

**CURRICULUM RESOURCE**

Workplace Skills, Strategies, and Know-How: Collaboration in the Workplace

**OALCF ALIGNMENT**

Competency	Task Group	Level
Competency A - Find and Use Information	A1. Read continuous text	2
Competency A -Find and Use Information	A2. Interpret documents	2
Competency A -Find and Use Information	A3. Extract information from films, broadcasts and presentations	2
Competency B - Communicate Ideas and Information	B1. Interact with others	1
Competency B - Communicate Ideas and Information	B3. Complete and create documents	2

**Goal Paths (check all that apply)**

- Employment
- Apprenticeship
- Secondary School Credit
- Postsecondary
- Independence

**Embedded Skills for Success (check all that apply)**

- Adaptability
- Collaboration
- Communication
- Creativity and innovation
- Digital
- Numeracy
- Problem Solving
- Reading
- Writing

**NOTES:** Part three of an eleven-part series on workplace norms for employed learners.

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## WORKPLACE SKILLS, STRATEGIES, AND KNOW-HOW

### Note for practitioners:

This series of **Skills for Success Curriculum Resources** is a beginner's guide to the modern workplace for LBS learners. The goal is to provide essential tools to employed learners, or learners seeking employment, so that they can thrive as employees. This series considers personal development topics ranging from conflict resolution to time management; topics focused on changes in the workplace; and mental health issues like stress management.

The overall focus of the series is on helping employees (or aspiring employees) understand their rights and responsibilities.

These resources are learner-based and activity-focused, with each topic area serving as a mini-lesson, followed by personalized activities. The activities invite learners to respond to lesson material or explore their own ideas on the subject.

The series is divided into eleven sections that can be used separately or in tandem:

- Your Rights in the Workplace
- Adaptability in the Workplace
- Collaboration in the Workplace
- Communication in the Workplace
- Creativity and Innovation in the Workplace
- Problem Solving in the Workplace
- Work-Related Stress
- Time-management
- Conflict Resolution
- Self-Advocacy
- Changes in the Workplace

# WORKPLACE SKILLS, STRATEGIES, AND KNOW-HOW: Collaboration in the Workplace

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Overview .....	4
Collaboration in the Workplace: Introduction .....	5
Skills.....	11
Benefits.....	13
Strategies to Try .....	15
Final Thoughts .....	22

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*This is Section Three, Workplace Skills, Strategies, and Know-How:  
Collaboration in the Workplace*

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## Overview

Are you currently employed? Are you about to start a new job? There are many things about the modern workplace that you may not know.

This resource series is designed to help you get the most out of your employment.

When you have a job, there are several important questions you should ask:

- What are my rights?
- How can I advocate for myself?
- How should I expect to be treated on the job?
- What are the expectations at a modern workplace?
- What has changed at workplaces over the last few years?
- How can I be my best at:
  - conflict resolution
  - time-management
  - communication

You may also face other challenges on the job. Do you have concerns about:

- stress on the job
- mental health at your workplace

This resource series will consider these topics and more. Participate in the lessons and activities, and you will learn to get the most out of the modern workplace.



## Collaboration in the Workplace: Introduction

### What is collaboration?

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**Collaboration** means:

working effectively with others.

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Collaboration is the skill of being a good member of a team. It means learning what it takes to work well with others. Developing strong collaboration skills is essential when you become part of a workplace. It's a way to make yourself a valuable teammate and get the support you need from those around you.

Collaboration at work might mean:

- helping your co-workers with a group task like unloading a truck
- covering a shift for a co-worker who needs it
- participating at a staff meeting
- supporting new co-workers if they have questions or concerns
- working with co-workers or managers to solve a pressing problem

This resource will discuss collaboration in the workplace. It will teach you how to improve your collaboration skills.



**Let's discuss!**

Write your answers or discuss with your teacher or group.

1. What was the best team you have ever been part of?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What did you like most about being part of a team? List all the parts you liked.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. What did you like least about being part of a team? List all the parts you disliked.

Check the boxes that apply to you:

- I feel uncomfortable or ignored in a group.
- I struggle to get along with others.
- I am a people person.
- I love connecting with new people.



Are you in a different situation? Discuss with your teacher or group.

## Making Connections

Collaboration involves connecting with others. It's impossible to work together unless you connect on some level. This can be challenging. It might mean working with people who are very different. They may have different ways of doing things. They may have different beliefs or opinions.

They may also have different races, genders, ages, or religions.

So good collaborators work on their **interpersonal** skills. "Interpersonal skills" is another way of saying "people skills." Some important people skills are:

- acceptance
- understanding
- forgiveness
- compromise

We'll discuss how to build these skills using building blocks like patience and politeness. It's important to do so because interpersonal skills help you work with all different sorts of people.

