

## Practice-Based Article

# **Guiding Success: Staff Support for Undergraduate Nursing Students in Academic Poster Design**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Posters are a dynamic and innovative assessment tool in undergraduate nursing programmes offering benefits for both students and faculty, while moving beyond traditional assessment methods. Since the inception of the undergraduate nursing programme at Hibernia College in 2022, posters have formed a key part of its diverse assessment strategy. Recognising the need for structured support, the nursing faculty partnered with the Digital Learning Department (DLD), specifically the digital librarian and DLD researcher, to leverage our expertise in poster design to help guide nursing students through the creative part of the assignment. We developed an instructional workshop drawing on active learning principles, as well as additional resources, to help students develop the skills and confidence to create impactful academic posters. This paper explores the development and outcomes of this collaboration, and its role in student learning and engagement.

### **KEYWORDS**

academic poster design, student instruction, active learning, undergraduate nursing students, teaching and learning

### **INTRODUCTION**

Hibernia College is recognised for its expertise in delivering innovative hybrid and online education. While well regarded for its postgraduate education programmes, the introduction of the undergraduate nursing programme *MSc in Nursing in General Nursing* in 2022 has expanded the college's academic offerings. The programme integrates diverse assessment strategies, including poster presentations, to enhance student learning.

Academic posters are a dynamic and engaging assessment tool, offering significant benefits to both students and faculty while moving beyond traditional methods, such as case studies and exams (Conyers, 2003). Summers (2005) has emphasised that academic requirements on nursing programmes must align theory with practice as traditional assessment methods alone are no longer sufficient to ensure that graduates are prepared for professional practice. Academic poster creation helps to develop essential skills including critical thinking, creativity, communication and problem-solving, while accommodating a variety of learning preferences. This assessment method develops a student's ability to effectively present complex ideas within a limited space, while still maintaining visual clarity and engagement (Halligan, 2007). Developing a poster presentation requires students to engage with current research, gain a deeper

understanding of a subject, and skilfully present content in a way that engages their audience. As such, academic poster assessments encourage active and meaningful engagement with course content (Crawley & Frazer, 2015).

Communication skills are an increasingly important aspect of the role of practising nurses. The development of poster creation skills can help to support practising nurses to communicate effectively with colleagues, patients, and the wider community (Conyers, 2003). Crawley and Frazer (2015) have highlighted the benefits that skills acquired during poster design can bring to patient care, such as information synthesis and effective visual communication. Furthermore, poster presentations at professional conferences are an engaging and impactful way of sharing research findings. They also help to facilitate networking among researchers. These valuable contributions that posters can make to the professional lives of practicing nurses further highlight their value beyond undergraduate programmes and their contribution to lifelong skills (Halligan, 2008; Hardicre, Devitt & Coad, 2007).

Crucially, research suggests that students generally enjoy poster assessments. According to Conyers (2003, p. 39) “nursing students embraced with enthusiasm the opportunity to explore their creativity and develop alternative communication skills. Many students expressed relief at not having to write an essay.” An assignment method that is intrinsically enjoyable for students, coupled with its long-term benefits, seems to be an obvious choice.

Due to our experience in designing and presenting posters at academic conferences, both librarian and DLD researcher inadvertently acquired a reputation as the ‘poster people’ within the institution. As a result, the nursing faculty approached us to collaborate in providing instruction and support to nursing students on academic poster design principles. We approached this novel request with curiosity and enthusiastically took on the challenge of developing an effective strategy to guide and support the nursing students in poster creation. We now play an established role in supporting the nursing programme’s poster assessment strategy.

## THE INTERVENTION

At the beginning of their *Care Needs of the Older Adult* module, the students received guidance on the assignment from the module lead, which included a comprehensive assignment brief, general guidance, and a PowerPoint template for the poster layout. Then we focused on guiding students regarding the visual design aspects of poster creation. We developed a workshop that combined instructional components with collaborative, hands-on learning activities.

We incorporated active learning principles into the workshop design. Active learning methods, which encourage students to take greater responsibility for their own learning, have been demonstrated to enhance educational success (Saunders & Wong, 2020). A collaborative, team-based, active learning approach has been shown to increase student engagement with workshop material (Opuda & Bresnahan, 2019). Research suggests that active learning improves problem solving and critical thinking skills, leads to higher achievement, and is the preferred learning strategy among students (Ul Huda et al., 2016). The approach we took with the poster design workshop at Hibernia College blended traditional teaching methods with active learning principles to give the nursing students a richer experience and encourage better learning outcomes. The key components of the workshop were:

- An instructional section, outlining design principles and the differences between academic posters and written academic assignments.
- A group activity, where students were divided into groups of four or five and given the task of analysing sample posters collected from various sources.
- A collaborative discussion led by us, as facilitators, where students shared insights and critiqued poster designs and facilitators collated key points on a whiteboard.

