LET US GUESS: YOU’RE TICKED OFF AT YOUR ROOMMATE

Is it:

1. Because your roommate is a pig?
2. Because your roommate chews their food with their mouth open?
3. Because your roommate borrows things but never brings them back?
4. Because your roommate’s girlfriend sleeps over? All the time?
5. Because your roommate’s room reeks?
6. Because your roommate rocks the bass at all hours?
7. Because your…

…ok, we might not have your gripe listed here, but the point is there are a gazillion reasons why roommates get into a conflict.

We should know. As a property owner, we’ve managed student housing and private residence halls. And as you can imagine, in more than 30 years, we’ve seen hundreds of conflicts.

More importantly, we’ve resolved hundreds of conflicts, helping roommates stay roommates. Our approach has resulted in mended relationships, a happier coexistence, and no broken bones.

This report will show you the techniques we use to help resolve roommate conflicts. It’s simple, straightforward, but it requires you to work hard and be honest.

It will work. But only if you want it to.

Alright, ready to get to work and get on with a happy apartment life? Then let’s begin.
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THE LITTLE KNOWN YET AMAZINGLY SUCCESSFUL KEY TO RESOLVING ROOMMATE CONFLICTS

One lesson we’ve learned is that the key to any ideal Madison roommate relationship can be summarized in this sentence: It’s how you deal with conflict.

That’s it. It’s not that you and your roommate are different, or that you have different tastes or different political views. In fact, we’ve seen more roommate problems between students who were best friends in high school.

The bottom line is this: How do you resolve an issue that’s bothering you?

Some people confront conflict head-on.

Others shy away from it.

Many fall somewhere in between.

If you have two people who handle conflict differently, but don’t know how to resolve the conflict, then the problem will continue to fester.

Do you ever notice how roommates in conflict will voice a lot of complaints, usually to a third party, but will actually spend little time trying to constructively resolve the problems with each other?

It’s most often because they don’t know how. That’s the key, plain and simple.

Our first step, then, will be to identify how you deal with conflict, or your Conflict Resolution Style.
CONFLICT RESOLUTION STYLES

To help students identify their particular conflict-resolution style, we use a system devised by David Johnson, a professor at the University of Minnesota.

The system begins with an assessment in which you determine your personal conflict management style. Your score reflects one of the five styles of conflict resolution. These styles we personify (or should we say, animate) in the form of five different animals.
YOUR SCORE DETERMINES YOUR STYLE

Instructions: Listed below are 15 statements. Each statement provides a possible strategy for dealing with a conflict. Give each a numerical value (i.e., 1=Always, 2=Very often, 3=Sometimes, 4=Not very often, 5=Rarely, if ever) then tally your score on the next page.

Don’t answer as you think you should, answer as you actually behave.

____ a. I argue my case with peers, colleagues and coworkers to demonstrate the merits of the position I take.

____ b. I try to reach compromises through negotiation.

____ c. I attempt to meet the expectation of others.

____ d. I seek to investigate issues with others in order to find solutions that are mutually acceptable.

____ e. I am firm in resolve when it comes to defending my side of the issue.

____ f. I try to avoid being singled out, keeping conflict with others to myself.

____ g. I uphold my solutions to problems.

____ h. I compromise in order to reach solutions.

____ i. I trade important information with others so that problems can be solved together.

____ j. I avoid discussing my differences with others.

____ k. I try to accommodate the wishes of my peers and colleagues.

____ l. I seek to bring everyone’s concerns out into the open in order to resolve disputes in the best possible way.

____ m. I put forward middle positions in efforts to break deadlocks.

____ n. I accept the recommendations of colleagues, peers, and coworkers.

____ o. I avoid hard feelings by keeping my disagreements with others to myself.
WHICH FISH, REPTILE, BIRD OR MAMMAL ARE YOU?

The 15 statements you just read are listed below under five categories. Each category contains the letters of three statements. Record the number you placed next to each statement. Calculate the total under each category.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STYLE</th>
<th>a.</th>
<th>e.</th>
<th>g.</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competing Shark</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Collaborating owl</td>
<td>d.</td>
<td>i.</td>
<td>l.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Avoiding Turtle</td>
<td>f.</td>
<td>j.</td>
<td>o.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodating Teddy Bear</td>
<td>c.</td>
<td>k.</td>
<td>n.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compromising Fox</td>
<td>b.</td>
<td>h.</td>
<td>m.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results:

My dominant style is _________________________________ (Your lowest score)

My back-up style is_______________________________ (Your second lowest score)

Now that we’ve brought out the animal in you, let’s move on to the descriptions.
THE AVOIDING TURTLE

When it comes to dealing with conflict, Avoiding Turtles head for the door. They completely avoid conflict – often fear it.

