



EVALUATING & NEGOTIATING JOB & INTERNSHIP OFFERS

Undergraduate Resource Series

Mignone Center for Career Success | 54 Dunster Street

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Whether you have an offer in hand or are thinking about it for the future, you are likely considering both short-and long-term goals. For both summer experiences and post-graduate opportunities, you are probably making a decision about your “next step” on your path toward something else. Keep this in mind as you explore your options and start making choices.

By the time students get to the offer stage of their search, they sometimes forget that MCS is also here to help for this part of the process. Connect with MCS through drop-ins, scheduled advising appointments, or by emailing recruiting@fas.harvard.edu as soon as possible for optimal support.

Congratulations! You received an offer. Now what?

You may have a number of questions: How do you prioritize the offers you’ve received and those you’re still working on? How do you weigh employment offers against other options? When is it appropriate to negotiate, what is negotiable, and how do you negotiate effectively?

Ideally you will reach a decision that is consistent with who you are and what you value, while also finding a place where you can develop skills and reality-test your interests. This is true whether you’re comparing internships, jobs, graduate and study programs, or travel and fellowships. The decision to accept an offer is a personal one, and often involves a combination of weighing the facts, following your instincts, and taking a leap of faith.

When you Receive an Offer:

- **Say thank you** – Acknowledge the offer as soon as possible. You don’t have to decide immediately, but it is important to say thank you and confirm that you received the offer.
 - Many employers give an initial offer by phone. Show gratitude and express your continued and sincere interest in the position.
 - You may also receive an offer via email. Check your email regularly during your job or internship search and respond promptly.
 - *You don’t have to decide right away!* But you do need to be responsive and plan to contact the employer about the decision timeline and next steps.
- **Ask to get your offer in writing** – Most employers should be able to share official documentation so you can consider it more carefully. If not, they should at least be able to email details such as start date and salary so you have an informal record.
- **Negotiating for more time** – While there are many things about an offer you can negotiate, the most common is to ask for more decision time. It is important to determine for yourself how much time you need to make an informed decision before asking the organization. We recommend having a conversation over the phone (or Zoom) to ask for more time – don’t ask via email. Reiterate your interest in the role and explain how much time you think you need. Always end the conversation on a positive note by thanking the employer for their time.
- **Keep in touch** – It’s essential to stay in contact with the employer. Make sure to return phone calls and emails in a timely manner. If you feel they’re contacting you too frequently, be proactive and suggest the date and time for your next conversation. Use the opportunity to prepare questions that will help you decide.
- **Be an ACTIVE decision-maker** – 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 may have time to make a thoughtful decision, you also have a responsibility to use your time wisely and not wait until the last minute. This is a great time to attend our drop-ins or to schedule an appointment with an adviser to talk through your options.

Advice from former Harvard President Lawrence Bacow:

"It's important that you live your own life, not the life that others have planned for you. Sometimes figuring out what you don't want to do can be as valuable as figuring out what you do want to do...Be open to serendipity. Perhaps the most valuable piece of advice I can give you...is to recognize opportunity when it walks up and hits you in the face, because it will."

Assess Your Options

When considering offers, ask yourself:

- Where do I see myself every day this summer or for the next couple of years after graduation?
- What will I learn from this opportunity? Where could those skills and experiences take me in the future?
- Will I meet new people in the field and expand my network of professional connections?
- Do I like and respect my potential coworkers? Do I feel comfortable with the culture of the organization? Do people seem happy working there?
- Does the organization offer formal mentorship programs and/or affinity groups?
- Am I happy with the geographic location?
- Does this opportunity align with my other priorities...work/life balance, time off, etc.?

Understand the Commitment

While this may be your first internship or full-time job, it most certainly will not be your last. As mentioned above, we often refer to the first job after graduation as your "Next Step" because you will likely change jobs and even careers as you develop new expertise and interests. Note that many people stay in their first job after college for two years. It takes that amount of time to gain both the quantity and quality of experience needed for your next career evolution.

Offer Etiquette – Accepting and Declining Offers

How to Accept an Offer – We recommend that you 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 required.

Once you accept, STOP LOOKING! Continuing to apply and interview for additional opportunities can harm your reputation with individuals and organizations in your chosen field. Keep in mind that people within fields may know one another and even compare notes.

If an opportunity comes up that you want to pursue after you've accepted an offer, contact our office at recruiting@fas.harvard.edu for help. While no organization wants an unhappy employee, your own professional reputation is at risk. If you are unsure about an offer, try to negotiate for more time before you commit.