It doesn't mean putting up with bad behaviour. That's never okay. It means accepting people's differences. And it means getting to know people better. And getting to know others is one of the keys to collaboration.

**New Task!**

Getting to know you.

1. Get together with a partner or in a small group.
2. One at a time, go through each of the pairs on the list below.
3. Afterward, discuss what you learned about each other and what surprised you.

**Which do you prefer?**

Tea or coffee

Apples or bananas

TV or video games

Car or bike

Train or airplane

Being scared or embarrassed

Hanging out in a group or hanging out one-on-one

Being a leader or a follower

Being super smart or super rich

Funny movie or scary movie

**If you had to give one up, which would you choose?**

Breakfast or dinner

Spring or summer

Cheese or chocolate

Pasta or pizza

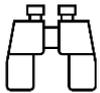
Day or night

Cats or dogs

## Extroverts and Introverts

It's harder for some people to connect with others. **Extroverts** tend to be outgoing and talkative. They have an easier time making connections or meeting new people. **Introverts** tend to be shy and like time to themselves. They find it more challenging to be in a group and make connections.

Even shy employees must learn to work well with others. Both introverts and extroverts should develop their interpersonal skills. But introverts often have to do something else. They have to step outside of their comfort zone and be brave in group settings.



Let's look at an example.

D is one of many people hired to work at a new Walmart. All the new staff must attend three training workshops. They must study the Walmart employee handbook and write a test.

The manager suggests that the new staff work together in groups. They can help each other learn the material in the employee handbook. They can help each other prepare for the test.

But D is shy. And D can't relate to the new staff. They are younger and some have accents. D decides to study the material alone.

**Reflect!**

Write your answers below or discuss with your teacher or group.

1. Do you think D made the right choice not to study with the others? Why?

2. Can you list any benefits there might have been to studying with others?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

3. Do you think D made many connections with the rest of the staff?

4. Can you think of a time when you had trouble connecting with others in a group?

## Skills

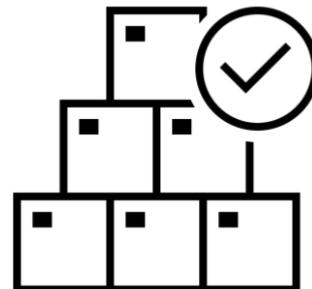
Overcoming shyness takes courage. But it gets easier with practice and time. And it gets easier as you build your interpersonal skills. These skills involve communication and empathy or kindness. They're things like:

- patience
- politeness
- willingness to learn
- willingness to be open-minded and tolerant
- acceptance of others' perspectives
- flexibility and adaptability



There are other collaboration skills related to how you act over time. They show how trustworthy you are. They're things like:

- reliability (do what you say you will do)
- punctuality (being on time)
- honesty (telling the truth)





**New Task!**

Your collaboration skills.

Put a check in the box that applies to you.

**Collaboration Skills – Communication and Empathy or Kindness**

	Always	Sometimes	Rarely
I am patient			
I am polite			
I am willing to learn			
I am willing to be open-minded and tolerant			
I accept others' perspectives			
I am flexible and adaptable			

**Collaboration Skills – Trustworthiness**

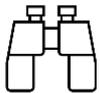
	Always	Sometimes	Rarely
I am reliable			
I am punctual			
I am honest			
I like to be challenged			
I can learn to work with most people			
I am patient			

## Benefits

Even if collaboration takes you outside your comfort zone, it's important to work at it. Because there are many benefits to collaboration. It's about getting support from co-workers. It's about giving support when needed. It's about becoming a key member of the team. Other benefits are:

- helping solve problems more efficiently
- learning and grow with your team
- enjoying a better working environment
- increasing your creativity and innovation
- helping reduce conflict and risks

Another benefit might be team members working to their strengths. This mean that team members who are strong at one task might work on that task. Team members who struggle with a task might do something else.



Let's look at an example.

C has been working at Loblaw's for a year. C has become familiar with where everything goes on the store shelves. But one day C's manager decides to change the organization of the shelves.

C's manager wants all the products moved to new locations. The task is assigned to C and four co-workers. The job will involve a lot of bending down and climbing step ladders. C has a bad back and finds bending down difficult.

C understands the new organization of the shelves. But C notices that the four coworkers are confused about the new organization of the shelves.



**Reflect!**

Working to your strengths. Fill out the chart below.

What are some ways C and the others could work to their strengths?	What might be some of the benefits of doing this?	What collaboration skills might they use?

## Strategies to Try

Now we will discuss some strategies that will help you develop your collaboration skills. We will look at communication skills, reliability, and conflict management. Think about the example and try the activities. Your collaboration skills will grow!

### 1. Communication Skills

Communication is the bridge between you and other people. This means it works two ways. There is speaking and there is listening. There is also what happens between the words.

