

NEGOTIATING SALARY AND BENEFITS

*A Guide
for Digital Learning Experts*



You know negotiating your salary and benefits is a good idea. Maybe you've even seen the statistic that people who negotiate are able to raise their salary by more than 7%. Even so, you're still uncomfortable with the process. And you're not alone. Negotiation can leave even the most confident digital learning expert second-guessing themselves.



**Equip yourself
with the tools to
confidently
negotiate a
competitive salary
in the digital
learning industry.**

You probably have all kinds of excuses for not negotiating. You don't know how to bring it up. Plus, talking about money makes you uncomfortable. And asking for more money makes you feel greedy. After all, you didn't choose the learning industry because you wanted to get rich, right?

Before you talk yourself out of earning what your skills are worth, read this guide. It will help you harness your fear of negotiation so you can ask for the salary you deserve.



IDENTIFYING YOUR ISSUES WITH NEGOTIATING



GET SPECIFIC ABOUT YOUR FEARS SO YOU CAN TAKE STEPS TO DEAL WITH THEM.

If you're like most people, just reading about negotiating your salary might make your heart race. Which of these issues are you facing?

YOU DON'T DO IT OFTEN. New experiences and situations can trigger anxiety, and most people don't negotiate often enough to feel completely comfortable. **Solution:** Practice what you'll say or draft emails ahead of time.

YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOUR SKILLS ARE WORTH. If you're not sure what others in your industry are making, it's hard to be confident that your request is reasonable. **Solution:** Research salaries for people with your training and experience.

YOU'RE DEALING WITH MONEY HANG-UPS. Many of us are taught from a young age that it's rude to talk about money. Asking for money might make you feel greedy or ungrateful. **Solution:** work on your mindset around money.

Get specific about your fears so you can take the steps to deal with them before negotiation time rolls around. You'll find strategies to address each of these issues throughout this guide. But first, let's acknowledge the biggest fear many people have about negotiating salary.

THE OLIVER TWIST REACTION

For many people, the fear of negotiation centers around how the employer will react. They picture something like the scene from the musical *Oliver!*, where young Oliver Twist asks for more stew. In response, Mr. Bumble, the official who runs the poorhouse, screams, “More?!” in a tone of utter disdain and disbelief.

LET'S TAKE A REALITY CHECK



Your new employer is not a crooked official running a Dickensian charity. They're a professional running a business.

They want employees who are happy to do the work and are satisfied with their compensation for doing so. Negotiation ensures that everyone gets what they need out of the relationship.



**NEGOTIATION ENSURES
THAT EVERYONE GETS
WHAT THEY NEED OUT
OF THE RELATIONSHIP.**

Even if your request is higher than anticipated, employers are unlikely to walk away without at least trying to work with you. They've invested time and resources into getting you this far in the interview process. They've seen the value you can bring to their team. Negotiating toward a mutually acceptable wage is in their best interest as much as it is in yours.



WHEN TO START NEGOTIATING

Your negotiation starts from the moment you apply to the job. No, that doesn't mean you should include your desired salary in bold letters at the top of your resume. It means that you should start thinking about the negotiation process from day one.

Questions of salary may arise at any time during the interview process. Be prepared to gently refocus the conversation if you're not yet ready to offer a number.



Use phrases like:

- First, I'd like to understand the responsibilities of the position and how I will be contributing.
- This is a great organization and I trust that you'll make a fair offer.

Successful salary negotiations are based on the value you can bring to the team. Start proving that value from the first contact.

The formal negotiation process begins after the employer has offered you the job. That's when it's time to have The Conversation. In many cases, this conversation happens over email. So relax. You won't have to write down an offer on a slip of paper and slide it across the table to a frowning HR manager.

HOW THE PROCESS WORKS:

- 1** You complete the interview process and the employer calls to offer you a job. Congratulations!
- 2** They send you an offer letter outlining salary, benefits, and other terms of employment.
- 3** You review the letter and respond with a counter-offer.
- 4** The employer reads your counter-offer and either accepts it or counters with an offer of their own.
- 5** This process continues until you reach an agreement, or one of you decides to walk away.

BEFORE THE NEGOTIATION: HOW TO PREPARE

The right preparation boosts your confidence and breaks down some common fears around negotiation. Work through these steps before you get the offer letter.



1 LEARN YOUR WORTH IN THE MARKETPLACE

You have a unique mix of skills, education, and experience, which bring value to whatever organization you choose to work with. But, pricing your contributions in the marketplace requires some research.

Here's how to find out what your skills are worth:

- **Use online salary research tools** like Glassdoor, ZipRecruiter, and Salary.com to get a sense of what people with your job title make in your area.
- **Check reports** like the Global eLearning Salary & Compensation Report from the eLearning Guild. Keep in mind that these types of reports may lag behind actual salary levels because they're looking at data from the past few years.
- **Look for insights from industry experts.** Some digital learning experts share their experience in blogs, podcasts, or other content. Look for surveys that mention salary levels for your role.
- **Talk to recruiters and talent placement professionals.** Recruiters may interact with dozens of employers every month. Discuss your experience with them to get a sense of what that skill set is worth in the marketplace.

