

Preparing for Job Interviews

A Helpful Guide to Entering The Job Market

Preparation

Just as you would study for an important test, you should always take time to prepare for a job interview. From what you wear to what you say, the interview is your chance to highlight your skills and experience and show your potential employer how you fit their company's needs.

Professional Image/Brands

Email and Voicemail

Utilize a professional email address, e.g. jsmith@ku.edu (not beerguy@ku.edu). Emails to employers are an example of your written communication skills. Use proper grammar--don't use slang, abbreviations, text messages, etc. Always proofread before sending. If close to graduation, utilize a non-KU email address instead of a KU email address.

Phone, Text, and Voicemail

Make sure your phone message is appropriate. If you aren't in a setting where you can conduct a professional conversation (e.g., a noisy restaurant) and don't recognize the number, let the call go to voicemail. If caught off guard, or an employer calls at an inconvenient time, politely excuse yourself for a moment or explain that you're unable to talk at this time. Request a mutually agreeable time to call them or have them call back. Make sure your voicemail message is appropriate.

Social Networking Sites

When searching for a job, it's important to remember your online image. Employers often search for information on job candidates. Never post anything you wouldn't take into a job interview or show your grandmother. It's also a good idea to Google yourself to learn what information is out there and correct misinformation if possible. Understand the privacy settings on your social media accounts.

Applications

Many companies require you to fill out an application in addition to the resume and supporting materials you have already submitted. When you're filling out the application, you may be asked whether you have ever been terminated, arrested, or convicted. Read carefully and pay attention to the wording of the question. If an application asks and you don't disclose, it can be considered falsification of records. Being honest will not necessarily jeopardize your candidacy. A possible way to answer a difficult question is, "Yes, details provided upon request."

Professional Appearance

What's the right outfit for an interview? It depends! For example, clothing that would be just fine for a software job interview at a startup would not be considered appropriate for an interview with a large legal firm.

Your best bet is to ask someone in the industry, an employee at the company (or a company like your interview target), or the Career Center for guidance on an appropriate interview outfit. Typically, business professional or business casual attire are best for most interviews (see guidelines below). If in doubt, it's better to slightly overdress than to risk appearing too casual.

Dress for Your Interview

Make a great first impression by looking the part and feeling your best!

Business Professional Attire

For most interviews, wear a two-piece matching business suit. However, rules may vary depending on the industry.

- Two-piece matching suit (pinstriped pants or skirted suits are acceptable)
- Skirts or dresses should be at least knee-length
- Ties should complement, not clash, with your outfit Socks should cover the calf and match your suit
- Wear a plain white shirt underneath a light-colored dress shirt
- Closed-toe and closed-heel dress shoes with low heel height

Business Casual Attire

Business casual attire should be crisp, clean and fit you properly. Business casual is a classic look, not a trendy one. If you would wear it to the bar, a gym, a sporting event, or a cocktail party, it's probably not appropriate.

- Solid-colored V-neck or crew neck sweaters are appropriate.
- Blazers can be worn
- Wear shoes that you can walk in

DO:

- Prepare and set out your clothing the day before
- Turn in early the night before and get plenty of rest Wash, starch, and iron shirts
- Groom your hair and nails
- Polish your shoes, make sure they're free from
- scuffs and dirt
- If wearing cosmetics, practice your look beforehand and run it by a trusted friend

- Find out whether tattoos/body piercings are acceptable for company standards Wear a belt that matches your shoes
- Wear socks that are dark in color and high enough to cover the leg when seated
- Keep mints on hand

AVOID:

- Ill-fitting (too loose or too tight) clothing
- Perfume or cologne (your interviewers may have a fragrance sensitivity)
- Overly casual clothing like shorts, cargo pants, capri pants, tank tops, or crop tops Flip flops, sandals, or tennis shoes
- Excessive jewelry (no jewelry is fine, too!)
- Formal attire
- Smoking before meeting employers

Professional Etiquette

Just like your appearance, your behavior is big part of that first impression. Focus on staying polite, positive, and calm.

