

TOP 3 TIPS FOR RESPONDING TO JOB INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ABOUT SALARY HISTORY AND SALARY REQUIREMENTS



How can you make sure that you are properly compensated for your skills and experience without scaring off potential employers? Well, the answer lies in understanding the natural tension point that exists between job seeker and potential employer. Job seekers correctly want to get the best compensation possible while employers want to give you the least amount that will not make you an immediate retention risk. This is the dance that all job seekers and employers eventually have to perform.

Here's the key: Pick the proper time to perform the dance. Compensation negotiations should be one of the last steps in the hiring process. Ideally, you want to have that negotiation at the end of a successful interview (successful in this case means that both parties feel like the other side is a good fit).

But what if the employer is asking directly for salary history and/or salary requirements? Let's take the salary history first. Why does an employer want your salary history? It's simple: They want the advantage when the compensation dance happens. They'll use what you've made in the past to limit what they offer you.

It's really never in your interest to provide salary history. So, here's your game plan for handling this request (in this order):

1. **Try to opt-out of the request.** Politely contact the potential employer and suggest that it really makes a lot more sense for both sides to wait and discuss compensation after coming to a mutual agreement on fit.
2. **Try to defer giving the information.** On your resume (for this job only), add a section that indicates: "Full salary history to be provided at interview."
3. **Provide the information only if stated as a requirement for application.** In this small case only, you'll want to identify the salary for each work experience you detail on your resume. Always use the highest salary point for the position. So, if you started a job at \$35,000 and ended it at \$38,000 then state the \$38,000.

Salary requirements are a little different. Here the potential employer is asking you to specify what you want to make. Sounds great, right? But, remember that you want to have the compensation dance once you have access to the most information (after one or more interviews). Setting a salary requirement earlier is self-limiting and again gives the employer a negotiating advantage. The game plan for salary requirements is very similar:

1. **Try to opt-out of specifying a salary requirement.** The same message you made for the salary history request can do double-duty here.
2. **Try to make a general statement.** If salary requirements aren't absolutely required for application, then add a statement to your cover letter that says "Salary is negotiable dependent on actual job responsibilities and other compensation." This will tell them you are a smart job seeker who understands that overall compensation (which might include paid training, 401(k) matching, etc.) is more than just salary.
3. **Provide the information only if stated as a requirement for application.** In this case, specify a salary range on your cover letter to meet the requirement. Make the lower bound the minimum you'd accept to take the job and get the upper bound from the ranges you can find at any of many online salary sites. Make sure it is appropriate for the job and location.