

Navigating problems & difficult conversations:

Steps to take when communication gets tough

1. Pause & reflect

- ☐ Talk to someone you trust for perspective.
- ☐ Let emotions settle before addressing the issue.
- ☐ Clarify the problem: “I don’t want X... I want Y, and Y looks like...”

2. Invite them to the conversation

- ☐ Give a heads-up so they can prepare. This also gives them the opportunity to decline or reschedule.

3. Have the conversation

- ☐ Describe your experience objectively and respectfully.
- ☐ Use “I” instead of “you” to reduce defensiveness.
- ☐ Allow them space to share their perspective.
- ☐ Work together on next steps (solution-focused!).

4. Summarize afterward

- ☐ Send a short email capturing what was discussed and agreed upon.
- ☐ This ensures mutual understanding and creates a record.

5. Return to normal

- ☐ Resist “me vs. them” thinking.
- ☐ Give grace, patience and the benefit of the doubt.



Key reminders

- ☐ Prepare your goals and talking points.
- ☐ Be open to hearing “no,” negotiating, or compromising.
- ☐ There’s always risk – it may not be received well.
- ☐ Others may not have the awareness, willingness, or skill to navigate conflict effectively.
- ☐ You can’t control someone else’s behaviour, only your own.

We are here to help.

Situations can arise that can critically delay progress or completion of your degree program, such as personal reasons (e.g., family, health), a lack of communication with your supervisor, lack of resources that are required for you to complete the project, as well as a supervisor’s relocation to a different institution. Reach out to us.