THE ADULTING VAULT

Salary Negotiation Scripts

Word-for-Word Language for Asking, Countering, and Not Backing Down

EVERYTHING THEY FORGOT TO TEACH YOU

Most people do not negotiate, and the reason is rarely that they think the offer is fair — it is that they do not know what to say and are afraid the offer will be withdrawn. This guide solves the first problem and puts the second in perspective. It is mostly scripts: how to deflect the expectations question, how to counter, what to say when they say the number is final, and how to ask for a raise when you have no competing offer. Every one of them is designed to be said out loud by someone who is nervous.

Please Read This First

This guide is general educational information, not financial, tax, or investment advice. It does not account for your individual circumstances. Nothing here is a recommendation to buy, sell, or hold anything. For decisions with real consequences, consult a qualified professional.

CURRENCY OF THIS GUIDE

This guide covers negotiation technique. It is not financial, tax, or legal advice, and it cannot tell you what any particular role is worth. Employment law differs by state and country — including whether an employer may ask your salary history, and whether pay ranges must be disclosed. Verify your local rules before relying on anything here, and read any contract in full before signing it.

Part One: Before You Say Anything

Negotiation is mostly preparation. The conversation is short.

The fear, addressed

The most common reason people accept a first offer is a belief that negotiating might cost them the job. In practice, a rescinded offer over a polite, reasonable counter is rare — the employer has already spent weeks and real money selecting you, and restarting is expensive for them.

What is genuinely common is the opposite: accepting immediately, then spending two years earning less than the person hired after you, because starting salary compounds through every subsequent raise.

> **THE ASYMMETRY WORTH HOLDING ONTO**
>
> Downside of a polite counter: mild awkwardness, and occasionally a no.
>
> Downside of not countering: a permanently lower base that follows you through every raise, bonus calculation, and future offer at other companies.
>
> These are not comparable risks.

Know three numbers

Number	What it is
Your walk-away	The figure below which you would decline. Decide it in advance, in writing, before any conversation. This is the only thing preventing you from talking yourself into a bad offer in the moment.
Your target	What you actually want. Should be researched, not invented.
Your ask	What you open with — above your target, because negotiation moves downward. Not absurd; defensible.

Research

- Salary aggregator sites, filtered for your location, industry, and company size — treat as a range, not a figure
- Job postings for similar roles. Many jurisdictions now require posted ranges, which is free market data

- People in the role. Ask "what range would you expect for this kind of position?" rather than "what do you earn?" — the indirect version gets answered far more often
- Recruiters, who will often tell you the band for a role they are filling
- Professional associations, which frequently publish salary surveys

My walk-away	My target	My opening ask	Evidence for it

Part Two: The Expectations Question

Asked early, designed to anchor you low. Here is how to handle it.

Whoever names a number first sets the anchor everything else moves around. So the aim is to get them to name it, without being evasive enough to be irritating.

Deflections, in order of preference

- "I would rather understand the scope a bit better first. What range have you budgeted for this role?"
- "I am flexible for the right opportunity. What does the band look like at your end?"
- "I would rather not anchor either of us this early. Is there a range attached to the requisition?"

When they insist

Some recruiters will not move without a number, and continuing to dodge starts to cost you goodwill. Give a range, with your target at the bottom of it.

- "Based on what I have seen for similar roles, I would be looking at somewhere in the region of X to Y, depending on the whole package."

> **TWO RULES FOR THAT RANGE**
>
> Put your target at the BOTTOM. Employers hear the bottom of any range you give as your actual number, and will offer it.
>
> Attach "depending on the whole package" so the figure is not treated as a commitment.

If they ask what you currently earn

This question is prohibited in a number of jurisdictions precisely because it perpetuates pay gaps. Whether or not it is legal where you are, you do not have to answer it.

- "I would rather focus on the value of this role than on what I was paid previously."
- "My current package is not really comparable to this position. What range are you working with?"

Part Three: The Counter

One conversation. Warm, specific, and unhurried.

First, do not accept on the call

Whatever the offer, do not say yes immediately. Sound pleased, ask for it in writing, and buy time.

- "That is great news, thank you. Could you send the details in writing? I would like to look at the whole package properly."
- "Thank you — I am genuinely excited. Can I come back to you by Thursday?"

Almost every employer will grant a few days. Anyone who pressures you to accept on the spot is telling you something about how they operate.

The counter script

> **APPRECIATION, ENTHUSIASM, NUMBER, JUSTIFICATION, SILENCE**
>
> "Thank you for the offer — I am really pleased, and I want to make this work."
>
> "Based on the scope of the role and what I have seen for comparable positions, I was hoping for something closer to [number]."
>
> "Is there flexibility there?"
>
> Then STOP TALKING. The silence is uncomfortable and it is the most effective part of the script. Do not fill it, do not soften it, do not start negotiating against yourself.

