

CURRICULUM RESOURCE

Workplace Skills, Strategies, and Know-How: Conflict Resolution

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 B - Communicate Ideas and Information	B1. Interact with others	1
Competency B - Communicate Ideas and Information	B2. Write continuous text	2
Competency B - Communicate Ideas and Information	B3. Complete and create documents	2

Goal Paths (check all that apply)

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Employment | <input type="checkbox"/> Postsecondary |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Apprenticeship | <input type="checkbox"/> Independence |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Secondary School Credit | |

Embedded Skills for Success (check all that apply)

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Adaptability | <input type="checkbox"/> Numeracy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Collaboration | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Problem Solving |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Communication | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Reading |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Creativity and innovation | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Writing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Digital | |

NOTES: Part nine 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

*This is Section Nine, Workplace Skills, Strategies, and Know-How:
Conflict Resolution*

WORKPLACE SKILLS, STRATEGIES, AND KNOW-HOW: Conflict Resolution

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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 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. You will learn to get the most out of the modern workplace.



Introduction

Conflict is an inevitable part of the workplace. People have different expectations, needs, and values. When these clash, there is conflict. This is a reality when many people come together at a place of work.

Conflict can result from miscommunication and other misunderstandings. It can also result from:

- pressures at work like deadlines
- confusion about roles
- lack of support from management
- bullying and harassment

Conflict in the workplace is unhealthy. It makes for a poor work environment.

Employees feel unstable. Work processes become less efficient. It also might mean:

- low employee morale
- poor co-worker relations
- lower productivity
- reduced sense of trust
- higher rates of sick leave
- higher employee turnover

Some conflict at work may be necessary. It may bring concerns to light. It may spark creativity and build relationships. But conflict must be managed and resolved.

This resource will teach you conflict management strategies. It will help you to improve your conflict resolution skills.

Soon we will learn more about conflict resolution. First let's talk about **your** situation.



Let's discuss!

Answer these questions with your teacher or partner.

- Have you experienced conflict at work?
- How did you respond? How did it make you feel?
- Have you ever experienced harrassment or bullying at work?
- How did you respond? How did it make you feel?

Check the boxes that apply to you:

- ☐ I often find myself in conflict with others.
- ☐ I try to avoid conflict as much as possible.
- ☐ I have a bad temper.
- ☐ I sometimes say things that upset others.
- ☐ I get emotional when there is conflict.
- ☐ I experience stress when there is conflict.



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



Your Goals!

It's time to think about your **goals**:

1. Are you currently looking for work? Yes ☐ No ☐
2. If so, what sort of work interests you? Discuss with your teacher or partner.
3. How do you think improving your **conflict-resolution skills** might help you at work? Discuss with your teacher or partner.



New Task!

Do this now or when you have more time:

- Make a list of five jobs that interest you.
 - Now re-write the list.
 - Put the job you'd like most at the top.
 - Then put the job you'd like second-most. And so on.
 - Write the letter **C** beside any of these jobs that involve **customer service**.
- **Customer service** jobs require excellent conflict-management skills.

Miscommunication

Conflict at work can come from many sources. It's helpful to understand some of the causes of conflict. This way some conflict may be prevented before it begins. The type of conflict will also determine how it should be dealt with.

Let's discuss how to manage the main causes of conflict in the workplace:

1. Miscommunication

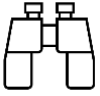
Conflict at work often boils down to miscommunication. A manager may not be clear about expectations. An employee may not listen to instructions. The result is misunderstandings:

- confusion about roles and duties
 - mistakes in how things are done
 - frustrations among staff and customers
- Conflict can worsen because of poor communication. Misunderstanding can lead to frustration. If this is not sorted out, the frustration may grow into more conflict.

Managing Miscommunication: Learn to be a Good Communicator!

It is a manager's responsibility to provide clear guidance to employees. But employees must be **good communicators** too. Here are some tips:

- listen carefully to rules, expectations, and instructions
- show you understand with a nod or a thumbs up
- ask questions if you are confused
- ask for more guidance if you need it

**An Example:**

An employee starts a new job as a forklift driver. During training, they don't listen carefully to instructions. On their first day of work, they are confused about their duties. They make many mistakes. They are embarrassed so they don't ask for guidance. Many of their co-workers are angry. The manager must resolve this conflict.

