During a tough economy, it's sometimes necessary to negotiate in reverse, or take a job at a lesser salary. When negotiating a salary in any economy, there are four things **you should know**:

- Your Value
- The Market
- The Business
- What's Important

1. Know your value

Conduct a benchmark salary survey of what your colleagues and peers make today. Assess your skills, experience, competencies against the benchmark.

Salary Survey Options:

Salary Survey	Description
STC and STC DC www.stc.org www.stcwdc.org	Annual Salary Surveys conducted by national society and local chapter. Survey is conducted among the active membership. STC survey provides national data, as well as local data by zip code. STC has three surveys (Technical Communicators, Independent Contractors, Academia). All surveys are available to STC members. Washington DC chapter provides local data and includes both annual salaries and hourly rates.
Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) www.bls.gov/oco/ocos089.htm	Occupational Outlook compiled by the Dept. of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. It provides employment outlook, current training and skills requirements, and annual earnings (from 2002).
Office of Personnel Management (OPM) www.opm.gov/oca/04tables/indexGS.asp	General Schedule (GS) Local Pay Tables for government employees. 2004 salary information is organized by locality. Lists GS Grade (15 grades) and Step (10 steps). GS level depends on position. In general, Technical Writers fall between GS 11-12; Management could fall into GS 13. Advancement in Step is based on performance and expertise.
Salary.com www.salary.com	National and local compensation information by job. Documentation Specialists and Technical Writers are listed in the IT-Computers, Software job category.

2. Know the market

Be realistic about the market and employer's expectations. Although the outlook is better, there are still a lot of technical communicators available. Many people are looking to move up or back into writing after taking "compromise" jobs that were outside of their interest, geographic area, or salary.

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Before you begin sending resumes, do a thorough assessment of your comfortable compensation package. Consider the following items as part of the package:

- Annual Salary
- Health/401K Benefits
- Commute
- Flex Time
- Telecommuting Options
- Free Coffee, Soda, Snacks
- Conferences and Training Opportunities
- 40-hour Week
- Holidays

When looking for a job, be prepared to give an expected salary range. The low end of your range should be the minimum salary that you can comfortably accept. The lower end can be combined with options like more flex time, telecommuting one day a week, or no required overtime. The high end should be a realistic, ideal salary that would make you quit tomorrow.

Convincing reasons for taking a salary cut

Think long and hard before taking a salary cut of more than 10%. Employers will want to know convincing and realistic reasons why you will take a cut. Some reasons are:

- Ability to work normal hours – translates to your average hourly rate will increase for a 40 hour week vs. a 50 hour week.
- Shorter commute, ability to telecommute, paid parking – could mean less out of pocket money for auto, parking, clothing expenses.
- More creativity, new skills, growth – could mean higher job satisfaction
- Better benefits – could mean more money in your pocket.
- Ownership, stake, position title – could mean higher job satisfaction and perhaps more money.

3. Know the business

When negotiating salaries, it's helpful to understand the employer's point of view.

Business 101: Understand your position on a business' financial statement. Here are two examples of where a technical communicator falls on a company's bottom line.

Type of Business	Technical Communicator's Role
Software Developer	Tech communicators are considered as either Overhead or General/Administrative (G&A) costs. Your cost (salary, benefits, training, etc) are figured into the total cost of the item sold (i.e., software product).
Consulting Firm/ Government Contractor	Tech communicators are most likely considered as Direct Labor. Your hours are directly billed to a client. Your cost is based on an expected number of hours that you will bill (~1980 hours/yr). Your salary is based on an amount that the company will bill for your services, usually negotiated in advance and for a longer period of time (1-5 years)

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What does this mean to you? With a software developer, perks can include a higher salary or more training ramp-up time. With a consulting/contract firm, you may have more telecommuting opportunities, longer employment terms, more government holidays.

Hiring Manager 101: Employers are interested in your value to their company and/or their customer. How can you and your experience bring value, help them get business, or help them lower costs? How do your skills and expertise compare to your peers? Employers **are not** interested in how paying you a higher salary will help you pay your rent.

4. Know what's important

Things to determine before salary negotiation:
- Your value
- Your budget
- Your desired salary range and bottom line
- The type of company you want to work for
- The technical communicator's role in that company

Things to remember during salary negotiation:
- Your value
- Salary is a part of a complete package, it's not all dollars and cents
- It's a small community – don't burn your bridges or be unprofessional