

Sometimes, conflict arises and you may not know how best to handle the situation. There are always people to help, but here are some important things to bear in mind when approaching a situation that requires resolution.

The School of Graduate Studies offers the following as a guide only:

Principles of Effective Conflict Resolution

- I. Be open and respectful (Natural justice)
- II. Act early
- III. Understand the conflict
- IV. Step towards conflict resolution

I. Be open and respectful (Natural justice)

This is a principle that informs and is fundamental to both the law and administrative processes. Put simply, natural justice is a duty to act fairly. If you find yourself in a conflict with your supervisor or another member of the university community, it is everyone's duty to act fairly.

The simplest way to describe natural justice and the best approach to all conflict resolution is to know and be mindful of the fact that there are always two or more sides. In order to act according to natural justice you must be respectful and you must listen to the other perspectives.

Because of the hierarchical nature of university structures, graduate students do not have as much power as others on campus. So many students need their supervisors for many things and that power dynamic can be intimidating. While that power difference might feel like an obstacle, you must try to face the challenge in order to put your needs at the forefront – and, you don't always have to do that alone. At the end of this document is a list of resources you can rely on for advice and support in conflict resolution. Remember: you must take ownership of your own program.

II. Act early

Many people avoid conflict, many of us would rather not go through the work of resolving problems and differences. As a graduate student, however, you might feel your program is at stake and so addressing any perceived or real conflicts as soon as possible is always the best strategy. The longer an unresolved conflict continues, the more difficult it is to resolve.

III. Understand the conflict

Here are some **suggestions to think through** before starting any conflict resolution steps:

i. Put the facts into your own words.

Try not to let personal feelings get in the way of resolutions and progress. Focus only on relevant issues, and state the reality that you are experiencing.

ii. Clarify your thoughts about the situation, and why it bothers you.

Is there one problem at play or several? Are there specific moments of conflict or is the conflict more vague?

iii. Explain what your goals are and how you would like the situation to be resolved.

Try and come up with possible solutions that would work for you.

But always bear in mind that conflict resolution means negotiation and compromise.

iv. Following through on any resolution.

Whatever happens from a conflict resolution session, be sure to not only follow up on decided actions or plans but also to maintain communication with the other party.

IV. Step towards conflict resolution

As hard as it may feel, you should try and meet and talk with your supervisor about the conflict. The simplest resolutions are ones that are negotiated early and that involve only the people involved.

However, if you cannot talk with your supervisor or if you have tried that and it has not resulted in a resolution, then you should begin to consult others for advice and assistance.

It's best to work within your academic unit and/or faculty, but there are also university-wide resources.

Here is a list of **People to ask for Help** in order:

i. At the department level – graduate officer, Head of Department

ii. At the faculty level – Associate Dean of Faculty

iii. At the university level – [Graduate Student Union](#), [Internationalization Office](#),
[School of Graduate Studies](#)