2

CHOOSE YOUR NUMBER

Your research will probably reveal a salary range that makes sense for your skills and experience. Don't stop there. Pick a specific number that fits your needs and potential contribution. Let's break this down.



**A SPECIFIC NUMBER
SHOWS YOU'VE DONE
THE RESEARCH AND
UNDERSTAND THE
VALUE OF YOUR SKILLS
IN THE MARKETPLACE**

HOW TO CHOOSE YOUR NUMBER

Say your research revealed that instructional designers at your experience level make between \$60,000 and \$90,000 per year.

You have a few years of experience under your belt and some useful certifications. So you'd like to make at least \$75,000.

Instead of asking for your minimum acceptable salary (\$75,000) focus on a number at the higher end of the spectrum. Say \$80,000.

Then make it specific: \$80,213.

Why? Because specific numbers show you've done your homework. They let the employer know that you didn't just pick a number out of the air, you've put effort into understanding your worth in the marketplace.

3 BE WILLING TO WALK AWAY

Now that you've done all that research, you probably have a much clearer idea of what a competitive salary looks like. Which means you won't be happy with one that doesn't recognize the value you bring. Even though it's unlikely, you may come across an employer who doesn't have the budget to pay you fair market value. In that case, you have to be willing to walk away. Know your minimum and prepare yourself to politely pass on the offer if necessary. If you keep your composure. The employer will likely remember you as a talented person who got away. This helps leave the door open to future opportunities.



**KNOW YOUR MINIMUM
SALARY NUMBER AND
BE PREPARED TO WALK
AWAY IF NECESSARY**

4 PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE

Say the phrase: "I am seeking an annual salary of _____." If hearing it out loud makes you cringe, keep practicing. Say it to your significant other. Tell your dog. Repeat it in the mirror. Keep saying it until you feel confident.

Of course, your negotiation might happen over email. So it's a good idea to have a negotiation letter ready to go. Take the time to refine and revise it with a cool head before you even see the offer letter.

DURING THE NEGOTIATION: THE BIG ASK

Whether the negotiation happens over the phone, in person, or through email, you'll need to be prepared to evaluate the offer and any counter offers.



EVALUATE THE OFFER

Read the offer letter carefully. Make sure you fully understand the terms of the agreement. As you evaluate, remember that the value of an offer is about more than just the salary. Benefits like health insurance, retirement funds, investments, and even free parking might be worth more than an extra \$100 in your pocket.

Then again they may not be. If raises are based on percentage of pay, a higher starting wage could translate to thousands of extra dollars over the course of your career. Think about the true value of the offer.

Answering the offer may feel urgent, but you have time to think. Sleep on it. Discuss it with your significant other or a trusted friend. Then decide whether to take the offer or negotiate.

INCREASING YOUR SALARY: TIPS FOR NEGOTIATING A RAISE



- Keep a brag sheet so your employer can easily see what you've accomplished.
- Check in before promotion season comes around. If you wait until the week of your performance review, raise decisions may already have been made.
- Point out ways that you've gone above and beyond or taken on new responsibility.
- Keep personal issues (kids, divorce, debt, etc.) out of the conversation.
- Focus on your market value and the value you bring to the organization.



STRUCTURING A NEGOTIATION LETTER



PARAGRAPH 1

- Thank them for the offer.
- Mention the position and location.
- Reiterate your excitement about the role.

PARAGRAPH 2

- Introduce the negotiation. A phrase like “Before I join your team, I’d like to discuss compensation,” is clear and confident.
- Tell them what annual salary or benefits you’re looking for.
- Briefly mention the skills, training, or experience that qualify you.
- Reference the research you’ve done.

PARAGRAPH 3

- Offer a follow-up conversation, and mention when you are available.
- Provide your contact information.

PARAGRAPH 4

- Thank them for the opportunity.
- Close on a positive note.



Your letter should be confident but not adversarial. Remember, this is a conversation, not an argument.



IN-PERSON NEGOTIATIONS

The same structure works for an in-person negotiation as well. Start by thanking them. Mention your skills, training or experience, and then make the ask. At the end of the conversation, thank them again and leave the door open to a continued conversation.



MOST IMPORTANTLY: STAY PROFESSIONAL

Negotiating salary and benefits can feel like a high-stakes situation. It's easy to let your emotions run away with you. Remember to stay polite and professional. Think of the negotiation as a continuation of the job interview. You want to get the compensation you deserve, but you're also starting a new relationship.



Keep the energy positive and resist the urge to apologize. Phrases like "I'm sorry to ask this" have no place in a negotiation conversation. Remember that you're working together toward a mutually beneficial agreement. There's nothing to apologize for.

Since negotiations are about your mutual interests, don't use personal reasons to justify your salary figure. Student loans, increased rent costs, and other financial pressures are your personal concerns. Unless they're work-related, like relocation costs or parking fees, they're not relevant to the negotiation. Instead, focus on the value you bring to the team.

If you enter a negotiation with an open mind and the goal of a mutually beneficial agreement, you may just find that negotiating is easier than you thought.



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