**Reflect!**

It's time to reflect on what you have learned:

1. Read the example above about the forklift driver.
2. Consider the list of tips for good communication on the previous page. How could the forklift driver have used these tips to avoid conflict?
3. Discuss your answers with your teacher or partner.

Active listening is a key skill to become a good communicator. It is essential to avoiding miscommunication.

Active listening means paying careful attention to the speaker. It means not losing focus to distractions. It means showing the speaker that you have understood.

Here are some tips for **active listening**:

- Face the speaker.
- Meet the speaker's eyes.
- Stay focused and avoid distractions. (If you have a phone, put it away!)
- Don't interrupt the speaker.
- Watch for non-verbal cues like smiling and frowning.
- Keep a positive manner:
 - smile
 - don't cross your arms (this can make you seem angry or closed off)
- Show that you understand by giving a thumbs up.
- Ask questions if you don't understand.
- Ask if the speaker is finished.





New Task!

Do this now or when you have more time:

- Ask your teacher or partner go to the website for Public Health Ontario:
https://ipac-canada.org/photos/custom/pdf/IPAC_cleaninghands85x11English.pdf
- It will provide instruction for how to wash your hands.
- Ask your teacher or partner to read you the instructions.
- While they read, practice active listening.
- When you have finished, work together to complete the check list below.

Did you:

- ☐ face the speaker?
- ☐ meet the speaker's eyes?
- ☐ stay focused and avoid distractions?
- ☐ not interrupt?
- ☐ keep a positive manner?
- ☐ watch for non-verbal cues like smiling or frowning?
- ☐ smile, nod, or give a thumbs up to show you understood?
- ☐ ask questions if you didn't understand something?

- Which of these listening methods felt most natural?
- Which do you need to improve?
- Discuss with your teacher or partner.

- Sometimes instructions can be a little dry. That makes it even more important to practice active listening!

Speaking with confidence is a key skill to becoming a good communicator. It is essential to avoiding miscommunication.

Speaking with confidence means knowing **how** to speak. It means knowing **when** to speak. It means using a **professional manner**.

Here are some tips for **speaking with confidence**:

- speak slowly and clearly
- speak at a loud enough volume
- make eye contact
- keep a positive manner
 - smile
 - don't cross your arms
- speak without too much emotion
- wait for your turn (don't interrupt)
- be polite (don't swear)



When in doubt, **share the issue early**. Active listening reduces miscommunication. Speaking with confidence reduces miscommunication. But misunderstandings can still happen. If confusions or conflicts arise, don't hesitate. Share the issue with co-workers. Share the issue with management. This will help prevent the conflict from growing worse.

- Good communication keeps a small problem from becoming a large problem.



New Task!

Do this now or when you have more time:

- Have a conversation with your teacher or partner.
- Ask your teacher or partner what they did on the weekend.
- When they are done, tell them what you did on the weekend.
- Try to speak with confidence.
- When you are done, work together to complete the check list below.

Did you:

- ☐ speak slowly and clearly?
- ☐ speak at a loud enough volume?
- ☐ make eye contact?
- ☐ speak without too much emotion?
- ☐ keep a positive manner?
- ☐ wait for your turn?
- ☐ speak politely?

- Which of these speaking methods felt most natural?
- Which do you need to improve?
- Discuss with your teacher or partner.



Pressure

2. Pressure

Pressure is a big source of conflict at work. The pressure comes from customer and manager expectations. It comes from a rushed timeline. Jobs with deadlines or customer service often have more pressure. Jobs like this include:

- **Fast food or restaurant work.** Customers expect hot meals delivered promptly. At peak hours, workers must hustle to meet demands.
- **Delivery jobs.** Deliver work comes with high expectations. Drivers must make a large number of deliveries in a short period of time.
- **Factory jobs.** Factory workers are expected to meet certain quotas. This means they must hurry to complete the required amount of work.

High-pressure jobs are often done at a stressful pace. They may not allow much time for reflection or co-worker interaction. Emotions can run high making conflict more likely.

Managing Pressure: Learn to Manage Your Emotions and Collaborate!

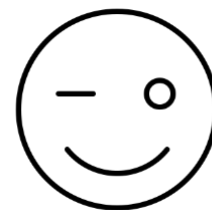
Managers try to develop efficient systems that reduce pressure. But employees must learn to deal with some pressure at work. Here are some tips:

- practice managing emotions in your daily life
- develop tricks for staying calm under pressure
- work to build relationships with co-workers
- learn to collaborate
- ask for help if you need it

Managing your emotions is a key skill to staying calm under pressure. It helps reduce conflict in high-pressure situations.