How to Decline an Offer – Withdraw from the applicant pool or decline the offer **as soon as possible**. Here are some important tips:

- 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.
- Decline an offer over the phone (not by email or voicemail) but be sure to reiterate your appreciation. You can leave a message for them to call you back or use email to schedule a phone call at a specific date and time, but decline in a real-time conversation.
- Follow up with any person at the organization who you've come to know during the job search process. Thank them for the opportunity to interview and reiterate your appreciation for the offer. You may even want to connect with them on LinkedIn.
- If you sign an offer, or even verbally commit to the offer, then you should honor it. If you decide after you have already committed that this position is not right for you, then you would be renegeing on the offer. If you find yourself in this position, please reach out to our office at recruiting@fas.harvard.edu to help you navigate the situation.
- **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 decide not to work somewhere, you never know when your professional paths may cross again. It's in your best interest to keep the people you meet during your search in your network. A strong network is the best job security and vital to your own professional development. Consider connecting on LinkedIn with those who have helped you through the process.

Tips for asking for more decision time:

- Consider how much time you realistically need, knowing that it is unlikely you will be able to explore every option before making a decision.
- Reiterate your excitement and interest in the position and ask if it would be possible to have more time to make an informed decision.
- Be prepared to explain why you need more time and know that you may not get as much time as you hope for.
- Regardless of what they say, thank the employer for considering the request, reiterate your interest in the role, and let them know that you will be in touch soon with a decision.

Additional Considerations for Internship Offers

You will have three summers over the course of your time at Harvard. Many first-years and sophomores consider returning home to previous summer jobs, studying abroad, research, structured programs, volunteering, or internships. While experiences build upon each other, it can ease the stress of decision-making to remember that no employer hires someone for full-time post-grad positions based on their first-year experience. You can use your early summers to explore, knowing you have time to change or hone your interests later in your academic career.

Especially in the corporate sector, the summer internship between junior and senior year is seen as a 10-week mutual interview for both you and the organization to evaluate one another for post-grad employment. Students' most common request is to negotiate for more time to decide. Some offers can come well in advance of the internship start date (over a year before the internship starts), and some employers want students to make a quick decision. See above for tips on having this conversation.

Advice from former Harvard President Drew Gilpin Faust:

“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.”

Internships are an important way to explore your interests, and you want to make a thoughtful and informed decision. There will also be many employers hoping to hire you for post-grad opportunities as a senior, so you will have another opportunity to pivot and explore if your junior summer experience was not what you expected or did not result in a full-time offer. If you need help navigating this conversation, or if an employer or organization is not willing to give you more time, connect with our office for guidance during drop-ins, by scheduling an appointment, or at recruiting@fas.harvard.edu.

Salary

While compensation shouldn’t be the sole focus of your analysis, it is an essential component of any job or internship decision. If you’re looking at more than one type of opportunity, you may be looking at very different sets of numbers. One cannot fairly compare salaries for 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 position 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:

- “Job Market Insights” on our website
- Payscale.com
- Salary.com
- Glassdoor.com

Also remember that compensation includes more than base salary. **Bonuses** and **benefits** can come with a considerable price tag once you begin paying the bills and are considered part of your total compensation. Benefits to consider for post-grad opportunities include:

- Signing Bonus
- Additional Bonus (Yearly, Performance-Based, etc.)
- Equity, Stock Options or Profit Sharing
- Paid Leave (Vacation Time, Sick Time, and Personal Days)
- Flexible Work Arrangements (Hybrid/Remote Work, Flex Hours)
- 401(k) or other Retirement Savings Plan
- Education Benefits
- Relocation Benefits
- Health, Life, and Disability Insurance

Fielding Salary Questions

Some employers ask for your “salary requirements” or “expected salary” as part of the application or interview process. Organizations typically ask so they don’t spend time on a candidate that they can’t afford to hire. For example, if someone applies to a position indicating an expected salary \$20,000 above what they budgeted, the employer may assume that the candidate is overqualified or mismatched for the opportunity. This often puts 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 specific 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 using online salary calculators (like those listed above) or other resources.

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 receive an 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 virtual resources at the Mignone Center for Career Success. 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, 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 decide to negotiate, the time to negotiate is after you receive an offer but before you make a verbal or written commitment. Plan to have a conversation in real time over the phone or Zoom. Have notes in front of you, and try practicing beforehand with a friend, parent, alumni or one of our advisers.

Some negotiation guidelines:

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

Maintain Relationships

When you ultimately reach a decision, it's important to remember that it is a small world. The opportunity you don't take today may 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.

What to Do If...

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 your offer meets your needs and expectations. Examine the details, clarify or negotiate if necessary, and accept promptly.
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 to start making decisions. Actively evaluate options against each other and your ideal and don't hold more than one or two 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...	<p>It's acceptable to ask an employer for more time to decide 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 their process. Also be prepared for what you'll do if the employer doesn't give you more time.</p> <p>Note that in the current hiring climate, decision timelines of two weeks are considered reasonable, even when the offer is made far in advance of an actual start date. Contact the Recruiting Team if you have a time-sensitive concern about an offer (recruiting@fas.harvard.edu).</p>
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, attend our drop-in hours, make an appointment with an adviser, or email recruiting@fas.harvard.edu to discuss your options and how best to proceed before contacting the employer.

Remember to consult one of our advisers for guidance, whether you are amid any of the scenarios above or experiencing a unique situation.

Trust Yourself!

In the end, only you can decide whether a job or internship is right for you.