

Consensus Decision Making

Consensus means that everyone must agree. A number of strategies may help your group reach a consensus on an issue.

- **Treat others with the same respect** that you would expect for yourself. People may have widely divergent points of view. Insults and other disrespectful comments will further inflame the situation and will not help in coming to an agreement.
- **Listen carefully** to what the other students are saying.
- Make sure you understand other views by **summarizing** what they say in your own words. Ask them to **confirm** that this is what they meant. Many misunderstandings occur because of miscommunication.
- **Take turns** so that everyone gets an equal opportunity to share their opinions.
- **Make sure your point of view is heard.** It is not a consensus if your views are not represented and you are uncomfortable with the decision.
- **Look for alternative ways** to meet your goals and those of other people in the group. You may find it helpful to **distinguish between the underlying goals** (what someone is hoping to achieve) **and the means or strategy** (how they propose to achieve their goals). Often, merely by altering the strategy, more people's underlying goals can be accommodated.
- At some point in the discussion you may find it useful to **make a chart** of the main issues of contention between your points of view. You might also consider trying to **brainstorm** possible solutions to the dilemma by creating a **mind web**. (A mind web is an illustration or picture of the connections between ideas. When making a mind web, write down everything everyone says and connect the ideas with lines. Then, eliminate those ideas that are unacceptable to some members.)