Managing your emotions can be difficult. But you can learn through practice. One way is to build emotion-management strategies into your life. Here are some tips:

- Be aware of your **breathing**. Deep breaths in and out through the nose are calming. Take a few minutes a day to notice your breath. Try to practice deep breathing through the nose.
- Be aware of your **body**. Your body can tell you a lot about how you're feeling. Take a few minutes a day to notice how you're feeling. And remember:
 - **Eat healthy and reduce indulgences**. A happy gut means a calm brain.
 - **Set aside enough time for sleep**. A well-rested brain is calm.
 - **Move your body**. Exercise is calming too.
- **Smile and laugh**. Smiling and laughing bring good emotions. Take a few minutes a day to focus on happy things. Remember what you have to be grateful for.
- **Connect with loved ones**. On your own, you can get stuck in negative thoughts. Try to spend time with people who bring you up. It's good for the soul. And the emotions!





- Read the list of emotion-management tips above.
- Try to practice as many as you can for one week.
- Write down how you felt after practicing each tip.

- At the end of the week, discuss how you felt with your partner or teacher.

Staying calm is even harder under pressure. Practicing emotion-management helps. You must also practice when the pressure is on. Here are some tips:

- **Be aware of your triggers.** Triggers are situations that cause you a lot of emotion. Some examples include:
 - feeling criticized or blamed
 - feeling confused or helpless
 - feeling overwhelmed
 - being ignored
 - not receiving support when you need it
- Know your triggers. Be prepared for the emotions they may cause. Being aware and prepared is the first step to managing emotions.

- **Be aware of your feelings.** During conflict our physical state changes:
 - Are you breathing fast?
 - Are you feeling weak?
 - Are you feeling shaky?
 - Notice your emotions and then...

- **Pause!**
 - Take deep breaths through the nose.
 - Close your eyes for a moment if you need to.
 - Wait for yourself to calm down.

- **Keep breathing!** Take deep breaths through the nose to help you focus and listen. Take deep breaths through the nose before speaking.

- **Release your emotions in a constructive way:**
 - Wait until you have calmed down.
 - Wait until it's your turn.
 - Then express your concerns to co-workers or management.

Or you could release emotions by:

- talking to a friend after work
- journalling
- exercising
- listening to music



- Read the tips for staying calm under pressure above.
- Print them off or write them down.
- Keep the list handy and re-read through the week.
- Keep them in mind the next time you experience pressure or conflict.
- When this happens, try to practice as many tips as you can.
- Write down how you felt afterward.

-

- Develop good relationships with co-workers by being polite and empathetic.
- Listen to the needs of others and offer your help.
- Speak with confidence when expressing your needs.

Differences with Co-Workers

3. Differences with Co-Workers

Conflict may also result from differences between co-workers. These differences can be hard to overcome. They can take many forms. Differences between co-workers might occur if:

- an employee is not doing their share of the work
- an employee or manager has unrealistic expectations or needs
- there are personality clashes between co-workers, such as:
 - different belief systems
 - different work styles
 - opposite personality types like introverts and extroverts

Problems might also occur because co-workers have different ways of communicating. This could refer to the ways they engage in conflict.

- The video below discusses five unique conflict styles.





Reflect!

It's time to reflect on what you have learned:

1. Watch the video about the five different conflict styles.

2. List the five different conflict styles below:

3. Do you use one of these conflict styles? Discuss with your teacher or partner.

4. What is effective about your conflict style? What is problematic about it? Discuss with your teacher or partner.

Managing Differences with Co-Workers: Learn to Self-Reflect and Adapt!

Workplaces have rules about employee conduct. Most managers try to create an environment where everyone can get along. But employees must sometimes learn to work with people who are different. Or difficult. Here are some tips:

- Practice the **communication tips** you learned above. Conflicts often come down to not understanding a co-worker's needs. Or a co-worker not understanding your needs.
- Try to see things from **your co-worker's perspective**:
 - listen to understand their point of view
 - try to find things you agree on
 - show empathy for their feelings
- **Be clear about your position**. Ask yourself some questions:
 - Are my expectations realistic and fair?
 - Are there ways I can compromise?
 - Are there things I could do differently?
- **Acknowledge the criticism you receive**. Reflect on it. If it is reasonable, try to adapt.