Student engagement in the workshop was evident to us, as we observed increased energy, discussion and collaboration as students analysed sample posters during the group activity. The interactive nature of the session, along with facilitator guidance, helped to build confidence as students recognised that they could intuitively identify effective design principles.

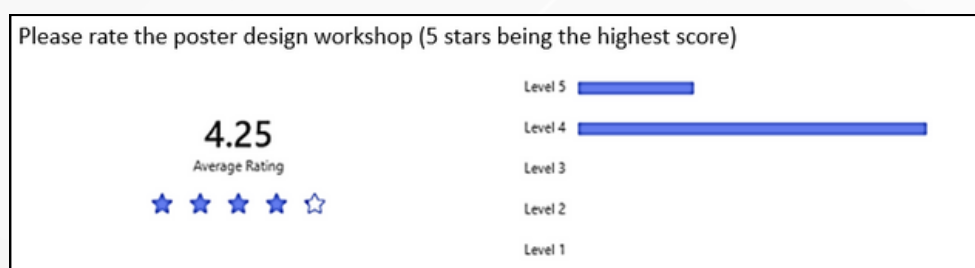
We also created handouts for students to use after the workshop, consisting of a poster design checklist and concise writing tips. They were made available in the module area on the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), allowing students to refer to them as they developed their posters. These resources reinforced the key concepts from the workshop and gave students the support they needed to work independently.

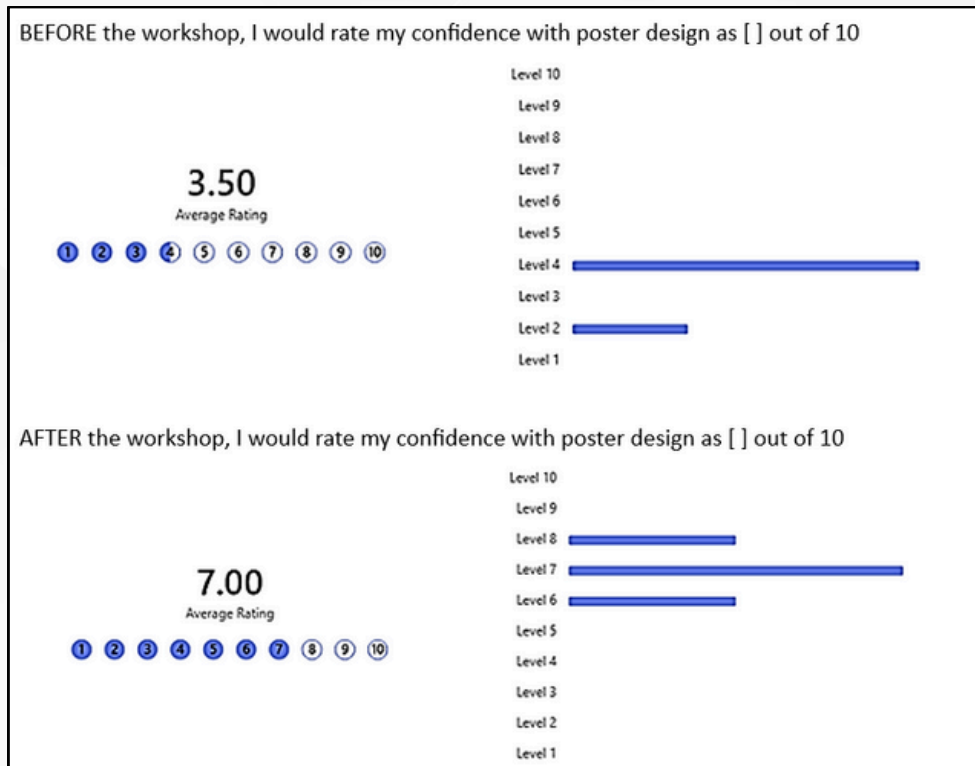
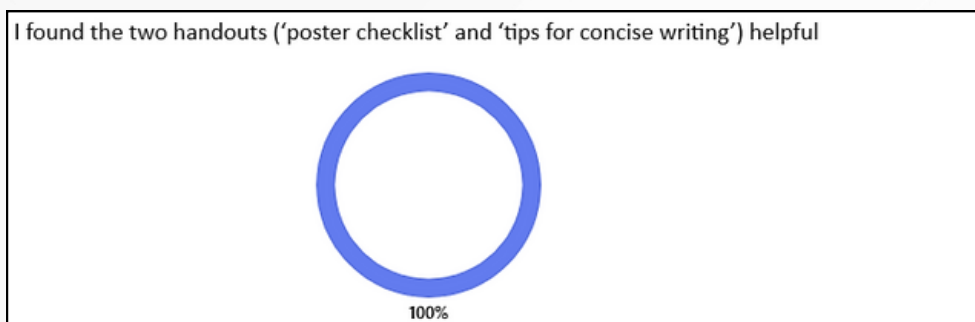
## OUTCOMES