- Be nice to everyone, especially the receptionist or greeter; your interview begins as soon as you leave home
- Turn your cell phone off (not on vibrate) and keep it out of sight
- Offer a firm handshake — no one likes a dead fish or a bone-crusher
- Smile, have good eye contact, and speak clearly
- Have 3-5 current event topics available for small talk; avoid negativity and controversial topics such as religion, politics, etc.
- Wait to sit until invited by your host
- Don't chew gum during the interview
- Sit up straight and don't fidget
- Treat employer-sponsored social events as though you're at a job interview – dress and behave accordingly

Company Research

Learning what you can about the company and being able to ask informed questions at the interview will help lift you above the competition and target your communication. Marketing yourself requires knowing how your skills, talents, values, and personality lend themselves to particular jobs. It's easy to:

- Start with the company website. Typically, the "About Us" section of the website will offer insight into the company history, culture, and values. Also, gather information on key products and services. Review recent press releases on their site.
- Check trade journals, LinkedIn, and public sources. Look for information that covers year in business, services or products, competitors within the industry, ranking within the industry, growth pattern, reputation, divisions and subsidiaries, location/length of time established there, size, sales, assets and earnings, projects, number of locations, and foreign operations.

- Utilize your network as they may have some insight into the company with which you're interviewing. Check with KU libraries and your Career Center for resources.

Interview Preparation/Research

- Verify the time and location of where the interview is located. Be sure you have directions for getting there. Account for rush hour traffic, construction, or other delays when making your travel plans.
- Plan to arrive ten minutes early.
- Know the name and title/position of your interviewer if possible. Being familiar with names ahead of time will make it easier to connect in person and will give a more personal touch to the thank you notes you write following the interview.
- If you know who you're interviewing with, learn more about them through their LinkedIn profile.
- It's okay to ask what type of interview will be conducted (i.e., panel, behavioral, case, etc.).

Check with the Career Center for more company research pointers.

The Interview

Interviews can take a lot of different forms — especially today as many people may have a video interview before or instead of an in-person interview. No matter what, you can still be prepared for whatever comes your way.

The Employer's Perspective

The interviewers will have several goals during the interview process. Although they already have basic information from your resume, they want to:

- Confirm your competence (knowledge, skills, and abilities) to do the job.
- Determine if you're a good fit for the company.
- Assess your communication skills—every sentence you speak during an interview provides an example of your verbal communication skills and ability to present information.
- Determine your level of motivation and interest in the position as well as the organization.
- Observe your interpersonal skills and how well you get along with other employees.
- Evaluate your problem-solving skills and initiative.

Answering Interview Questions

Interviews can feel intimidating, but thinking ahead about the most likely questions based off the job description will help you prepare and build your confidence. Employers determine which skills or critical behaviors are necessary for the position and then ask very deliberate questions to determine whether the candidate possesses those skills. Assess which skills the employer is seeking by talking with alumni, reading company literature, and listening closely during the company's information session.

- Always listen carefully to the question, ask for clarification if necessary, and answer the question completely.
- Responses such as, "That's a good question, let me think about that," or "Did that answer your question?" could help make sure you're answering the question.

- Your resume will serve as a good guide when answering interview questions. Be prepared to elaborate on the experience listed on your resume.
- Keep your answers concise but complete. Your answer should take approximately 30 seconds to two minutes, depending on the depth of the question.
- Focus on your strengths and put a positive spin on answers to negative questions. Take responsibility and share what you learned.
- Enunciate, speak clearly, and avoid swearing and slang, or fillers (e.g., “um,” “you know,” “like”).
- If you need to circle back to a question, do so at the end of the interview.

Using AI to Generate Prompts

Feeling stuck? ChatGPT and other AI tools can be a useful way to rehearse interview questions. Some of the following prompts can help you adapt to different scenarios and challenges:

- I’m in [interview round] of [job title] at [company/type of company]. What kinds of questions should I expect?
- How should I be presenting myself/what should I talk about in my experience?
- I’m doing a [case study/technical interview/edit test/presentation] in front of [role of interviewer] for a job interview for [job title] at [company/type of company]. It entails [describe the case study/technical interview/edit test/presentation]. How should I prepare? What should I focus on?
- I’m doing a [case study/technical interview/edit test/presentation] in front of [role of interviewer] for a job interview for [job title] at [company/type of company]. I plan to [describe what your answer will be]. Do you have any feedback to improve my answer?
- I’m doing a job interview with [company/type of company] for [job title] over video. How can I best present myself?