To be a good collaborator, speak in a polite and professional manner:

- wait for your turn (don't interrupt)
- use appropriate language (don't swear)
- speak clearly and at a loud enough volume
- make eye contact
- keep a positive manner

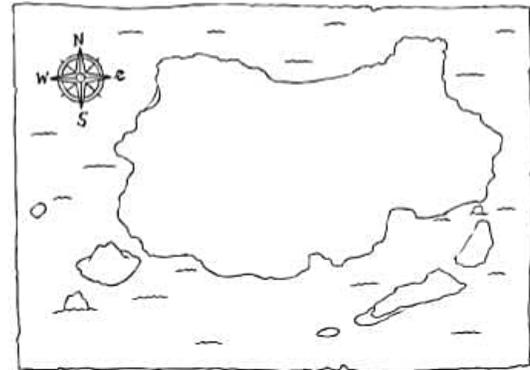
To be a good collaborator, listen carefully to others:

- Face the speaker.
- Stay focused and don't interrupt.
- Watch for non-verbal cues like smiling and frowning.
- Show that you understand by giving a thumbs up.
- Ask questions if you don't understand.
- Ask if the speaker is finished.

**New Task!**

Collaborating under pressure.

Try this with a partner or in a group.



Imagine you and your group members are stranded on a deserted island.

Together come up with a plan to survive and escape. But you only have four resources: food, water, a radio, and a compass.

1. Discuss your plan with your group. Answer these questions:
  - How will you use your resources?
  - What obstacles will you face?
  - What is your plan to overcome the obstacles?
  
2. When you are ready discuss your plan with your teacher and the other groups.
  
3. Once you have finished, let's see how well you collaborated. Check the boxes that apply. During the activity, did you:
  - face the speaker and make eye contact
  - stay focused and not interrupt
  - keep a positive manner
  - watch for non-verbal cues like smiling or frowning
  - ask questions if you didn't understand something
  - speak clearly and at a loud enough volume
  - use appropriate language

## 2. Reliability

Reliability is a key workplace skill. It is at the heart of collaboration. If you are reliable, others will trust you. They will want to collaborate with you. You'll be a supportive and trustworthy team member. Your coworkers will be quick to support you.

Let's look closer at what it means to be reliable at work. Watch this video on reliability in the workplace and answer the questions below.



Video URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cyz1O8iGLFU>



### 3. Conflict Management

Conflict is a part of any workplace. Differences between people can sometimes lead to clashes. Conflict can also be caused by workplace pressures like deadlines and customer demands.

A key to handling yourself when under pressure or facing conflict is managing your emotions. The first step is awareness.

- Be aware of your **breathing**: Take deep breaths through your nose to calm down.
- Be aware of your **body**: If you are shaking or agitated, walk away from the conflict to cool down.
- Be aware of your **thoughts**: Notice your thoughts and remind yourself to control your emotions.

The second step is avoiding conflict when you can. Develop your communication skills. Try to be reliable. And learn what your triggers are. Triggers are situations that cause you a lot of emotion. Some examples include:

- feeling criticized or blamed
- feeling confused or helpless
- feeling overwhelmed
- not receiving support when you need it

The final step is to manage your emotions in a constructive way using self care. You could release emotions before and after work by:

- talking to a friend or loved one
- exercising
- listening to music
- journaling

**New Task!**

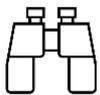
Managing emotions.

1. Below is a checklist with tips for managing your emotions. Keep it handy throughout the week.
2. Keep them in mind the next time you experience pressure or conflict.
3. After the conflict, check the boxes that apply.

During the conflict, did you:

- take deep breaths through your nose to calm down
- walk away if you feel agitated
- notice your thoughts and work to remain calm
- talk about the conflict afterward
- exercise or listen to music to release your emotions constructively

4. Now how do you feel after the conflict?



Let's look at an example.

F and G work as custodians at a school. Both of them are responsible for sharing the different tasks. Both must sweep, mop, and empty the garbage. Both must clean a certain number of classrooms.



## Final Thoughts

Collaboration can lead to great teamwork and deep connections with coworkers. It requires generosity and compromise. But it usually pays off. As you learn to be a good collaborator, you become a key part of the team.

But maintaining good relationships with coworkers is not your job alone. It works both ways. You deserve to be treated politely and professionally at work too.

Sometimes coworkers are difficult to work with. But sometimes they are worse. Bullying and harassment is never okay. If you are the victim of bullying and harassment speak to management at once.

If your manager is the cause of the problems, seek outside help. See the resources below:

- 211 Ontario connects you to social services and community supports that you need:
  - Call **211** or toll free at **1-877-330-3213**
- **Employment Ontario** offers career-related counselling and guidance:  
<https://www.ontario.ca/page/employment-ontario>
- Also see the other resources in this series: **Workplace Skills, Strategies, and Know-How**