Avoiding Turtles rarely have their self-interests met in issues of conflict. They tend to be passive, and are found calling home to mom or dad to relay their problems. It seems like people walk all over them.

Sadly, Avoiding Turtles are often misjudged. Because they remove themselves from any types of conflict, and may suffer from minor to major anxiety, they may appear aloof and uncooperative. In truth, it’s just that they view conflict as inherently bad.

Key to resolving conflict with an Avoiding Turtle:

When they do find the strength to deal with conflict, Avoiding Turtles prefer an established structure for venting. A weekly house meeting, for example, probably would provide a safe environment for the Avoiding Turtle.

No matter how resistant they may appear to be towards conflict resolution, they’re just like anyone else – they want the peace to return and to be able to move forward. Give them a safe, structured space is a great place to start.
THE ACCOMMODATING TEDDY BEAR

The Accommodating Teddy Bear prefers hugs over war. Much like the Avoiding Turtle, they’re not fond of conflict, but they’re much more emotional.

Accommodating Teddy Bears are always worried about other people’s feelings. Their tendency is to smooth over issues in a continuous attempt to keep a relationship intact.

Teddy Bears truly value the relationship. They’re very empathetic, and it’s easy for them to give voice to their feelings. For example, if a Teddy Bear had an issue with an avoiding turtle, they might say, “I can see you’re not happy.”

Unfortunately, they are going to sacrifice their own wants and needs to keep the relationship intact, and are often walked on by more aggressive personalities. Harmony is critical to them, but its price can be high.

Key to resolving conflict if you’re dealing with the Accommodating Teddy Bear:

As painful as it may be, an Accommodating Teddy Bear will endure emotional pain if you can demonstrate the long-term benefits to a relationship. Prove to them that working through the conflict will ultimately result in stronger bonds and a deeper understanding, and they’ll work with you to resolve the issue.
THE COMPROMISING FOX

The Compromising Fox, along with the Collaborating Owl, is one of the easiest conflict-resolution styles to work with. Why are we so high on the Fox? Because, as the name implies, the Fox is willing to compromise, which helps avoid a lot of head butting.

In fact, so keen is the Fox on compromise that they tend to over-compromise. They will sacrifice their own beliefs and needs so that compromise can be reached.

They’re very process-oriented; we find a lot of these people tend to be engineer-types, who like to see the end goal before they undertake a task. Foxes are great at selling to their roommates why compromise is good. We’ve found with little or no facilitation, they can show why an idea works, and sell it with gusto.

Generally, Compromising Foxes don’t encounter a lot of conflict, as they’re so adept at heading it off at the pass. That’s not to say they’re conflict averse, like the Avoiding Turtle. They’ll engage in the process, and they’ll stick with it until the conflict is resolved.

The key to resolving conflict with a Compromising Fox:

Compromising Foxes are most open to conflict-resolution when they see a clear-cut objective. They’ll stick to the goal, no matter how long it takes, and do their best to get roommates to join in on the compromise.

While they achieve great results over the long haul, the compromises take time and effort, so don’t expect a quick resolution. You can expect relationships to be maintained, however, which is typically a priority when dealing with people with whom you share a home.
THE COLLABORATING OWL

Collaborating Owls want everyone to achieve a win-win situation. Unlike the Compromising Fox, the Owl wants everyone to emerge from the process feeling like a winner (even if they haven’t actually won.)

We want to stress that collaboration doesn’t mean compromise. Owls are tremendous communicators, and they really enjoy the process of hashing out a solution. Many grow up to become professional mediators, negotiators or managers.

When the Collaborating Owl is involved, people tend to leave the room without any of the negative feelings that brought them there in the first place.

The key to resolving conflict with a Collaborating Owl:

Try and clearly establish how everyone will win in the long-run. The key phrase is “long run”, because you need to be ready to commit to your Collaborating Owl for a long time. They’ll go the distance for you, but you’ve got to be there to support them.