Phone Interviews

- Confirm the time zone for the company and your location. Lawrence and Kansas City are in the Central Time Zone (CST).
- Prepare your telephone area (paper, pen, calendar, and resume) and the location (i.e., hang a sign to warn roommates or other visitors). Minimize noise.
- Get in an interview mindset — it may help to dress as if you’re going to an in-person interview.
- Consider standing up for a phone interview; it may help you project your voice.
- Give brief answers and follow with questions of your own.
- Make sure you’re in a quiet, private place that’s free of distractions. If you need a space, check with your Career Services office.

Web Cam/Pre-Recorded Video Interviews

If the interview is being conducted using video, dress and behave just as though it is an in-person interview—just keep in mind a few extra pointers:

- Test the technology before the interview. Confirm the time zone for the company and your location. Lawrence and Kansas City are in the Central Time Zone (CST).
- Give brief answers and follow with questions of your own.
- Make sure you're in a quiet, private place that's free of distractions.
- Choose an appropriate background that will appear behind you (e.g. a blank wall).
- Dress appropriately—(business casual or better). Color should not blend into the wall behind you.
- Lighting is important. Use lamps if necessary.
- Computer camera should be at eye level. Use books to prop up the camera.
- Camera should be ~3 feet from your face (ensure microphone picks up your voice).
- Look at the camera, not the screen of yourself.
- There may be a slight delay in video transmission—don't talk over the interviewer.
- Check with your career services office if you need space to conduct the interview.
- In addition, during Pre-recorded Interviews:
 - When preparing to interview, time your answers, the pre-recorded interview may cut off within a certain time frame (e.g. 2 or 3 minutes).
 - If you get multiple chances for responses and have time between takes, write down the question so you can review it between takes.

Panel Interviews

Panel interviews are a common interviewing format that includes multiple interviewers asking questions. As a candidate, you will prepare for a panel interview the same way you would prepare for a one-on-one interview. Tips for managing the differences include:

- It's appropriate to ask for the names and job titles or areas of your panel members before the interview. Knowing this information can help you get a sense of how you might answer your interview questions.
- Be sure to look at all committee members when answering a question, not just the person who asked the question or the most senior panel member.
- Get a business card from each panel member and send each person a personalized thank you note following the interview.

Situational Interviews

Situational interviewing techniques focus on what candidates would do in a specific situation. This technique involves questions that describe a hypothetical situation based on challenging, real-life, job-related occurrences and ask the candidates how they would handle the problem. Example: You feel your team is making the wrong decision. How do you handle the situation? Most interviews will contain these types of questions.

Behavioral Interviews

The basic premise behind behavioral interviewing is that the best predictor of future behavior is past performance. Some points to remember when answering behavioral interview questions are listed below.

- Before the interview you need to think of specific examples where you have demonstrated the behaviors sought by the company. Recent examples are preferred.

- Demonstration of the desired behaviors may be proven in many ways. Use examples from past internships, classes, activities, and work experience. In addition, you may use personal examples such as competing in a marathon or running for student body president. Avoid being overly personal (e.g. roommate arguments).
- Your response needs to be specific and detailed. Tell the interviewer about a particular situation that relates to the question, not a general one. Briefly describe the situation, what you did specifically, and the positive result or outcome. The interviewer may probe further for more depth or detail such as, “What were you thinking at that point?” or, “Lead me through your decision process.”
- The question will require you to frame your answer in one of the following ways:

STAR: Situation (when and where did the situation occur; who was involved?), Task (what was the challenge/task?), Action (what action did you take?), Result (what was the result of your actions?); or
A + 1: Answer plus an example

Case Interviews

Case interviews are a specialized style of interviewing that is common for consulting and finance interviews; however, they can be found in any field. Case interviews allow an employer to assess a candidate’s ability to use logic, analyze a situation, and sort through a large amount of information as well as their ability to present recommendations to a group.

The “right” answer is not as important as the process you use when answering the question. Case questions can take several forms such as market-sizing questions, business strategy questions, or business operations questions. There may be industry-specific terms and frameworks that are important to understand with case interviews. Ask a mentor, a trusted contact in the industry, or a Career Center advisor if you need help.

Answering case interview questions can seem very overwhelming. However, students who know they will be getting a case interview question or who have an interview in the areas of consulting or finance are strongly encouraged to contact their career services center for information on the do’s and don’ts of answering case interview questions. Company websites may also provide case interview preparation resources. Check out the eProgram at the School of Business for additional resources to help prep for case interviews.

