


# Resolving Conflict

Conflict in our lives is both inevitable and normal. We have all been in situations of conflict whether personal or professional, so why then does managing conflict seem to evade us?

Conflict is not absent of emotions but in communicating clearly, empathetically, and patiently it can lead to resolution. Poor communication can grow tensions and escalate into resentment worsening the conflict. When you handle conflict (and not avoid it) in a respectful and non-adversarial way you will be better positioned to manage the conflict before it manages you.

Conflicts can happen for many reasons and in understanding the source of the conflict you are better able to manage the conflict and your feelings to seek resolution. Before you take action, consider the source of the conflict to help guide your approach and understand its role in the conflict. Here are some common sources of conflict:

- **Lack of clarification**
- **Lack of resources**
- **Communication problems**
- **Misunderstandings**

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- **Personal differences**
  - **Poor processes**
  - **Unreasonable time constraints**

We have all been in a position where we have had to compromise, accommodate, or negotiate a situation. As a student, you may be navigating a group project or seeking an assignment extension. We compromise, accommodate, or negotiate all the time without realizing we are doing it.

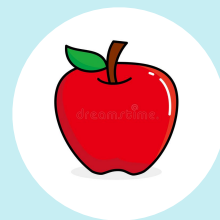
Sometimes when in conflict there are things that cannot be compromised, they are fixed and cannot change. These may include test/exam dates, assignment outlines/rubrics, or university policies. However, with any conflict, you have control over your approach. This does not mean in managing a conflict you will get what you want but many require compromise, accommodation, and negotiation (give and take).



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## Seek to Understand and Resolve Conflict Early

If you are seeking to resolve your conflict by getting exactly what you want, the way you want it, you are **not** beginning from an approach to consider compromise, accommodation, or negotiation. This limits you from the outset of a conflict.

Seeking perfection will not help you achieve what you are trying to achieve and will limit what may be possible. Rather, seeking to understand positions you to be a partner in resolving a conflict with consideration and respect for all involved.

If you are experiencing a conflict, **resolving it early** can help you resolve the conflict before it can grow or get worse. By not waiting and working through a conflict early on you are managing the conflict you are experiencing, not a conflict that has had the chance to grow or worsen.



## Informal Resolution

An informal approach is the first place to start. Informal simply means engaging/communicating with the person/office you are in conflict with before escalating your concerns to another individual or process. In addressing a conflict, there are different informal approaches to take.

You could send an email, request a meeting, go to the office, or attend office hours. **Keep in mind that while this may be an informal approach to resolving a conflict your approach should not be informal.**

Being informal does not mean you should be disrespectful, demeaning, demanding, use inappropriate language, or threaten. Treat others how you want to be treated! If you communicate in an aggressive manner the response may be angry or defensive.

**Your goal is to resolve a conflict not escalate the conflict.**

## Formal Resolution

There are formal approaches and avenues available if you do not receive satisfaction through an informal approach. The Ombudsperson Office can help you navigate these formal approaches, processes, and policies. Each situation and experience is unique so before escalating the situation, consult for guidance and direction on where and with who you may seek resolution.

## Consider Your Approach to Resolution

- Consider your role in the conflict - your part but also your contribution to resolution
- Listen to understand rather than listening to reply
- Look for options and solutions instead of focusing on only one outcome
- Understand what you want and need so you can understand the motivations of others
- Stay calm and keep emotions in check
- Be willing to change
- Use email to communicate booking a time to meet but try to meet in-person
- Don't send communication when you are mad or upset - give yourself space and seek advice
- Be curious - seek clarification when do not understand and ask questions
- Seek support and advice!

## Negotiating a Conflict

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### PRE-NEGOTIATION

Let the other person know you would like to talk & preview the topic so they can prepare.

Remain flexible!

2

### OPENING

Set the tone for discussion as the other person will likely reciprocate.

Use "we" language not "you" language.

3

### EXPLORATION

Goal should be to explore conflict by sharing perspectives & listening.

Information you gather may help clarify the conflict.

4

### BARGAINING

Make proposals for resolution. May need to make concessions on what you want.

Flexibility is important as you may have to revise ideal

5

### SETTLEMENT

Decide on the options you have bargained & discussed.

Summarize & seek confirmation.

## Conflict Resolution Tools

- **Focus on the situation at hand, not the past.**  
Holding a grudge is distracting from resolving a conflict
- **Validate who you are in conflict with to de-escalate conflict; hear the person out**
- **Remain neutral - keep a neutral tone and mindset in your verbal and non-verbal communication**
- **Make resolving the conflict a priority, not “winning” or “being right”**
- **Listen carefully to understand the entire situation, then troubleshoot**

