

Questions to Ask When Receiving an Academic Position Offer

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Once you start interviewing, keep this list below with you. These are the kinds of questions you want to have answered. Following an interview, answer as many of these questions as you can from what you learned. Use that information to perception-check when you receive a verbal offer.



What should I do when an offer comes?

Most offers come via phone. Listen carefully to the offer, show enthusiasm, ask questions, and ask about their timeline for a decision. If you have done other interviews or have other offers, let this school know and give them a sense of where you are in the process. If you have interviews scheduled and want to complete those, let the school making the offer know what the timeframe is. They will not wait forever and you may or may not be able to do all interviews. That is always a tough decision, but not an uncommon one to have to make.

What is included in an offer?

Most offers will be verbal, so take good notes. Ask questions and perception-check. Contact the school as more questions arise. You may or may not get anything in writing until negotiations are done and the contract is finalized (every school is different). Sometimes you will receive a draft letter to look at. At the end of the process, you will receive an offer letter that should detail salary, rank, when you come up for tenure, expected teaching load, start date, start-up funds and/or funds to help with the move. Check the letter very carefully and make sure it conforms to your understanding.

What is the timeline for a decision?

While most schools will want a quick answer, most of the time you will have 5-7 days to give them an answer. You do not have to make snap decisions about anything. It is your right to take some time, think, call an advisor, etc. However the reality is that decision time is usually limited. Go ahead and call the other schools you are waiting on and let them know you have an offer. Find out where they are at in the process. It is important to note that once you accept an offer, it is unethical to reverse that commitment.


Should I negotiate?

You may want to negotiate once you have an offer. Do not undersell yourself, and at the same time, be reasonable. Take into account the school and locale, cost of living, and the salaries of similar others at the institution (salary information from public institutions should be in the university budget in the library or on the web). You may negotiate salary, and may be able to negotiate start up costs, and issues such as first year teaching load or, at times, moving funds. Most people do not try and negotiate in too many of these categories, so chose wisely. Negotiate early in the process. Do your research and develop arguments (e.g., you may have an offer in City X and City Y has a cost of living that is higher). Mentors can be very helpful with this process. Do not negotiate unless you are serious about the job.

What if I take another position?

If, during the interview and offer process, you take another position, let all of the other schools know immediately, especially when you are on a short list or have an interview or offer pending. If during the job search process, you decide you are not interested in a particular school, let them know right away. It is better to cancel out of the process rather than use their time and money going on an interview (not to mention your own resources). If you know you will not accept an offer, let the school know right away.

We are a tight-knit discipline. Treating others well is especially important and is, of course, the right thing to do. Our advice is to get advice! Talk through the offer and process with your mentor(s).

Download a copy of the quick guide of the questions you should ask to help negotiate your contract. 

This article was originally published in the following: Braithwaite, D. O. & Braithwaite, C. A. (October 2007). Questions to ask when receiving an academic position offer. *Spectra*, 43, p. 6.