Make sure you identify that time is not a concern, and that you want the relationships to be preserved. Again, frame everything in the win-win context, and you’ll all come out on top.
THE COMPETING SHARK

As the name implies, the Competing Shark is very competitive. Sharks have their eyes on the prize – think “team captain” out to win the big one.

Human relationships aren’t valued as highly, and sharks aren’t the best at relating emotionally to others.

When sharks are in a conflict situation, they’ll deal with the issue head-on, pulling no punches. People who are conflict adverse will feel threatened by sharks, even accuse them of harassment.

It’s nothing personal. Sharks just deal with the issue, and they tend to fight for what they want.

This is definitely someone you want on your team. They are in it to win it, and often dominate in group settings. Be forewarned, however. They can be autocratic, authoritative, and uncooperative if they don’t get what they want.

The key to resolving conflict with a competing shark:

Don’t try to compete with a shark. If you try to use a shark methodology and you’re not naturally a shark, you’ll lose. Instead, reframe the discussion into a win-win. You’ll want to avoid win-lose situations with any conflict-resolution style, but particularly with sharks.
PART 2: GIVE PEACE A CHANCE

Now that you’ve identified your conflict resolution style, you’ll need to accept and commit to the following behaviors and attitudes for this to truly work. Repeat this next line (we’re serious!):

I Pledge to Adopt the Following Attitudes and Behaviors So We Can Put All of this Behind Us and Get On with Extremely Excellent and Enjoyable Lives

Read (to yourself or aloud) these attitudes and behaviors. You are stating you are ready to:

- **Advance.** You must be willing to commit to a return to peace and cooperation. If you can’t, don’t bother going any further.
- **Listen.** Be willing to listen to everyone’s individual areas of concern, and agree to attempt to resolve them.
- **Innovate.** “Well that’s not what we used to do!” That sentiment won’t work. It’s what got you here in the first place! It’s time for something new.
- **Commit.** You’re roommates. That’s a big deal. Are you ready to appreciate one another, and believe that you want each other to be happy?
- **Explain.** Don’t just say, “This place is a dump!” Explain why: “If we clean up, I won’t be so embarrassed to have friends over.”
- **Release.** You could blame everyone in the situation all day long, you won’t get anywhere. Let it go and start moving forward.
- **Accept.** Don’t think about needing to have “justice” for past problems in the apartment. Move on. Look forward.
- **Value.** Your roommate may suck at sharing, but he or she could do a great job cleaning. Say “thanks” and show your appreciation for their strengths.
- **Learn.** Be willing to try things your roommate’s way. Ask to see how he or she wants to do it, so you can find the best way to move forward.
- **Change.** If you think your roommate should have to change, you do too.
- **Forgive.** If you and your roommate decide to forgive one another, you can move forward. Forgiveness is powerful. Be willing to do it.
- **Respect.** Respect the rights of others.
KEY TECHNIQUE: ACTIVE LISTENING

Active listening is a communication technique that requires the listener to return what he hears to the speaker, usually by restating, paraphrasing or re-forming what he has heard into his own words.

The goal with active listening is to act more as a sounding board, and try not to influence what the other person has to say. You want to encourage them to talk. Here are some tips:

- **Clarify:** Ask questions, and avoid leading with ‘yes / no’ answers. “How long have you been feeling this way?
- **Summarize:** Try and summarize his/her thoughts. “So you’re telling me that you like my sense of humor, but I’m too messy.”
- **Reflect:** Repeat what your roommate has said. “So I hear you saying that I’m messy?”
- **Clarify again:** Make sure the point is clear. “Could you tell me more about why you think I’m so messy.”
- **React:** Show empathy and understanding. “Oh, that must have been difficult seeing the room in chaos when you’re an organized person.”

This skill may sound self-explanatory, but it does take patience and practice. It demonstrates:

- Sincerity, that nothing is being assumed or taken for granted.
- Improves the personal relationships
- Reduces misunderstanding and conflicts.
PART 3: ENGAGE IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Ok, you’re ready to roll! Here’s the best way to tackle the conflict.

STEP 1. CHOOSE AN APPROPRIATE TIME AND PLACE

Meet in a “safe space” where any individual in the process can feel comfortable to experience whatever emotions they may encounter. Use a shared living space, so no one has “home court advantage.”

UH OH...!