### Student feedback

As a follow-up to the most recent workshop, a survey was conducted of the 2024 cohort. The cohort comprised 25 students with 4 students responding to the survey, giving a response rate of 16%. Among respondents, the workshop satisfaction rating was 4.25 out of 5 (Figure 1). Furthermore, all respondents found the provided handouts useful. There was a considerable increase in student confidence regarding poster design, as the confidence rating rose from 3.5 before the workshop to 7 afterwards (Figure 2). Student comments indicated general satisfaction with the content of the workshop and handouts (Figure 3). However, some constructive feedback was given, including a request for advice regarding how to include references in posters, and a request for more practical guidance on designing posters using PowerPoint (Table 1).

**Figure 1. Student feedback on satisfaction with the workshop**



**Figure 2. Student feedback on confidence levels before and after the workshop****Figure 3. Student feedback on helpfulness of the handouts****Table 1. Sample Feedback Comments**

Question	Response
What did you like about this workshop?	Clarity The example posters Explained what made a good poster
What could have been better?	Everything was good Ways to reference How to actually make the poster on PowerPoint etc

As outlined, student feedback indicated overall satisfaction with the supports provided, with most respondents indicating a clearer understanding of poster design following the session. Additionally, the workshop provided valuable face-to-face interaction enabling the facilitators and students to interact in a more spontaneous way than would be possible via a support webinar. The active learning component contributed to the success of the workshop by encouraging enthusiastic and lively engagement among the

students. It not only kept the students actively involved but also supported their understanding of key concepts. As a result, it became a valuable component of the workshop design, facilitating deeper learning.

As well as benefiting the students, the process also contributed to our professional development. It allowed us to expand on our skills, knowledge, and experience in instructional support and academic poster design. From a wider staff and faculty perspective, the initiative fostered active collaboration across different roles and departments, which strengthened interdisciplinary partnerships.

### **LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

A limitation of this study was the small response rate to the survey. For future workshops we intend to change our method of gathering responses to ensure a more representative sample. For example, instead of distributing the online survey after the workshop, we could leave time before the end of the workshop to allow students to complete it in class.

To build on the success of the poster workshop, several future initiatives are proposed to further enhance student engagement and support. Since poster assessment is now incorporated into additional programmes, such as the Postgraduate *Professional Master of Education in Primary Education*, there is an opportunity to expand collaboration to include the School of Education.

Library staff are currently developing a research support page for the library site on the student VLE. This page will be expanded to include supports for academic poster design, including the handouts currently distributed to nursing students.

Additionally, in response to student feedback, future workshops and handouts will include guidance on referencing and specific instruction on PowerPoint to better support the technical aspects of poster creation. There may also be scope in these areas to develop further instructional handouts for students to refer to after the workshop.

Finally, students will be encouraged to submit their posters for academic conferences, such as the Higher Education Colleges Association (HECA) student poster award. This will facilitate greater academic engagement and provide opportunities for networking, allowing students to connect with peers, educators and professionals as they advance in their studies and move closer to their professional careers.

### **CONCLUSION**

The collaboration between the nursing faculty, the librarian and DLD researcher highlights the value of structured support to develop the poster design skills of undergraduate nursing students. By drawing on active learning principles to provide an interactive workshop, along with additional resources, the initiative improved student confidence and engagement. Student feedback also demonstrated the success of this approach, with participants expressing overall satisfaction with the workshop and additional supports, and greater understanding of poster design principles. Some areas for improvement were also noted. The initiative also led to cross-departmental collaboration among staff in different roles at Hibernia College.

Beyond its immediate impact, this initiative has set a foundation for continued improvement and growth. Future developments will focus on integrating technical training, expanding support to other disciplines, and encouraging students to showcase their work in academic settings. By sustaining and developing this support framework, Hibernia College can continue resourcing students with a diverse skillset that will benefit them throughout their academic and professional careers.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

We have no known conflicts of interests to declare.

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