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# Getting Bids and Evaluating an Estimate

## Advice on How to Make Sure Your Bids Are Complete

By [Bob Formisano](#), About.com Guide

### Getting Bids and Evaluating an Estimate

This is an extremely important aspect of successfully hiring a Contractor. Let's break it down into sections and address each one.

#### The Scope of Work:

This defines what the contractor is doing for you. Make sure it covers all the things you want completed. It should also spell out any preparation work, protection of surrounding areas, clean up, etc.

**Reviewing the scope of work between contractors is an essential element of evaluating their bid estimate.** Here are some things to watch for in the scope of different contractors:

- **Painter:** Describe how they are preparing the surface. This step makes or breaks a paint job. Define if they are hand scraping all loose paint (best), power washing the exterior (be careful as this can damage surrounding areas and you must wait for the wall to fully dry before proceeding with work), priming (best), spot priming (OK). Define the coats of paint, brand, quality, etc. Make sure they protect surrounding areas and clean up any debris.
- **Landscaper:** No matter what they say, no matter how much they pooh-pooh this issue, **make sure they understand you want your shrubs and root balls of your trees planted below the ground.** DO NOT ACCEPT them making a shallow hole, then placing the plant in it and surrounding the root ball with a mound of dirt and mulch. Make sure they remove the wire around the root ball or untie the twine and place the root ball fully in the ground until only about 6" extends above ground. Also make sure they guarantee the installation and life of the plant for a specified period of time. Understand your responsibilities for watering.
- **Roofer:** Roofs rarely leak from shingle failure, they leak from FLASHING FAILURE. The stuff you typically can't see is where water gets in. Make sure they specify where flashing is used. Be concerned and review how they flash an outside corner of a chimney or wall. On a brick home, it's best to cut the brick joints for the flashing and then seal the joint. This is much better than nailing the flashing to the brick wall and relying on caulk. If you live in a cold climate, make sure they install a rubber ice / water shield along the entire edge of your roof extending from the roof's edge to at least 24" past the exterior wall. Make sure they protect your plants and shrubs and clean up any debris daily.
- **Plumber:** If possible, try to negotiate a fixed price for their work. Cleaning out a clogged drain is often priced on a "per foot" basis of the "cleanout snake" used, but some plumbers give a fixed price for this work. I highly recommend you pre-select a drain cleaner for emergency drain cleanouts. Expect to pay a premium price though for emergency calls.

## **What “Is” and “Is Not” Included in the Bid**

Sometimes a contractor must make allowances or assumptions in their bid, such as material quantity, access to your home, etc. Also, they will sometimes specify what they exclude in the bid. Carefully review assumptions and exclusions with the contractor. Question them as to the reasonableness of any assumptions and exclusions. Do it in a nice way, but do it. If not, these items will likely become a Change Order later. When you are evaluating and comparing bids between contractors, assumptions and exclusions highlight where you have an apple and an orange.

## **Contractor Representations**

Here I’m just concerned with the contractor’s willingness to put in writing any of the verbal representations he or she has made to you to get the job. If they have made oral commitments but won’t put them in writing, that’s a REJECT.

## **Price**

Look for a contract price that is well broken down, clear and easily understood. If it is unclear then they have not taken the time to understand your requirements, the scope of work, or the job. I would not necessarily make the selection only on price.

## **Incentives**

It is extremely important that the contractor NOT offer you a discount or cash incentives for immediately signing the contract.

## **Contract Payment Terms**

Try to be invoiced by mail after the work is completed, but expect most to want payment right after work is done. If they want cash, that’s not a great sign. If materials were needed before work can start (e.g., roofer or painter), they want an initial payment for materials. Try to minimize this amount as much as you can. I don’t recommend you ever pay more than 33% up front and ONLY agree to that with a very reputable company.

## **SUMMARY:**

I hope this overview provided useful information on successfully hiring, managing and working with contractors. Don’t be afraid to ask for help from one of these pros when needed. That’s their job 7 days a week.

**Sometimes it’s just fun to watch someone work on your house and take the weekend for yourself!**