SUMMARY
Students summarize and communicate scientific information in a setting that simulates a research conference. In groups of 6, students prepare scientific posters to present at scheduled sessions throughout the semester. Students receive feedback from peers and from the TA, who also assigns a grade.

GOALS
• Give students the opportunity to present research in a formal setting, similar to a real-world conference experience
• Foster students’ group management, research, and presentation skills

“The benefit of hands-on assignments like poster presentations is that students gain a much deeper sense of knowledge about the topic than they would through a simple lecture-exam format.”
- John Stix
1. Students receive an exemplar of the poster to demonstrate what they are being asked to do.

2. Instructors divide students alphabetically into groups of 6 students each. Students have 3-4 weeks to prepare their posters.

3. Students complete a group homework assignment that consists of short answer questions geared towards developing their poster content.

4. Students present completed assignments to peers at in-class conference-style poster sessions.

5. Each student fills out a peer assessment form and submits it to the TA.

ASSESSMENT

- Students complete this assignment on two different topics. Each assignment is worth 15% of the final grade (for a total of 30%).
- For each assignment, the group’s grade is based on the oral presentation (5%), the quality of the poster (5%), and the homework assignment (5%).
- Instructors advise TAs what criteria to look for when assessing the posters and presentations. TAs use a rubric to assess the homework assignment.
- After the presentations, students assess each group member’s contribution to the assignment on a hard copy form with a 5-point scale. They submit their completed forms to the TAs.
- The instructors review all grades and make adjustments in the case of inconsistencies among TA assessment approaches, or if 3+ students in a group indicate that a peer did not contribute adequately to the assignment. Students receive feedback on the first assignment that they can use when working on the second assignment.

BENEFITS

- The assignment increases students’ understanding of course content because the analytical requirements go deeper than exam questions based on lectures.
- The group aspect of the assignment teaches students to manage time and collaborate effectively.
- Students participate in an actual research process (creating and presenting a poster), which gives them more familiarity with situations they may encounter throughout their academic careers.

CHALLENGES

- Coordination of TAs, groups, and the presentation schedule can be daunting. A strong organization system to store relevant information (e.g., an Excel spreadsheet) is helpful.
- Students may not participate fully in their group. Including the peer assessment helps motivate group members to contribute.

BEYOND GRADING: ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES FROM MCGILL INSTRUCTORS

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