Technical Interviews

This type of interview is usually conducted by a professional in your field. You may be asked about knowledge specific to your industry. Be prepared to define terms common to your discipline or solve basic problems common in your academic area. You may want to review some of the vocabulary and problems found in basic-level courses in your field. You may be given a brief assignment to demonstrate a skill (e.g. writing a press release, coding, design).

Interview Presentations

An employer may ask you to make a presentation as part of your interview. In most cases, you’ll receive instructions ahead of time detailing the topic and length. Make sure you understand what is expected regarding the topic, format, and length. Determine whether audio-visual elements are required or appropriate. (Hint: if you use AV, be sure it’s done well.)

Research the topic, create an outline, write, and edit. Practice in front of others, timing your presentation and incorporating your visuals. Memorize as much as possible, but make sure

you have a print copy or notes to glance at in case nerves get the best of you or the AV equipment doesn't work. Prior to the interview, confirm the time and location as well as the technology available for your presentation. Arrive early enough to set up your technology and organize your thoughts.

During the presentation, be sure to introduce yourself and make eye contact with your audience, being careful not to focus on just one or two people. Smile, relax, and speak clearly at an easy-to-follow pace. At the end, ask if there are questions and be prepared to answer! Finish by repeating your name and thanking your audience for their time.

Tell Me About Yourself Questions

"Tell me about yourself" is a common opening question in job interviews, and preparation is key. This question provides an opportunity to communicate a succinct overview of what you would bring to the company as well as why you're a good fit and qualified for the position.

Do:

- Keep it to a minute to 90 seconds.
- Focus on how your education and experience led you to this position.
- Highlight how your experiences relate to job qualifications or company values and mission.
- Show you've done your research on the company/job requirements.
- Practice answering "tell me about yourself" with a trusted friend, Career Center resource, or mentor.

Avoid:

- Sharing deeply personal information or telling your life story.
- Going over 2 minutes (watch out, nerves can make a person chattier than normal!). For example:

"I will complete my bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering this spring and both of my senior elective classes align very closely with the skills needed in this position. I have gained hands-on manufacturing experience as well as an introduction to Six Sigma through my internship at XYZ Company. In addition, I have become known for my strong written communication skills; my internship supervisor and two of my professors have complimented me on the excellence of my technical reports. Two summers ago, I had the chance to hone my teamwork and problem-solving skills through an Engineers without Borders project, when I collaborated with six other engineers to design and construct a solar shower for a small village in Bolivia.

I've seen the work that your company is doing with making technology and resources more accessible to underserved communities, and that's why I was interested in this position. I think my qualities and my passion for engineering would be a good fit for a company like yours which values ingenuity and community development.

General Interview Questions

Personal Information

What do you consider to be your greatest strengths and weaknesses? How do you handle criticism?

How do you think a supervisor, friend, or professor would describe you? Why should I hire you?

How do you like to be managed?

What two or three things are most important to you in a job?

Education

Why did you choose your major?

What class did you like best and least? Why?

How has your college experience prepared you for a career with our organization? What are your plans for continued study?

Do your grades accurately reflect your ability? Why or why not?

Experience

What did you like best and least about your last job?

What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction? What experience do you bring to this job?

What have you learned from participating in extracurricular activities? Describe your most rewarding college experience.

Company or Organization Questions

Why do you want to work for this company?

What position in our company interests you the most? What do you know about our company?

Motivation

What are the most important rewards you expect in your career?

Why did you choose this career?

How would you describe the ideal job for you?

What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort? How do you determine and evaluate success?

What salary are you looking for? (Try to avoid answering this until you reach the final interview stage.)

Behavioral Interview Questions

Communication Skills

How have you motivated yourself to complete an assignment or task?

Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see things your way.

Tell me about a time when you had to use your written communication skills in order to get an important point across.

Describe the most significant or creative presentation you have given.

Give an example of a time when you were able to successfully communicate with another person even though that individual may not have personally liked you (or vice versa).

Sometimes employees must communicate sensitive or unpleasant information to customers or other team members. Describe a time, in a work setting, when you had to communicate unfavorable information to someone.

Adaptability/ Stress and Time

By providing examples, convince me that you can adapt to a wide variety of people, situations, and environments.

Describe a time when you had to function in a new environment that was different from one you had functioned in previously.