Differences between co-workers can be expected. Other people's differences should be tolerated. But bullying or harrassment is **never** okay.

- If you are feeling bullied or harrassed **seek help** from management at once.

**New Task!**

Do this when you have time:

- This task can be done after a conflict at work or at home. After the conflict, take time to reflect.
- Write down your position.
- Write down what you think is the other person's perspective.
- Write down any criticism you received.
- Do you think any of the criticism is reasonable? If so, how would you adapt to address it? Discuss with your partner or teacher.

Seeking Support

4. Seeking Support

Sometimes you can resolve conflicts on your own. But there are situations that require outside help. Seek help from a manager to resolve a conflict if the conflict:

- involves bullying or harrasment
- could result in injury or harm
- could result in damages or other financial losses
- involves unhappy customers

You should also seek help if you have tried and failed to resolve the conflict. Communicate the situation with your manager so it doesn't persist or escalate.

Here are some tips to help you communicate with your manager about conflicts:

Speak face-to-face for urgent or sensitive matters. Don't wait to report urgent issues. Speak about sensitive subjects in private. Try to:

- be clear about the situation
- get right to the point
- speak with confidence
- listen carefully to any questions your manager may have
- ask your own questions if you are confused
- ask what will happen next

For non-urgent matters, **email** to ask your manager for a meeting. Use a subject line like "Meeting Request." See how to write in a professional style on the next page.

Here is an email written in a professional style:

Good afternoon Quinn,

I would like to request a meeting with you **at your earliest convenience**. I have been having some trouble with a co-worker. **I would be grateful for a few moments of your time. Please let me know what time works for you.**

Thank you,
Blake

Let's look at the parts of the the email. The email has:

- a polite greeting and sign off
- a sentence clearly stating the meeting request
- a sentence stating the reason for the meeting (conflict)
- phrases in professional language:
 - **At your earliest convenience.** This means as soon as possible.
 - **I would be grateful for a few moments of your time.** This is a polite way to ask for a meeting from a superior.
 - **Please let me know what time works for you.** This is a professional way to ensure you get a response.



New Task!

Do this now or when you have time:

Read the email example above.

Now try to write your own email requesting a meeting with your manager:

Lack of Support

Often managers are supportive and address conflicts quickly. But sometimes they don't. Managers might be busy or distracted. They might not think the problem is serious.

In this case, try tracking a conflict by **taking notes**. Keep the facts straight by recording the details of a conflict. This will make it easier to explain the situation to your manager. This might help address more serious and persistent conflicts. Here are some tips:

- have a pen and notebook handy
- write down all the details
- date every incident

Unfortunately, not all managers are supportive. Sometimes your manager is the problem. A bad manager is one of the main reasons people quit their jobs.

If this is the case, you have options. Here are some steps you can take.

Keep a record of your concerns. Communicate them to your manager. Maybe your manager will surprise you and resolve things.

Remember: You can't be fired without cause. If you are let go, you may be entitled to severance pay.

Seek outside help. See the next page for a list of resources.



Outside Support Resources:

- 211 Ontario connects you to social services and community supports that you need:
 - Call **211** or toll free at **1-877-330-3213**
- Is your manager not addressing a serious matter? You can file a complaint with the **Ontario Government**: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/filing-workplace-health-and-safety-complaint>
- **Employment Ontario** offers career-related counselling and guidance: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/employment-ontario>
- Are you a New Canadian? Are you not getting fair treatment at work? **Workers Action Centre** offers services and support:
 - Call **1-855-531-0778**

Skills For Success

Skills for Success and Conflict Resolution

The **Skills for Success** (SFS) are the everyday skills Canadians need for work, learning and life. Several SFS are required to improve your conflict resolution skills:

- **Communication.** Good communication at work helps you:
 - avoid conflicts and confusion
 - develop good relationships with co-workers
 - gain confidence in your role
- **Collaboration.** Collaboration helps to strengthen work relationships. This help manage pressure. It reduces conflict.
- **Adaptability.** Resolving conflict often involves adapting. Adaptability invites growth and compromise among co-workers.
- **Problem Solving.** Good communication helps problems get solved. The problem can be identified and solutions can be worked out.



What are your strongest SFS? Which do you most need to work on?

Discuss with your teacher or partner.

Reflect!

Learn more about the Skills for Success here:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/services/jobs/training/initiatives/skills-success.html>

- Also see the other resources in this series: **Workplace Skills, Strategies, and Know-How**