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# Online job application: How to respond to salary requirement

**W**hen completing an online job application, how many times have you come to the point on the application where you were asked to type in “salary requirement” or “desired salary” and you were not quite sure what to put there? In the next few paragraphs, I will share with you some food for thought coupled with advice from several leading career strategists.

Keep in mind why a company is asking for a salary requirement. Let’s quickly define “salary requirement.” It is the amount of compensation a person needs to accept a position. This base amount usually depends on your industry, position, work experience, cost of living and salary history, as appropriate. Companies generally request salary requirements for a variety of reasons, including salary range budgeted for the position, corresponding benefits package and/or an attempt to get the best for the least amount of money. If your salary requirement is too high, employers can screen you out because you are too expensive; they don’t want to pay you that much or waste anyone’s time. On the other hand, if you are coming in low and under-shooting the average salary for the position, you could be undervaluing yourself and telling the employer you have not done your homework and are unprepared. With that being said, I suggest you put a good deal of thought into what the “magic” number will be.

There are numerous risk versus reward factors to be considered. Attorney Shauna C. Bryce is a leading

expert in career development, transitions and portfolios for lawyers. She suggests you enter \$0, \$1 or \$10 (minimum number you can) or \$999,999 (or highest number you can); it will be clear you’re not answering the question or purposely avoiding the question. Unbelievably, this strategy has worked in many situations. However, you can be taking the risk of being screened out for not following instructions and properly responding to the question.

It would be great if you could enter a salary range or terms such as “flexible” or “negotiable.” In fact, many applications are now explicitly telling you not to write in these terms. Actually, most online forms are set up so you can only put in a number, or on occasion, there may be a drop-down selection.

So how do we determine an acceptable number? Career coach and author of the book “Negotiating Your Salary: How to Make \$1000 a Minute,” Jack Chapman provides an interesting strategy. He recommends entering a “single number in a box with an asterisk” tactic (for example, \$55,000\*). Then, once in the interview, you can quickly clarify the amount with the “asterisk” before the salary question is brought up. The key here is you do have to decide on the number you are going to use with or without the asterisk. This process will involve conducting research to find your number that won’t be too high or too low and will screen you “in” to the interview rather than screen you out. Of course, once you are invited

to the interview, always be prepared to negotiate.

I suggest you learn as much as possible about the position and corresponding salaries from local and industry sources, colleagues, friends, job sites such as Indeed.com and Glassdoor.com, and online salary calculators. Salary calculators can provide comprehensive information for positions you’re interested in, as well as give you insight on your current job. Here are a few that should be valuable to your research:

- Glassdoor.com’s Know Your Worth Tool provides a free, personalized salary estimates based on current job markets.
- Indeed Salary Search offers salaries and comparisons.
- Salary.com provides free salary reports covering U.S. and Canada markets.
- LinkedIn Salary is free for LinkedIn users and provides median salaries for job titles in specific locations throughout the U.S.
- PayScale.com’s Salary Survey generates a free salary report with salary ranges and evaluates job offers.

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