How did you adapt?

Describe a time when you were faced with a stressful situation that demonstrated your coping skills.

Tell me about a time when you had to work with competing priorities or an excessive workload.

Give me an example of a time when your schedule was interrupted. How did you react to this?

Tell me about a situation when you had to learn something new in a short time. How did you proceed?

Give me a specific example of a time when you did not meet a deadline. How did you handle the subsequent situation?

Leadership/Personal Effectiveness

Give an example of an important goal you set and tell about your success in reaching it.

Tell about a time when you went above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.

Describe a time when you decided on your own that something needed to be changed, and you took on the task to get it done.

Give me an example of a time when you tried to accomplish something and failed. How did you deal with the failure? What did you learn from the experience? What would you have done differently?

Give me an example of a time when you motivated others. Tell me about a time when you delegated a project effectively.

Tell me about a time when you missed an obvious solution to a problem.

What are three effective leadership qualities you think are important. How have you demonstrated these qualities in your past/current position?

How have you motivated yourself to complete an assignment or task that you did not want to do?

Tell me about a time when you constructively dealt with disappointment and turned it into a learning experience. What was the situation? What factors led to the disappointing outcome? What did you learn from this situation? What would you do differently if you had it to do all over again?

Give a specific occasion in which you conformed to a policy with which you did not agree.

Teamwork

Tell me about a time when you had to work with a difficult co-worker or customer.

Describe a situation in which you were part of a team and not everyone was doing their share. How did you handle the situation? What was the result?

Tell me about a team project in which you're particularly proud of your contribution.

Decision Making and Problem Solving

Describe an instance when you had to think on your feet to resolve a difficult situation.

Give a specific example of a time when you used good judgment and logic in solving a problem.

Describe a time when you anticipated potential problems and developed preventative measures.

Tell me about a time when you were forced to make an unpopular decision.

Give me an example of a time when you could not make a decision because you did not have enough information?

How did you handle the situation? What was the result?

Describe a situation in which you had to make a decision involving an element of risk. What was the outcome? How comfortable were you in making the decision?

Describe a creative solution you have developed. How did you do it?

Illegal Interview Questions

Any questions in your interviews should strictly relate to your ability to do a particular job. However, you may also encounter illegal questions in an interview. The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) guidelines defines illegal questions as those that open a company up to a discrimination lawsuit. Questions that center on any of these topics should stand out as a red flag in an interview:

Your age

Race, ethnicity, or skin color

Gender or sex

Country of national origin or birthplace

Religion

Disability

Marital or family status or pregnancy

For example, illegal job interview questions may sound like:

Do you have kids or want kids?

Are you a U.S. citizen?

What does your partner do for a living?

Are you from a mixed-race background?

Will you need personal time for religious holidays outside of the regular ones?

Have you been arrested?

Do you socially drink?

When was the last time you used illegal drugs?

Respond to these types of questions: “My _____ is not an issue for my performance for in this position.” Ask your Career Center support staff if you have more questions about this.

Questions to ask Employers

You should always prepare a few questions for employers— it shows interest in the company. These questions can be written down and taken to the interview with you. Your questions should not be the type that could have been answered by doing very basic research. Be aware that some interviews have very strict time limits (such as 30 minutes), so don't ask too many questions.

Questions About the Company

What expansion is planned for this department/facility? What are your growth projections for next year?

What is the largest single problem facing your staff (department) now?

Do you fill positions from the outside or promote from within?

What do you consider to be your organization's three most important assets? Tell me about your company's culture.

What is unique about the way this company operates?

Questions About the Position

Please expand on the duties of the job for me. What is a typical day like?

What kinds of assignments might I expect the first six months on the job?

What are the potential career paths within the company? Has there been much turnover in this job?

Is this a new position or am I replacing someone?

What is the person doing now that previously held the position?

What qualities and skills are you looking for in the candidate who fills this position?

How much team/project work is involved in this position? Will I have the opportunity to work on special projects?

Where does this position fit into the organizational structure? How much travel, if any, is involved in this position?

What happens during the training program? Tell me about the workspace.

What are the goals/priorities for this position in the first six months?

Personal Questions

What do you like most and least about working for the organization?

Can you tell me about your own experience with the organization?

What does it take to advance in this field?

Wrap-Up Questions

What is the next course of action? When should I expect to hear from you or should I contact you?

