A Graduate Student Haggadah: Four Defense Committee Members

Contributed by [Carl Elkin](#)
Source: A Graduate Student Haggadah

Leader: By tradition, our Thesis Defense Committees have four members, including our advisor. From this our tradition infers that there are four types of Defense Committee members, the wise Committee member, the evil Committee member, the simple Committee member, and the uninterested Committee member.

Participant: The wise Committee member asks, "What is the meaning of the experiments, and the context in which you did them?" To her you shall explain all your experiments, hypotheses, and experimental approaches, right down to the very last details of your negative controls.

All: It is the wise that ask the questions from which we learn.

Participant: The wicked Committee member (your thesis advisor) says "What is the meaning of the meaning of the suchand-such data which we have observed?" By saying "we" he implies that he contributed more to your thesis then your pet rock did. To him you shall speak in a stern voice, beginning, "The meaning of the such-and-such data that I have observed"

All: For had he been there when the experiment finally worked and you told everyone within shouting distance of its significance, he would not have needed to ask.

Participant: The simple Committee member asks, "What did you learn from XXX?" By asking this, he makes clear that he has not read your thesis. Him you shall first praise for his insightful question, and then summarize your entire thesis in three minutes.

Group: To those of open simplicity, we give a straightforward answer. For grad school teaches us it is that some things are not worth wasting time on.

Participant: As for the Committee member who does not even care enough to ask, you must begin gently with him, saying "Er, professor? I'm sorry to interrupt your reading, but I thought you might be really interested in my observation that...

Group: It is the ones who don't even care which make one wonder.