

How to negotiate for your career

Negotiation skills are important to career success because they help you establish working relationships and achieve objectives. This guide will help you prepare to negotiate.

Purpose of negotiation

Negotiation is a strategic discussion, between two or more parties, to reach an mutually agreeable outcome. The negotiation process requires exploring the art of persuasion, compromise and agreement.

How to negotiate

Whether negotiating for business needs, contracts or salary you must be prepared, confident and respectful. Negotiation can take anything from a few minutes, to weeks. This is dependent on the complexity of the negotiation and the people involved.

Getting prepared

Before entering any form of negotiation, it is important to think about what you want to achieve from the process.

- **Organise yourself:** Write a list of reasons for your negotiation. For example, when negotiating a salary, think about the impact your living wage has on your personal life.
- **Top scale:** When introducing your 'terms', aim for the top. You may find you are asking for more than the employer or business partner is willing to give. From here you can be realistic and negotiate down using your evidence of worth.
- **Be specific:** Always ask for specific details. For example, a salary of £20,850 plus benefits, rather than £21,000. The benefits package may be greater than the added £150, resulting in a better outcome for you.
- **Walk away:** It is never easy to let go of a negotiation; however, you must have a 'walk away point' if a beneficial compromise can't be reached. You should choose the right moment to use this option. Walking away can be powerful and may help the other party to reflect and re-negotiate.
- **Timing:** Do not rush your responses when negotiating. You could make errors and come across unprepared. Reply by saying "Thank you for the offer. I would like to read through the contract and will get back to you in a couple of days". This gives you time to review their proposal professionally. If you want to give a relaxed approach towards negotiations, reply on a Thursday or Friday.
- **Practice your pitch:** If you are negotiating on email or in person, rehearse, and prepare your notes on one page.
- **Receiving a negative response:** If the negotiated offer does not meet your expectations, you need to decide if it is right for you. What are the advantages and disadvantages of taking the proposed deal?
- **Outcome:** Once you have reached an agreement, make sure it is in writing and signed by both parties. This should protect you and will ensure there are no changes.

In any negotiation you need to know your value.

Do your research, this will provide evidence for your argument. Speak to specialists, recruiters or peers for advice, they know the market and trends.



Laura Manrique Martinez, Eeva Erkinjuntti and Lu Hua Zhang working together in the Studio, Case study, © Ivan Jones.

Styles of negotiation

Negotiating in Person

Negotiating in person generally happens in business and project collaborations. Prepare by making notes and researching.

- **Meeting arrangements:** Confirm the date, time, location, attendees' names, and their titles for your meeting. It is beneficial to have the key 'decision-maker' present to avoid any delays in reaching an agreement.
- **Presence:** Prepare your outfit, stance and expressions before attending your meeting. Body language is important! Ask friends or colleagues to get constructive feedback.
- **Entrance:** Arrive approximately 10 minutes early and walk confidently, with a smile.
- **Start with questions:** Ask detailed questions at the start, to understand their needs and priorities. For example, "What are your biggest priorities right now?" - This can help you build your negotiation terms and show your value to the other party.
- **Your abilities:** When negotiating, discuss your achievements, experience and capabilities. This will remind the other party of your value.
- **Focus on the future:** It is better to focus on the future, rather than the past. For example, if you are commissioning work do not discuss previous project payments. Your current rate reflects market value, new skills, and responsibilities.
- **Audience:** Know your audiences' perspective, it will help you understand their proposal and allow you to make a reasonable counteroffer.
- **Do not be pushy:** Negotiation may be scary but be kind and firm with your proposal. Respectful behaviour shows professionalism.
- **Listen:** Listening carefully to the other party, you need to understand them to reach a compromise when negotiating. Take the time, listen, and if you do not understand anything ask them for an explanation.

Negotiating by Phone

If a negotiation is taking place over the phone, adopt an enthusiastic tone of your voice. Extended pauses can imply hesitation, but a quick response will show an interest in the offer and a decision can be made.

Where possible, prepare a script before having the conversation. All discussions should be followed up in writing to confirm the agreement.

Negotiating by E-Mail

When negotiating indirectly through email, there are certain phrases or language that can determine how you come across.

- Words or phrases can be interpreted in many ways and indicate that you are open to a proposal. Look to use specific words like: can, possible, perhaps, maybe, or acceptable.
- If the other party uses phrases like "Awaiting your reply" or "looking forward to it," it could be a sign of enthusiasm.
- If you receive a first offer or a counteroffer, include their suggestions within your ideas, to reach an agreement.
- Finally, request a formal contract in writing, reflecting the terms agreed.

Phrases to use when negotiating

- “I want to thank you for the offer of (…position/business support/products) from (…company name).”
- “What’s the most important issue for you to solve?”
- “Before formally accepting the offer, I would like to discuss the (…basic salary, product cost, business deal) you’re proposing.”
- “I am excited by the opportunity to work together.”
- “Based on my research…”
- “Is that number flexible at all?”
- “I would be more comfortable if…”
- “Do you mind if I take a couple of days to consider your offer?”
- “Regarding your proposal, how do you feel about…”
- “I have some reservations about that…”
- “If I understood you correctly…”
- “Could you clarify one point for me?”
- “That sounds reasonable…”
- “From where we stand an acceptable price would be…”

Useful Links

- Forbes: How to negotiate effectively
- Business of Fashion: How to navigate contract work
- New York Times: Guide to Salary Negotiation
- UAL Careers and Employability: Career resources



Zoe Zanon Rives in the studio, London College of Fashion, Fashion: Buying and Merchandising. © Alys Tomlinson.