

How Do You Handle a Salary History Request?

When an employer requests a salary history to be submitted with a resume, many job seekers find themselves at a loss. If you're a student and your employment "history" is primarily part-time, co-op, internship or volunteer positions, the problem is compounded—obviously, you want to make considerably more in your full-time job! No job seeker wants to price him- or herself out of a job, but most do not want to give the employer the opening to offer less than the going rate for the position.

Your response to a request for a salary history is best handled in your cover letter. Respond to the question well toward the end of the letter, after you've highlighted your skills, experience, and interest in the position, which are far more important to your consideration as a candidate.

Here are some tips:

Do...

- **Respond to the question positively without stating specific amounts.** (Examples: "I'm earning in the low 30s." "As a student, my jobs to this point have been geared toward gaining experience and making money to cover my educational costs.")
- **Mention your desired salary**, either saying that salary is negotiable depending upon the position or giving a \$3-5,000 range (if you know the market value for the position and for someone with your skills and background). You may also use terms like "competitive" or "open" if you are responding to this question on an application form.
- **Know your salary requirements** as well as what you hope to make. You shouldn't mention these in your response to the salary history question, but you need to give this some thought for when you get to the negotiating stage.
- **Be prepared to respond to a request for previous salaries in an interview.** It can be handled by responding without stating specific amounts (see tip #1). Avoid specific amounts if at all possible.
- **Prepare a list of your positions** (in reverse chronological order) for your own reference and just in case an employer in which you are very interested is absolutely adamant. (This will not happen often!) The list should include name of each company or organization, your position title, your compensation, and a brief synopsis of your position.

Don't...

- **Include your salary history on your resume.** What you did in a job is much more important than what you were paid.
- **Lie about your previous pay rate.** Employers can often verify your salary history through your reference checks.

If it is any consolation, this is a difficult question for all job searchers to handle, not just new college grads! The key is to shift the focus, politely but firmly, from what you made in the past to what you expect to make in the future.