

YOUR FIRST JOB

Tips for landing a job & negotiating effectively

JOB ACQUISITION: A CRITICAL CAREER STEP

Obtaining your first job after graduation is a crucial step in your overall career trajectory. Understanding how to approach your search, what to discuss in your interviews, and how to appropriately handle job offers helps to establish your footing in the professional world. Landing a job can be broken down into four basic steps: researching, contacting, interviewing, and negotiating. Letter is evidence of you as a professional and as a prospective employee.

RESEARCH + STRATEGY

Researching potential employers is invaluable in the job search. Having an adept understanding of a firm's scope of work, values, and office culture not only gives you topics to discuss during an interview, but also helps you determine if you would be a good fit based on your skills and interests.

Start identifying potential recommenders early. Several jobs require a list of references or recommendation letters. Consider this: Can a former professor or supervisor comment effectively on your skill set if you ask him or her to write a letter years later? Establishing a habit early of asking those who know your abilities well for recommendation letters will help craft a comprehensive picture of your value when you enter the professional world.

Be selective with your references. Be sure that those you choose to use as references view you in the most positive light. Hiring managers can sense when someone is hesitant to recommend a potential candidate, which can actually hurt your chances at employment! Choose people that not only know you well, but who are also eager to recommend you.

Strategy also includes your application materials. If you are applying for a design position that requires you to show your design work, preparing both a portfolio and a set of work samples is ideal. See our Work Samples vs. Portfolio Guide for the differences, uses, and values of each.

You are unique - and so is the employer! Resumes, cover letters, and even portfolios and work samples are fluid documents that should be tailored specifically to the company to which you are applying.

EMPLOYER CONTACT

There is never a wrong time to reach out. Even if a firm is not hiring, scheduling an informational interview or office tour can work to expand your network. Not only that, but the people you meet are often willing to point you in the direction of an available opportunity within their network.

"To whom it may concern" is not a contact! Always strive to address a specific individual. This may require due diligence on your part, such as researching contacts on websites or LinkedIn, calling the firm's HR department, or reaching out to alumni within the UTSOA network. Even if the individual you contact is not responsible for hiring, they will most likely know who is and can facilitate an introduction.

Exercise brevity and efficiency. Most employers recommend attaching your application materials as PDFs but try not to exceed 10 MB. Attempting to transfer large files over email can be problematic. Avoid sharing your entire portfolio as an attached PDF until the employer asks you to do so.

INTERVIEWING: MAKING THE MOST OF AN OPPORTUNITY

Interviewing also requires research and strategy. Gather information on the salary ranges for different firm sizes and median wages for the position to which you are applying. Having a good understanding of a typical range aids in negotiating when you receive a job offer.

Gather as much information about your interview beforehand. If you are not provided with details about your interview, such as the name(s) of your interviewer(s) or whether or not the interview will be conducted individually or within a group - ask! This can help you to better prepare your materials.

Consider your presentation strategy. If your interview is in person, always print out extra copies of your application materials to share or leave behind. If you will be interviewed by more than one person, consider alternative portfolio presentation strategies that maximize your interview time, such as an unbound or hybrid portfolio. See our Work Samples vs. Portfolio Guide for more information on how to make a physical copy of your work that is unique to you and your presentation abilities.

Interview at multiple firms. Though you can discern a lot about a company's culture and values from their website, the best way to determine if you are a good fit is to interview! Interviews will give you a much better idea about your potential job role, introduce you to various team members, and give you the chance to see how employees function day-to-day. If you are visiting a city for an interview, set up meetings with other employers to maximize your time.

Never negotiate during an interview. If pressured to give salary requirements, give a range derived from your research conducted beforehand. Do NOT accept an offer on the spot - always give yourself time to consider whether or not you and the employer are a good match.

FOLLOW-UP & NEGOTIATION

Always follow up! After an interview, following up with a thank-you note or email is the best way to reinforce your interest in a position while being courteous and respectful.

If offered a position, set up a call to discuss your offer. Refer back to your salary research and, if necessary, conduct additional research to determine what a fair offer looks like for the position you have been offered.

Be fully aware of personal factors that affect your quality of life. Understanding the costs of living in a city, factoring in potential student loans or monthly payments, and accounting for other costs like food, transportation, and travel are important tools to help you justify the higher salary you are seeking.

When countering, as a general rule add 10-15% to your initial offer. Be sure to be prepared to articulate why you think you are worth the additional 10-15% based on your skills, experience, and needs. While the employer may not meet you all the way, they could come back with another offer that at least exceeds your initial one.

Salary is not the only component. While salary is an important factor when deciding whether or not to accept a job offer, consider other monetary benefits and how they add to the value of the overall employment package. Insurance coverage, 401K contribution, bonus structure, over-time policy, and licensure/certification exam reimbursement are just a few items to consider. Don't mistake a high-salary offer for the best possible value!

Each offer is different. Reach out to Career Services at any stage of your job acquisition process to ask questions and get tailored advice on how to negotiate effectively!