

What's going on?

Before you decide what to do about a conflict situation, it is important that you are clear about what's going on. In conflict, people tend to become fixed in their own perspective, lose sight of the big picture, and jump to conclusions. If you make a decision without having all the facts straight, it could be really embarrassing, or even make the conflict worse.



1. What are the facts?

The facts are things that everyone would agree are true. Usually, different people involved in a conflict have access to different facts. It's important to check whether what you think you know is based on actual facts, or if they are simply assumptions you have made from interpreting information you have heard from other people. If you have made some assumptions, it's important to double check what evidence you have to support your conclusions.

Some questions to ask yourself to help you get clear about the facts:

- What has happened?
 - What have you observed / witnessed yourself?
 - What have you been told by others?
- What are the facts that everyone would agree on?
- Are there some facts that people would disagree about? Why would they disagree?
 - What do you know about what other people in the conflict have observed / witnessed?
- What have you assumed?
- What evidence do you have to support your assumptions?
- Could anyone else have other information that might change things?

Remember: It is important to distinguish between what you observe yourself and what you are told has happened by someone else. It is possible that lecturers, your friend, your housemate or other people involved in a conflict may interpret the same information differently based on their own personality and experiences.



2. What are you feeling?

People in conflict often feel angry, upset or anxious. If you don't pay attention to your emotions, the conflict can get worse (e.g. you might say or do something that you later regret). It is important to acknowledge what you are feeling as it can be a good indicator of what is really important to you.

It might help you to think about:

- How are you feeling?
- What emotions do you feel most strongly about at this stage of the conflict?
- What upsets you most about the situation?
- Does the situation conflict with your values? (People's actions are often guided by their values. It's important to understand your own values and recognise how they could be influencing your behaviour. Similarly other people may choose certain actions based on their values)

Remember: What you're feeling and how strongly you're feeling it may also impact upon the choices you make.



3. What's really important?

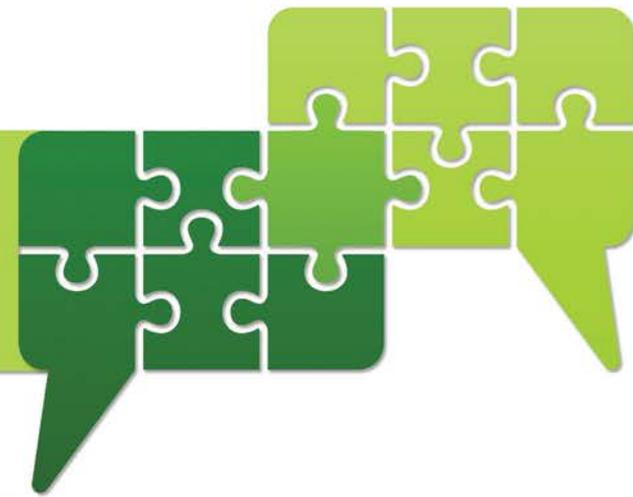
Sometimes people get focused on a particular outcome and don't realise that it is not actually the most important thing or only option for them.

Think about:

- Why do you want this particular outcome?
- What would it mean to you to get this particular outcome?
- What would it mean if you didn't get this particular outcome?
- Are there other ways to meet your needs rather than what you say you want?

Remember: People in conflict often state what they want and get defensive when others contradict them. It can be helpful to clearly explain *why* you want a particular outcome. This way you can open up a conversation about what's really important to you and several options might be available to you that meet your needs.

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Have a look at how these examples focus on 'what's really important' or 'why you want a particular outcome':

You might think that 'I need my lecturer to change my grade' is the only solution to a conflict you are in. If you ask yourself why you want that or what's really important to you, it might be that:

- You are actually concerned because you don't understand why you're not doing well in this subject and you really care about your grades. This concern opens up a whole range of options that could help address what is really important to you

You might think that 'I need an extension' is the only solution to a conflict that you are in. If you ask yourself why you want that or what's really important to you, it might be that:

- You're struggling with all your uni commitments and need help with time management
- You're having trouble gathering resources from the library and need help finding appropriate sources for your essay
- You have a personal commitment that has come up unexpectedly that needs to take priority in your life

You might feel that 'I'm getting bullied in class.' If you ask yourself why you feel that or what's really important to you, it might be that:

- You feel uncomfortable with the language used by another student in class
- You don't like to feel like you will be laughed at for asking a question

You might feel like saying to your flatmate 'you're so selfish, you never consider others in the house.' If you ask yourself why you feel like wanting to say that or what's really important to you, it might be that:

- You're feeling stressed about your studies and part-time work and need to relax at home
- You need more time to study in the lead up to exams

By focusing on *why* you want a particular outcome you can become clearer on what your actual needs are and hopefully there will be a wider range of options available to you.



This is an exercise to help you think about 'what's going on' in a conflict.

- I. List in bullet points what are the facts of the conflict you are experiencing. Tell your story. Consider some of the questions on the previous page to help you get clearer about the facts.
- II. For each point you've made consider how you feel about it. Why does it matter? What are your feelings, needs, values or emotions linked to each point?
- III. Now consider why is each point important? Write down the main issues for you, not just focusing on the solution you want but on the motivating factors behind them and what's really important.

This exercise will help you become clearer about why the situation is creating a conflict for you and hopefully open up your concerns so you can focus on addressing your underlying needs and focusing your options around what is important to you.