

Choosing Among Job Offers

First things first

First, make sure you know enough about the organization, the job, and the details of each offer to weigh one offer against another. If you lack information, seek it out by asking the employer, researching the organization, and talking to others who work at or are familiar with the organization or job. Ask your career services staff if they have had feedback from past students who have taken jobs with the organizations you are considering, and check to see if your career office has an alumni adviser to help you make contact with alumni working for these organizations.

There is no perfect formula for making your decision, but one of the best ways to begin is by making a list of all of the features that are important to you in your first job. These may include such items as the type of work you'll be doing, the organization's reputation/prestige, training program, salary, specific benefits, location of job, opportunity for advancement, work environment, opportunity for free time (evenings and weekends), opportunity for travel, colleagues with whom you'll be working, and so forth. Add every possible item you can think of to your list.

What matters most?

After you have all the features on your list, rank them in order of their priority to you. For example, type of work may be most important to you, followed by salary, and then specific benefits.

Next, look at each job offer you are considering, and rate the features of each using a scale of one to five (with five being excellent and one being poor). For example, if ABC Company's offer provides a great starting salary, you'll most likely give that feature a "5" under ABC. If XYZ Company's offer provides a lesser starting salary, XYZ might earn a "3" rating for salary. (See the sample below.)

After you have finished rating all the features for all your offers, add up the scores for each offer. Although this is an inexact science, it is a way to demonstrate which offer provides you with the most of whatever features are important to you.

Weigh your options carefully

In the final analysis, remember to weigh carefully what is most important to you. Don't be unduly swayed by the job title or the prestige of the organization and how it will impress your relatives. While it is helpful to get advice from family and friends, you are the one who will be going to work every day. You need to be sure that your job will be a good experience for you and will allow you to achieve your initial goals. Remember, though, that no job is perfect or able to meet all your needs. Consider the factors that you are willing to compromise on or have met in other ways. For example, if you enjoy travel and your job provides little opportunity for it, you can use long weekends and vacations for this interest.

Nothing is forever

Keep in mind that while you want to make the best possible decision at this moment in time, your decision is not irrevocable. The odds are great that you will not remain with your first employer for your entire career. As you progress in your career, you will continue to learn which features are of highest priority for you (your priorities will also probably change with time) and how to find the best opportunity to have these priorities met. Good luck!

Sample Rating Sheet for Multiple Job Offers

Feature (in order of importance)	ABC Company	MNO Company	XYZ Company
Challenging work	4	5	4
Advancement opportunities	3	4	2
Medical benefits	5	5	5
Salary	5	3	5
401(k) retirement plan	4	4	3
Dental benefits	4	4	4
Training program	3	4	4
Life insurance	4	4	3
Job location	5	4	4
Workplace environment	4	3	4
Opportunity to travel	4	2	2
Tuition reimbursement for grad school	5	4	1
Total Rating:	50	46	41

Create your own list of features that matter to you and list them in order of importance, with the most important feature appearing at the top of your list. Then, rate the features of each company's offer on a scale of one to five (five=excellent; 1=poor). In the sample to the left, the offer from ABC Company has the highest rating, indicating that ABC's offer provides more of the features that matter to the sample job seeker. This is one way to compare job offers.

by Marcia B. Harris and Sharon L. Jones. Courtesy of the National Association of Colleges and Employers.

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