

What is a Collective Agreement

A collective agreement is a book of rules negotiated by the employer and the union, which specifies our rights as workers, and the limits on the employer's power in the workplace. If we don't write in language covering wages, vacation, job postings, seniority, or protection from unjust discipline, then we have no defined processes or rights on these issues, except minimum standards required by the Employment Standards Act.

Labour laws say very little about what must be in a collective agreement. It's a very short list:

- **a recognition clause** (that the union is the only bargaining agent for the workers);
- **a term** (examples: one, two, three years);
- **a grievance and arbitration procedure** (so that there will be a way to settle disagreements over the interpretation of the contract without a strike or work stoppage while the contract is in force);
- and **a dues check-off** (an automatic payment of union dues by all workers covered by the collective agreement - and considered an important part of union security).

A collective agreement is a legally-binding agreement. If either the employer or the union violates the agreement, there is a grievance and arbitration process to use to settle the dispute.