Specifics that strengthen it

- Name a specific figure rather than a range at this stage. Ranges get answered at the bottom
- Tie it to the role, not to your needs. "Given the scope" works; "because rent has gone up" does not
- Stay warm throughout. This is a joint problem-solving conversation, not a confrontation
- Ask once, properly. Repeated rounds erode goodwill quickly

When they say the number is final

Sometimes it is. Move to everything else, which is frequently more flexible than base pay because it comes from a different budget.

- "I understand the base is fixed. Could we look at a signing bonus to bridge the gap?"
- "If the salary is set, would you consider a formal review at six months with a defined target?"
- "Is there flexibility on additional leave?"
- "Could we revisit the title? That matters for where I go next."

Everything that is negotiable

Lever	Notes
Signing bonus	Often the easiest yes — one-off, not recurring cost. Check any clawback if you leave early
Review timing	A written six-month review with a defined target is worth real money
Title	Free to them, valuable to you, and affects your next offer elsewhere
Leave	Frequently more flexible than salary
Remote or flexible working	Has genuine monetary value to you; costs them little
Start date	Extra unpaid weeks between jobs are worth something
Professional development	Certifications, conferences, tuition support
Equity or bonus target	Where applicable, sometimes more flexible than base
Relocation or equipment	Small, often granted, and easy to forget to ask for

Part Four: Asking for a Raise

Harder than negotiating an offer, because you have less leverage and more history.

Timing

- Well before budget cycles are set, not after — by review season the money is usually already allocated
- After a visible win, while it is fresh
- When you have taken on scope beyond your original role
- Not during a hiring freeze, a bad quarter, or a week when your manager is underwater

Build the case first

An offer negotiation is about market rate. A raise is about evidence. Bring a short written record of what has changed since your salary was set.

What I have delivered	Measurable result	Beyond my original scope?

The script

> **SET THE MEETING PROPERLY**
>
> "I would like to put some time in to talk about my compensation. Can we do that this week?"
>
> Do not raise it in passing, at the end of a one-to-one, or over instant message. The framing signals how seriously to take it.

Then, in the meeting:

- "Over the past year I have taken on [specific scope] and delivered [specific results]."
- "Based on that, and on what I have seen for comparable roles, I would like to discuss moving my salary to [number]."
- "What would it take to get there?"

That last question is the important one. It converts a yes-or-no into a plan, and a manager who cannot say yes can often say "here is the path."

If the answer is no

- "I understand. What would need to be true for this to be possible in six months?"
- "Could we set specific targets, and agree to revisit it then?"
- Get whatever is agreed in writing, in a short follow-up email, the same day
- If the answer is no with no path, that is real information about your future there

Part Five: Mistakes

Do not	Because
Accept on the call	You lose all leverage the moment you say yes
Give a number first if you can avoid it	Whoever anchors first shapes the range
Give a range with your target at the top	They will hear the bottom and offer it
Justify with personal need	It invites judgement about your finances rather than about the role
Bluff a competing offer	It can be called, and it ends badly
Negotiate over instant message	No tone, no silence, and easily forwarded
Apologise for asking	"Sorry to be difficult" tells them you expect a no
Keep negotiating after a yes	Goodwill is finite and you will spend the first month repairing it
Accept anything verbally without written confirmation	Verbal agreements evaporate when the person who made them leaves

If you genuinely have no leverage

Sometimes you need the job and both of you know it. Negotiate anyway, but move quickly to the non-salary levers, and ask for a review date in writing. A defined six-month review with agreed targets is a real outcome and costs the employer nothing today.

Part Six: Closing It Out

- Get the final package in writing before resigning from anything. Base, bonus structure, start date, title, leave, and anything you negotiated
- Read the whole document, including notice period, clawback on any signing bonus, and any non-compete or non-solicit
- If something you agreed verbally is missing from the letter, ask for it to be added before you sign. Now is the easiest it will ever be
- Accept warmly and in writing. The negotiation should end with both sides pleased

What did I not ask for that I wish I had? Write it down for next time.

Closing

Negotiating is uncomfortable mainly because it is unfamiliar. It is a normal, expected part of hiring, employers budget for it, and the people who do it well are not more confident than you — they simply have a script and have decided their number in advance.

Do the research, write down your walk-away before you speak to anyone, ask once, warmly and specifically, and then stop talking. That is the whole method.

THE FOUR LINES TO REMEMBER

"What range have you budgeted for this role?"

"Could you send that in writing? I would like to look at the whole package."

"I was hoping for something closer to [number]. Is there flexibility there?" — then silence.

"What would it take to get there?"