What is your timeline for extending an offer?

Questions on Salary

Let the company initiate salary discussions. Some experts suggest deferring salary discussions if they come up early in the interview process, but always be prepared by knowing the appropriate salary range.

When asked for salary requirements, suggest to the recruiter that you would like to discuss this topic after exploring the nature of the position and your qualifications. If pressed, try to get the recruiter to state a range first.

“Based on my research, I expect to earn a salary that is appropriate for my skills and qualifications — what is the range that the company has in mind?”

See your career services center for more information on salary negotiations.

Get a business card or contact information from every person at the interview

After the Interview

Post Interview Etiquette

Thank You Note

Always send a thank you note within 24 hours after an interview. Thank you notes can be typed, handwritten, or emailed. However, keep in mind your goal is to help employers have one more positive contact with you before they make a hiring decision, so in the essence of time, emailing may be the most efficient.

Some employers prefer an emailed version as it can be forwarded to others on the hiring committee. If you choose to hand-write a note, you may want to email a short thank you and follow it up with a longer, handwritten note. Your thank you note can help to emphasize your fit for the job or provide additional information such as pointing an employer to an online portfolio of your work or a website containing further job-relevant information.

Who you address the thank you note to depends on the interview situation. If you interviewed with several people, have contact information for each person, and are able to remark on something you discussed with each person, you may want to send a separate, personalized note to each interviewer. If, on the other hand, you interviewed with several people but find that your thank you note would be the same for each, It's OK to address the committee as a whole in one thank you note sent to your main contact.

Sample Thank You Email

Subject: Thank you

Dear Assistant Director White,

I wanted to thank you very much for interviewing me yesterday for the software developer position. After meeting you and learning more about Data Systems, I am even more impressed with the advanced technologies employed by your company.

I can say I am more enthusiastic about this position after the interview. As I discussed with you, my past two summer positions were related to the development and design of software programs for corporate accounting applications. With my skills and interest in software design, I believe I could make a significant contribution to your company, and I would appreciate the opportunity to do so.

I want to reiterate my strong interest in the position and in working with you and the Data Systems team. This is exactly the kind of opportunity I am seeking after my graduation. If I can provide any further information, please let me know.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Jay Hawk jhawk@ku.edu 555-555-5555

TIPS

Greeting

- Use the recipient's position title, i.e. Dr., Director, or Supervisor--avoid gendered titles like Mr., Ms., Mrs., or Miss

First Paragraph

- Express your sincere appreciation for the interview
- Keep the letter warm and friendly, but professional

Body

- Reemphasize your strongest qualifications
- Draw attention to the match between your experience and the requirements for the position

Last Paragraph

- Reiterate your interest in the position
- You may offer to provide information not previously given
- Express your appreciation

Signature

- Sign with Sincerely or Respectfully
- Leave one blank line
- Type your first and last name

Employer Follow-Up

If an employer has not gotten back to you within the time frame discussed, it's appropriate to contact the employer to follow-up on your status. If a time frame was not mentioned, wait two weeks after the interview to follow-up. Keep in mind that employers may be very busy meeting other work responsibilities — it's important to limit the frequency of follow-up contacts to avoid annoying the employer. If you're not sure whether it's appropriate to call, ask your Career Center.

Job Offers

Receiving an Offer

An offer for employment is typically delivered over the phone or email by your primary point of contact through the recruiting process. Be sure to thank them for the offer and clarify when you need to provide a decision. Don't instantly accept the offer because there may be multiple factors to consider, but be sure to acknowledge receipt of an email.

Example:

"Thank you for the offer. I am excited about this position and the opportunity to work for your company. Of course, this is a very important decision for me and I will need some time to think it over. May I get back to you with my decision?"

In addition to a verbal offer, you should request and receive a written document outlining the details of the employment offer as well as associated benefits. Bonus or relocation details and associated stipulations may also be included. Be sure any changes or exceptions are noted in the written document before signing.

Don't accept an offer and continue the job search.

If you would like to continue interviewing with other companies, ask for a deadline extension. Talk to someone in career services for guidance.

Evaluating the Offer

There are many issues to consider when assessing a job offer. It's not unusual for new questions to emerge as you evaluate an opportunity. Now is the time to ask the potential employer about these issues — and to do some checking on your own.

