve top dollar. At the close of the interview, you want the prospective employer to be thinking, "That's who I want to hire. Now, how can I get them to join our team?"

Compensation expectations might well come up during the first formal interview — or even during the initial phone vetting. That's why you should start preparing your "expected salary" answer the moment you apply for the job. And that means you need to do your homework.

Check out reputable sources such as the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics for federal data on wages in your industry. Also, review the [2022 Salary Guide From Robert Half](#) to get the average national salary for the position you're seeking. You can use our Salary Calculator featured in the guide to customize the figure for your market.

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2. Consider giving a salary range, not a number

Job seekers should avoid asking about salary when submitting their application materials or even during an initial phone vetting. Raising the topic of money too early sends the message that you're more interested in the paycheck than the position.

But that doesn't mean the employer won't ask about salary requirements during the initial contact.

If a job post asks applicants to state their expected salary when applying for the position, then give a range — not a specific figure — you're comfortable with. Answers like "Negotiable" might work, but they can also make you look evasive. If you've done your homework, you'll know what a fair salary range will look like.

Should the question of compensation come up during your first interaction with a hiring manager, you can still give a range — and hedge it even a bit more:

"From what I know about the position, I think somewhere in the area of \$XX – \$XX."

That kind of phrasing shows flexibility, which employers appreciate. It also leaves room to adjust the figures, if you think it's necessary, once you've learned more about the job and the employer's expectations for the new hire.

3. Diplomatically turn the question around

When it's still early in the hiring process, there's nothing coy about hedging with a salary range, as discussed above. An employer who asks about an expected salary before discussing the job in detail can't demand a more definite answer.

But at this early stage, you also have an opportunity to turn the question around. Whether salary requirements come up during a phone vetting or at the start of your first [video interview](#) with the employer, you can smile and say:

"I'd like to learn more about the position and the duties, and what the team's like, before discussing money. But may I ask what salary range you're considering for this position?"

Delivered politely, you'll demonstrate that your priority is learning whether the role is really what you're looking for — which every employer will respect. And your deft invitation to share the budgeted salary range will be difficult to resist.

If the employer's salary range is in the area you were considering, or even higher, thank them for sharing the information and confirm that the figure's in your ballpark. If it's a little less, say it's at the lower end of what you were hoping for, but you'd still like to talk about the job.

Why do that? Even in a challenging job market, you'll find some companies are prepared to offer better pay to hire top talent.

Demonstrate you have just what the employer is looking for, and you'll likely be able to negotiate a salary figure to your liking as you hammer out the details of the job offer.

If the employer is starting at a much lower range than your desired compensation, then say so and ask whether the figures would be adjusted for the right hire. Don't waste your time or the employer's if it's clear from the start that you won't reach an agreement on salary.

4. Now it's time to give a number, not a range

At some point, you have to commit. By the second interview (or certainly the third, if the process lasts that long), you've likely learned what you need to know about the job and how success will be measured, you've met team members, and you've shared the salary range you were considering — or the employer has shared the figure they've budgeted for the position. The candidate's compensation expectations, and whether the employer can meet them, remain the only major unsettled questions. So, when an employer now asks you to give your expected salary, you have to be ready to give a number, not a range.

Factor in all you've learned during your research and the interview process. Are the responsibilities and the stress level about what you expected when you applied for the position? Will you manage people or processes the original job posting didn't mention? Perhaps most importantly, what employee benefits, perks and bonus opportunities will be included in the compensation package?

Any and all of that information should help you arrive at a salary figure that you think is fair and will be acceptable to the employer. You may have had to tip your hand when salary requirements first came up, but that doesn't mean you're committed to the range you originally gave. Phrase your answer by citing, *briefly*, the points you think are salient to compensation expectations. Even better if you can frame it in a positive manner. For example:

- *"Given the responsibilities of the position and the number of people I'd be managing, I think \$XX is a fair figure. It's an exciting opportunity, and I truly believe I'm the person for the job."*
- *"I'm really excited by the challenges you described! \$XX seems like the right starting salary. There's a lot to take on, and I'm confident I'd succeed in the role."*
- *"I'm thinking \$XX. This is a big job — one I'm very familiar with and well suited for. I led a similar team at my past employer, and we hit all the goals we were charged with. I'd be very excited to take on another challenge like this!"*
- *"I remember the salary range you gave me earlier, and I respect the fact that you have to work within a budget. But I'd like to suggest \$XX as the starting salary. The responsibilities of this role are quite demanding, and as we've both said, I have all the necessary skills and training. I believe I can deliver the results you said you're looking for."*

Keep it positive and friendly. Be confident and polite. And above all ...

5. Always be truthful

Never misrepresent your experience, your training or the impact you've had at your current or previous job. Don't do it on your resume or in your [cover letter](#), during interviews, or when discussing salary requirements.

The truth is bound to come out — maybe during your reference checks, maybe during a skills test, or maybe once the employer sees how you perform at the new job. At some point, it *will* come out.

The same is true about your current or past salary. It's best to always direct the conversation to your skills and the value you'd bring to the role, not what you've been paid at other jobs. However, if you are asked about your current salary, be honest. Discovery that you inflated the numbers might lead to the loss of the job offer.

What to do after you've settled on salary

The employer made the offer, and the salary meets or comes close to your compensation expectations. What now? Thank the hiring manager and ask for a day or two to mull things over, if you feel you need the time.

If you decide to take the job, express your enthusiasm and talk about the start date. Then ask for a formal, written offer so you can make sure everything that you've discussed, from job description and pay to perks and benefits, is correct. Don't risk any misunderstandings about your agreement. And don't give notice at your current job until you've signed and returned that written offer.

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