

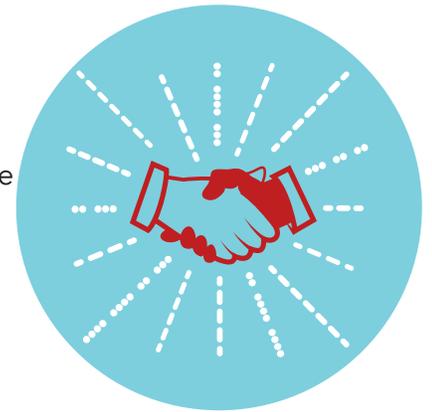
# CREATING AND USING TEAM CONTRACTS



The team contract is a document introduced at the start of each project that asks project teams to think through and agree on how students will individually contribute to the team, how the members will work together, and how problems will be solved when they arise. Contracts live within the context of existing co-created classroom norms but are specific to the projects and the individuals in each team. The contract template can either be co-created with students or created by you in advance. Here's an **example contract** from [bie.org](#). Contracts typically include agreements on how the students will work together, steps the team will take to resolve conflict, and next steps when conflict doesn't get solved at the team level.

## WHY IS IT USEFUL?

Contracts are used to support students in learning the skills of self-management and collaboration. With your coaching, contracts help students learn to hold themselves and each other accountable to the project work and team. Students at every grade level need support in learning how to collaborate and work productively together.



## WHAT DO I DO?

The steps in the table could be implemented in their entirety or some of the steps could be stand alone strategies for having students complete team contracts for different projects.

STEPS	INSIGHTS/SUGGESTIONS
During the launch phase, make in time for team building activities to give the new team an opportunity to work together to complete a low stakes task.	Consider team building activities like the <b>index card challenge, creating tear art pictures, building human machines, or racing to complete small puzzles and/or tasks.</b>
Follow up these team building activities with a whole group debrief.	Questions for reflection include the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What worked well for your team in this activity?</li><li>• What challenges did you encounter as a team?</li><li>• How did you approach these challenges?</li><li>• What agreements could you make as a team to prevent challenges like this from arising in the future?</li></ul>

STEPS	INSIGHTS/SUGGESTIONS
<p>Ask students to reflect individually on what they need to be successful in their learning and in collaborating.</p>	<p>After reflecting, ask members to share their needs to the team and discuss similarities and differences. Then have teams decide how they will honor teammates' needs. If you're focusing on particular success skills, you could offer prompts to encourage students to reflect on those particular skills.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What helps you listen respectfully when others are talking?</li> <li>• How do you work best when given a task that requires you to read?</li> </ul>
<p>Pass out contracts to each team and have students walk through each of the indicators.</p>	<p>You've got a few choices when it comes to contract construction: teacher-created, co-created as a whole class, or co-created by each team. Initially, you might start with a teacher-created contract and move toward the co-created contract later in the year as PBL becomes more of the culture of your classroom.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Here's a <b>blank contract template</b> if you prefer teams to create their contracts together.</li> <li>• Here's a <b>scaffolded contract</b> if you prefer teams to discuss and sign rather than create from scratch.</li> </ul>
<p>After giving teams time to discuss and complete the contract, Meet with each team to review their contract and ensure that their agreements will help them effectively self-manage and collaborate during the project.</p>	<p>When you meet with teams, have students verbalize or demonstrate <i>how</i> they are going to fulfill the indicators of the team contract.</p>

## PRIMARY GRADES CONSIDERATIONS

Early primary grade contracts may be simplified, have picture cues, and be filled in with teachers, especially early in the year. Have students dictate what gets written and how to represent the solution with an illustration. You might have one large anchor chart of the contract the teams are using for the whole class to refer to.

For grades 3 – 5, consider using a contract that is mostly completed during the first few projects and scaffold toward a more co-created contract as PBL becomes the culture of the classroom.

## TROUBLESHOOTING TIPS



### **Contracts are not taken seriously by teams.**

Does your school/district have a program that is used to manage student behavior, like Capturing Kids' Hearts, Discovery, Leader in Me, Responsive Classroom, etc.? Consider writing a contract template with language from familiar programs in mind to help tie in what students are already doing and are used to. This may help make team contracts more meaningful for students.

It's also important for you to use and reference the contracts for all concerns raised by a team. When teams are struggling, ask students what their contract said about how they planned to handle challenges. Support them in using or amending the contract to work through the problem. Consistently modeling the use of the contract will help students build their skill with it.

For more ideas on building a collaborative culture in a PBL classroom, check out this [blog](#).



→ **Teams don't think through how to solve problems until they arise.**

Check in with teams the day you hand out contracts. Ask students to identify possible issues, or ones that have previously come up, and ask students to brainstorm solutions. Consider having students reflect and assess team progress as an exit ticket throughout the project.

→ **Teachers assume students know how to write effective contracts and understand how to problem-solve, so they don't check in with teams and discuss contracts.**

Students of all grade levels need to learn and practice how to collaborate effectively. Don't assume students know how to use their contract or resolve conflict. Make sure you are checking in and having students check in with each other as a routine part of the project work in class.

→ **Contracts aren't revisited after project is launched.**

Emphasize and build skills of collaboration and self management, socratic seminars and/or fishbowls can be effective and quick strategies for revisiting contracts and encouraging self- and peer-assessment on collaboration. Have students use the contract as the "reading" for a short Socratic seminar and then craft the discussion around the contract indicators. Instead of tackling the whole contract, you might emphasize a single element of the contract each week.

A fishbowl might be used by having a team talk out issues they are experiencing. While the team is talking, have the rest of the class use the contract to give suggestions on next steps. Ensuring that you have an open, supportive, and positive classroom culture is key to the success of this suggestion.

Make a weekly check-in part of your PBL routine to help keep teams on track throughout the project.

## USING IT THROUGHOUT THE PROJECT

As suggested the previous section, implement a regular routine to have students check in with their teams about how well they are living up to their contract. You could use the contracts in conjunction with collaboration or self-management rubrics to have students and/or teams assess and reflect on progress, set goals, and revise their contracts as needed throughout the project. After final presentations, encourage students to revisit the contract one last time to self- and peer-assess their growth throughout the project.