Before you make a decision you might regret, make the effort to get clarification. You can get in touch with the recruiting contact, an alumnus that works for the organization, career services staff, or a current employee to provide you with the information that you need to make the best decision for you.

Ask About Restrictive Covenants Before Signing Job & Internship Offers

Organizations hiring new employees for internships and jobs might ask new hires to sign restrictive covenant agreements, such as non-compete and nondisclosure agreements – often on the first day of employment.

Students should consider asking about any restrictive covenants before accepting a job offer and have such agreements reviewed by KU Legal Services for Students. For example, during the offer discussion process, students could ask, “Many companies have non-compete and confidentiality types of agreements that employees sign when they actually start work – is it possible to get a copy of those now?” Please note that students must be currently enrolled at the KU Lawrence campus to be eligible for KU Legal Services.

Factors to Consider in an Offer

A candidate rarely gets everything he or she wants in a job offer. Consider which factors are most important to you and which ones you would be willing to give up to get what you want most. Think about what you would like to have in a job several years in the future.

- Salary and benefits
- Job/industry stability (including turnover and layoffs)
- Physical work environment
- Geographic location/possibility of relocation
- Personally rewarding work, impact on society
- Opportunities to travel
- Level of responsibility/autonomy
- Size of the organization
- Non-profit vs. profit/public vs. private
- Nature of supervision
- Fit with co-workers
- Telecommuting/flex-time
- Opportunity for advancement

- Work hours
- Ability to use skills and be challenged
- Training and development

Calculate Your Yearly Expenses

It's important to have a basic understanding of how much money you will need. If you plan to move to another geographic area, be sure to factor in the difference in cost of living. Check out the New York Times "Where Should I Live" project, or Area Vibes to learn and compare specific areas.

Here's a list of items to help you get a realistic idea of your expenses.

Rent or mortgage

Health insurance

Vision insurance

Dental insurance

Life insurance

Disability insurance

Medical expenses

Medications

Car payments

Car insurance

Student loan payments

Miscellaneous loan payments

Homeowners' association dues

Electricity

Utilities (gas, propane, etc.)

Water

Homeowner's/renter's insurance

Property Tax

Phone

Internet

Cable/Satellite

Gas (for your vehicle)

Public transportation

Groceries

Entertainment

Clothes

Miscellaneous Expenses

TOTAL EXPENSES

Understanding Benefits and Total Compensation

Wait until you have received a job offer before discussing or asking questions about salary and benefits. Total compensation includes your base salary plus the value of the benefits package and is a factor that must be carefully weighed. Benefits can increase your compensation by up to one-third of your salary. Here are some common compensation benefits—make sure you understand all the requirements and restrictions before accepting an offer.

- Insurance premiums and coverage (medical, prescription, dental, vision, life, disability, flexible spending)
- Paid time off (PTO): vacation, sick/disability leave, family leave (maternity, paternity, or family leave)
- Retirement plans (check if you're eligible immediately, or company match options) Stock options and profit-sharing
- Bonuses for signing, holiday, productivity
- Relocation expenses (check if there are stipulations for paying this back) Tuition reimbursement
- Reimbursement for advanced degrees, licensures, or student loan payback plan Hybrid/remote work
- Professional memberships/professional development opportunities Expense accounts
- On-site child care
- Company car, mileage allowance, parking
- Technical allowances (cell phone, personal computer)

Negotiating the Offer

Receiving an Offer

Negotiating an offer is an acceptable way to possibly improve your salary and benefits before starting a new job. Here are some guidelines for when and how to negotiate your pay and benefits package before starting a new role.

Consider negotiating:

- Once you have the offer letter in hand. The interview is not the time or place to do it. The letter will include the figures being offered.
- If you know your value. When negotiating your salary, you can't just pitch a number. You need grounds for your counteroffer.

Avoid negotiating:

- When applying for a government job: unless the salary is significantly lower than your state's average for that position, this is unlikely.
- Government employers do a fairly good job at providing great benefits and fair pay that is usually fixed and commensurate on experience.
- If it's a genuinely generous offer: if the benefits and pay package offered are competitive and meet your needs, leave it as-is. You may have found a great company that truly appreciates your potential, and you shouldn't risk it by asking for more.
- If an employer says, "this is the best we can do" or "this is our final offer": any further attempts to negotiate will likely result in a rescinded offer.

