

Chapter 5 Resources

Working with Committee Members



Preparation Steps for Chapter 5 Discussion and Activity

- This *Facilitator's Guide* will lead you step-by-step through the chapter 5 discussions and activities.
 - Duplicate as appropriate the needed handouts for the activity section.
 - During the group activity, participants will need to take notes. Arrange to have a pen available for each participant.
- Return to the [chapter 5 homepage](#).
 - Watch the chapter 5 video and download it in preparation for leading the session.
 - To **download** the **videos**, scroll to the bottom of the chapter 5 homepage and click on the .mp4 link under “Additional Files.”

Chapter 5 *Facilitator's Guide*



→ **Summary of facilitation steps:**

1. Lead the discussion of chapter 5
2. Prepare the group for the chapter 5 videos
3. Watch the chapter 5 videos
4. Lead the chapter 5 video discussion
5. Lead the chapter 5 group activity

Practical Points

- The time estimations provided for the discussions and activities may vary significantly, depending on the number of students and the group dynamics.
- Information contained in this document that is intended to be read verbatim to the participants is italicized.

Step 1. Lead the chapter 5 group discussion (15 minutes)

→ **Read aloud and discuss with the participants.**

1. *What are the two or three most important points you remember from chapter 5?*
2. *Imagine that you are at the stage where your thesis committee is in place and you expect to defend within the next 18 months. One of your committee members appears to be too busy. He's not responsive to e-mails, nor is he providing feedback. You are concerned that he will not devote sufficient time to writing a strong letter of recommendation for you. Would you consider trying to replace him? Explain your reasoning.*
3. *How do you feel about your decision to join your department? Do you feel that in your department the professors are good, supportive mentors? If you are not satisfied with your department, what could you do to make changes? Describe how you would go about communicating with your professors, the head of the program, and the chair to find better academic mentors.*
4. *What type of input do you want from your committee members? Do you want them to mentor you toward your future goals, or would you prefer that they offer input only on your current research?*

Step 2. Prepare for the chapter 5 videos

Note to Facilitator

- This video portrays a hypothetical situation that is *not* representative of the typical proposal or thesis defense process. Its content is designed to highlight potential conflicts between graduate committee members for the sake of probing deeply into the graduate committee process.
- The brief character description video can be played again during the group activity to help students in their role-play.

→ Read the following video introduction to the participants.

We will now watch two short videos. The first is a video introduction of the three professors serving on Isabella's dissertation defense committee: Dr. Jansen, Dr. Price, and Dr. Flanders. The second is the video titled Dilemma, where you will meet Isabella on her way to her thesis proposal defense and discover the dilemma she is about to face.

Step 3. Watch the two chapter 5 videos: first the introduction, then Dilemma (6 minutes)

Step 4. Lead the chapter 5 video discussion (10 minutes)

→ Ask the participants the following questions.

1. Explain Dr. Price's reasoning for not supporting Isabella's case to move forward at this time.
2. Do you think Dr. Price is being fair? Why or why not?
3. How would you describe the personalities of Dr. Price, Dr. Flanders, and Dr. Jansen? What things do the characters say and do that give you clues about their general disposition? Are they easy or hard to get along with?

Step 5. Lead the chapter 5 activity (20 minutes)

→ Read the following activity objective to the participants.

In this activity you will participate in role-plays involving three scenes that result in an ending for the chapter 5 video. In doing so you will become familiar with the dynamics of working with committee members. We'll need a few volunteers to play the various characters. In the handout, which I'll distribute shortly, you'll see a character description for Dr. Price, Dr. Flanders, and Dr. Jansen. Volunteers should familiarize themselves with their characters.

In scene 1, Isabella and Elena discuss what Isabella is going to say when she goes into the room with her committee. In scene 2, Dr. Price explains to the committee members the same thing he just told Isabella. The committee discusses the situation but does not reach a conclusion. In scene 3, the committee

invites Isabella into the room with them (Elena leaves), and the four of them conduct a conversation in an attempt to resolve the situation and make a decision with regard to Isabella's work in Dr. Price's lab and her thesis research.

- **If your group is large, you may wish to subdivide the students.** Male and female names have been included for each character so that the characters can be played by anyone. You can add additional characters to the committee if appropriate. For each of the scenes, allow the students to engage in their character roles, but give them a time limit and signal them when it's time to wrap up.

Assign the characters and give each volunteer actor a copy of the handout. Before you start, you may wish to play the introduction video again.

