

Consensus simply means reaching a general agreement on an issue within a group. It could be thought of as the collective opinion of the group members reached through discussion and compromise.

Defining Consensus

Consensus is:

- always a decision that reflects the ideas and values of all group members
- based on identifying common ground
- reached by acceptable compromises

Consensus is not:

- always a decision that represents everyone's first choice
- based on majority rule
- reached by complying with the most outspoken group member

Reaching consensus involves two distinct types of discussion—exploratory and decision making. **Exploratory talk** helps students understand their own and others' assumptions, values, and preferences. At this stage, group members are attentive, open, and suspend any form of judgement. **Decision making** involves students making a decision that represents consensus and reflects group values and goals. Critical thinking, objectivity, and flexibility are vital at this stage.

Steps in Reaching Consensus

1. Ask each group member to express his or her ideas and preferences.
2. Identify the essential differences between these positions.
3. Ask group members to state what they are willing to concede in order to reach consensus.

Adapted from "General Learning Outcome 5" *Senior 4 English Language Arts: A Foundation for Implementation*, 4.82-84 (Manitoba Education and Training, 2000).