Developing a Strategy for Negotiation

Grounding yourself in objective research is essential to preparing for your negotiation. Here are six steps to benchmarking your salary and benefits.

1. Research and identify a comparable job title. Start by researching the salary offered and whether it's in-range with state and national averages. The Bureau of Labor Statistics can provide you with this information when searching by job position. Glassdoor, Payscale, and Indeed can also offer valuable resources for finding average pay.
2. Find the salary range and establish your target salary
3. Identify your target salary range
4. Create a realistic budget
5. Determine your resistance or "walk-away" point
6. Determine the value of your benefits

Salary Negotiation Tips

- During the negotiation process, reiterate your excitement about the offer. Be gracious before elaborating on the concerns that you would like addressed.
- Research typical salary ranges for the nature of the work and the geographical area before asking for more money. Current economic factors such as hiring demand and availability of candidates will influence your worth to an employer.
- Don't bring your personal financial obligations into a salary discussion. The organization is not concerned about your expenses or debts and will not consider these issues in determining a fair salary for you.
- Be able to articulate your strengths so there is no question what value you can offer to an organization.
- Your value to the company can come from experience, specialized knowledge, or certifications/license relevant to the job. A peer's higher offer is not sufficient reason to negotiate your offer. Salaries differ from company to company and from industry to industry; plus, a certain skill set may be more in demand at the current time.
- Understand that your negotiation requests may be denied. Decide which of your requests are "deal breakers" and which are on your "wish list".

- If your negotiation requests are accepted, you're expected to accept the job with no further negotiation.

Salary Negotiation Biases

As 2023 research from Harvard University shows, some people, especially women or people with marginalized identities, may not feel comfortable negotiating salary because it may run contrary to deeply ingrained gender and social roles. As a result, you may be losing out on valuable earnings over your lifetime.

Negotiation doesn't need to feel antagonistic or aggressive. Instead, consider negotiation as an opportunity for a "win/win" for you and your employer. Here are a few strategies for overcoming negotiation biases:

Salary Negotiation Biases Contin.

- Practice negotiating with a Career Center resource or a trusted mentor.
- Know the market ranges for the job title and consider the other benefits/perks that would be important to you.
- Bargain as though you're negotiating on behalf of someone else.
- It never hurts to ask — sometimes the answer is "no," but you don't know what you can get if you don't ask.

Handling Multiple Offers

Weigh all of the factors. Create a pros and cons list outlining the comparative aspects of each opportunity. Analyze the list according to what is most important to you. You might be tempted to accept the higher paying offer, but many other factors will impact your career satisfaction. If the opportunities seem genuinely equal, look inside yourself, keeping in mind what is really important to you.

Coping with Rejection

If you get the dreaded rejection letter, it's okay to feel disappointed. Give yourself some time to grieve and then move on. Spend some time analyzing the process and what you could do differently in the future. Review your resume and reflect on the interview. Consider your presentation, including preparation, interview attire, body language, nervous habits, and answers to the questions. Also remember that you may not know your interviewer's priorities — internal candidates, funding changes, or anticipated layoffs are common reasons for rejection and have nothing to do with your performance.

Consider reapplying. In some industries it's common to apply several times before your application is successful. A one-time rejection is not always a permanent rejection. You may want to ask for feedback about your interview or what the protocol or timeline is for reapplication.

Turning Down an Offer

Be tactful and timely when declining an offer for employment. It's very important not to "burn bridges behind you." Be sure to indicate any aspects about the recruiting process or organization that you enjoyed or appreciated. Decline the offer verbally and in writing.

For example:

Thank you for offering me the position of Business Assistant with XYZ Company. Your organization's reputation for exemplary customer service was reflected in the courtesy and professionalism provided to me throughout the interview process. However, after careful consideration, I have decided to accept another position that aligns more closely with my skills and interests at this point in my career. Thank you again for the opportunity to interview and learn more about your organization. I enjoyed meeting you and the other members of the sales team.

Accepting the Offer

Get the final offer in writing. Sign a copy for the employer and keep a copy for yourself. Thank your references and others who have assisted in your job search. Report your offer to your Career Center.

Congratulations! You're Hired!

The "Preparing for Job Interviews" guide is part of a series. Get a copy of the "Resumes, References and Cover Letters" and "Strategies for a Successful Job Search" guides at your career service office.

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