- **Lead the students through the role-play exercise for each of the three scenes.** Serve as the timekeeper, allowing 2 to 5 minutes for each scene.
- **After going through the three scenes, conclude with posing the following discussion questions to the student spectators.**
 1. *Were you satisfied with what transpired in each scene? Explain.*
 2. *Should Isabella have done anything differently during her meeting with the committee?*
 3. *If you, as a spectator, were involved in the role-play as one of the characters, would you have behaved differently? What are some of the other outcomes that could have resulted with different character actors?*

Chapter 5 Role-Play Handout (2 to 5 minutes for each scene)

Scene 1: Isabella and Elena discuss what Isabella is going to say when she goes into the room with her committee.

Scene 2: Dr. Price explains to the committee members the same thing he just told Isabella. The committee discusses the situation but does not reach a conclusion.

Scene 3: The committee invites Isabella into the room with them (Elena leaves), and the four of them conduct a conversation in an attempt to resolve the situation and make a decision with regard to Isabella's work in Dr. Price's lab and her thesis research.

Notes for building your role-play character:

1. Elena (Ethan), Isabella's friend.

Think about Elena and her situation as Isabella's friend in this scene. Use the following prompts to help you get into Elena's character and her way of thinking about this situation: What is Elena's primary intention in this scenario? What does she want to see happen? What are Elena's stakes in this situation? Is she more of a listening friend or an advice-giving friend? What could happen to Elena's friendship with Isabella if Isabella does not get what she wants from her committee? What help or hindrance could Elena's advice to Isabella bring about?

2. Isabella (Roger), a graduate student ready to start her proposed thesis research.

As a graduate student, Isabella can chart her course to a certain degree, but she needs to stay in agreement with her committee members, especially her thesis committee chair, Dr. Jansen. Use the following prompts to help you get into Isabella's character and her way of thinking about this situation: How does Isabella feel? What is her primary intention in this scenario? What does she want to see happen? What are the stakes for Isabella in this situation? Knowing that one of her committee members is determined to postpone her primary research until the next semester, how does Isabella feel? What will most likely happen if she brings up her opinions of her conflict with Dr. Price when she goes back into the conference room? What if she just remains silent and waits for Dr. Price to bring it up? Does she take a stand and defend her desire to work on her primary research, or does she politely listen to the suggestions of her committee and go along with them? What does Isabella risk by openly contradicting Dr. Price?

3. Dr. Price (Dr. Percy), Isabella's committee member and lab advisor.

Dr. Price is serving as a committee member on Isabella's committee, and he is the director of the lab that Isabella is working in as a research assistant (RA). As a member of Isabella's committee, Dr. Price does not have the final say about things. Nevertheless, as a senior member of the faculty, his opinion on things bears weight in the overall discussion of Isabella's progress and graduate program.

Think about Dr. Price and his situation as Isabella's professor and committee member in this scene. Use the following prompts to help you get into Dr. Price's character and his way of thinking

about this situation: What is Dr. Price's primary intention in this scenario? What does he want to see happen? What are Dr. Price's stakes in this situation? What might Dr. Price say to the other committee members about Isabella's situation? Will he give the other committee members a chance to voice their opinions? Will he take a domineering role and demand that she delay her thesis research?

4. Dr. Jansen, Isabella's committee chair and thesis advisor.

Dr. Jansen leads the proposal defense meeting, and has the final say about Isabella's program and timeline. His decisions, however, reflect his support (or not) of his fellow faculty members on the committee, and therefore the impact of his decisions needs to be carefully considered.

Think about Dr. Jansen and his position as Isabella's thesis advisor and leader of this meeting in this scene. Use the following prompts to help you get into Dr. Jansen's character and his way of thinking about this situation: What is Dr. Jansen's primary intention in this scenario? What does he want to see happen? What are Dr. Jansen's stakes in this situation? What is his role in this conflict? How might Dr. Jansen react if Isabella first raises the issues Dr. Price raised before their meeting? How might he, as Isabella's major advisor, respond to Dr. Price? How might Dr. Jansen react if Dr. Price is the first to bring up the conflict?

5. Dr. Flanders (Dr. Franklin), Isabella's committee member and professor in the department.

Dr. Flanders has much experience as a graduate student committee member, but she is not in charge of Isabella's committee.

Think about Dr. Flanders and her situation as Isabella's thesis committee member. Use the following prompts to help you get into Dr. Flanders's character and her way of thinking about Isabella's situation: What are Dr. Flanders's stakes in this situation? What is her position on the committee? How might Dr. Flanders respond to Dr. Price? How might she respond to Dr. Jansen? Will Dr. Flanders stick up for Isabella, or for Dr. Price? She could also simply defer to Dr. Jansen and not say much at all in this discussion. How do you think this type of behavior might affect the outcome for Isabella?