AVOIDING TURTLES RARELY HAVE THEIR SELF-INTERESTS MET IN ISSUES OF CONFLICT. THEY TEND TO BE PASSIVE, AND ARE FOUND CALLING HOME TO MOM OR DAD TO RELAY THEIR PROBLEMS. IT SEEMS LIKE PEOPLE WALK ALL OVER THEM.
STEP 2. TAKE TURNS DESCRIBING THE PROBLEM

When you and your roommate are ready, let’s try and describe the problem. Everyone is going to have their own unique perspectives.

You and your roommate(s) will take turns describing the issue. The problem should be described in the following way:

- State the facts
- Describe WHAT happened... NOT WHY it happened
- Use “I” statements
- Be respectful

While your roommate is talking, use active listening.

- Ask questions and repeat what you’ve heard for clarity
- DO NOT change, or add anything

When your roommate is finished, now it’s your turn to identify the problem. Your roommate should now be listening actively.

OUT FOR BLOOD!

WHEN SHARKS ARE IN A CONFLICT SITUATION, THEY’LL DEAL WITH THE ISSUE HEAD-ON, PULLING NO PUNCHES. PEOPLE WHO ARE CONFLICT ADVERSE WILL FEEL THREATENED BY SHARKS, EVEN ACCUSE THEM OF HARASSMENT.
STEP 3. EXPRESS YOUR FEELINGS

Now it’s time to speak honestly about how you feel about the situation.

- What did/do you feel?
- How would you rather feel?
- What are your needs? Hopes?

UNFORTUNATELY, TEDDY BEARS ARE GOING TO SACRIFICE THEIR OWN WANTS AND NEEDS TO KEEP THE RELATIONSHIP INTACT, AND ARE OFTEN WALKED ON BY MORE AGGRESSIVE PERSONALITIES.
STEP 4. BRAINSTORM A WIN/WIN SOLUTION

We’ve arrived at the secret for resolving conflict. Are you ready? It’s really quite simple:

The true secret to the process is to create a win-win situation.

If everyone feels like they’re leaving with an improvement, or that they’ve “won,” then the group truly has won and your relationships will all be stronger because of it.

Ask yourself, “Is there a way we could all get what we want, by getting more creative?”

Give a little. One person shouldn’t compromise while everyone else gets what they want. Everyone needs to participate.

So brainstorm ideas. Think of solutions in which everyone wins. And when you’ve got one that feels right for all involved, figure out what it will take to make it happen.

BE CAREFUL!

SO KEEN IS THE FOX ON COMPROMISE THAT THEY TEND TO OVER-COMPROMISE. THEY WILL SACRIFICE THEIR OWN BELIEFS AND NEEDS SO THAT COMPROMISE CAN BE REACHED.
STEP 5. FOLLOW-UP TO MAKE SURE IT WORKS

Okay, you’ve done the hard part. Now you need to set some consequences. Determine what should happen if one of you doesn’t stick to the plan.

Set a date and a method for following up on your solution. Verifying that the solution works is critical. And that’s it! We’ve tried to keep this as simple as possible.

Remember the vital steps:

• Identify your conflict-resolution style
• Adopt the proper behaviors and attitude
• Use Active Listening
• Find the problem
• Brainstorm and implement a win-win situation

If you have any questions, feel free to reach out to us. As we’ve said, we’ve been down this road before!

GIVE A HOOT!

WHEN DEALING WITH AN OWL, THE KEY PHRASE IS “LONG RUN”, BECAUSE YOU NEED TO BE READY TO COMMIT TO YOUR COLLABORATING OWL FOR A LONG TIME. THEY’LL GO THE DISTANCE FOR YOU, BUT YOU’VE GOT TO BE THERE TO SUPPORT THEM.
Apply these famous Oprah Winfrey quotes to your situation. Guess what? You’ll find Oprah’s right on the money!

The greatest discovery of all time is that a person can change his future by merely changing his attitude.

The more you praise and celebrate your life, the more there is in life to celebrate.

The thing you fear most has no power. Your fear of it is what has the power. Facing the truth really will set you free.

I don’t think you ever stop giving. I really don’t. I think it’s an on-going process. And it’s not just about being able to write a check. It’s being able to touch somebody’s life.

My idea of heaven is a great big baked potato and someone to share it with.

The whole point of being alive is to evolve into the complete person you were intended to be.

Turn your wounds into wisdom.

Where there is no struggle, there is no strength.