

PERRLA Case Study

Campbellsville University

RN to BSN & MSN Programs

Executive Summary

Campbellsville University's School of Nursing didn't offer PERRLA as an optional resource and hope students would use it. They required it – for every student, in every paper, from day one. That decision made all the difference.

Before PERRLA, faculty in both the RN to BSN and MSN programs were spending significant grading time on in-text citations and reference formatting, time they would rather have spent on content and clinical reasoning. After the first large cohort used PERRLA, BSN Program Coordinator Dr. Sarah Smith put it simply: it was "night and day." Faculty were "happy dancing."

By mid-semester, usage numbers reflected consistent engagement across multiple assignments – and faculty could feel the difference in every stack of papers they graded.

The Challenge

Campbellsville University's nursing students often enter the program with varied levels of preparation in academic writing, particularly in the APA format. RN to BSN students frequently transition directly from ADN programs where formal paper writing may have been limited. MSN students, on the other hand, are often experienced nurses returning to academics after time away from formal writing expectations. *Continued...*

→ Diverse student entry points in APA knowledge and academic writing

→ Increased faculty time addressing format mechanics alongside content evaluation

About the Programs

Campbellsville University's School of Nursing offers two fully online degree programs: the RN to BSN program, coordinated by Dr. Sarah Smith, and the MSN program, coordinated by Dr. Tammy Harris.

During the case study year, PERRLA covered 40 students across both programs – required for every student, in every paper.

What Changed

After the first large cohort used PERRLA, Dr. Smith didn't mince words: it was "night and day." The mechanics that had consumed feedback cycles – in-text citations, reference elements, and consistent formatting – improved dramatically. Students who received corrections went back and applied them.

But the more meaningful shift was what filled the space PERRLA cleared. With less time spent on formatting mechanics, faculty could focus on what actually mattered – the quality of sources students were selecting. Dr. Smith noted a visible improvement there too. Students increasingly made more informed choices, selecting peer-reviewed literature over less credible websites.

In a single 30-day period mid-semester, Campbellsville University students created 130 papers, 489 references, and 516 citations. Those numbers reflect a program where the tool is genuinely part of the workflow.

What Still Takes Work

PERRLA didn't solve everything – and Dr. Smith and Dr. Harris are candid about that.

PERRLA formats what students give it. When a student pulls a reference from a third-party database, they are still responsible for confirming the information is correct before it goes into their paper. PERRLA doesn't make assumptions about source content – it formats what the student reviews and confirms. Careful inputs lead to accurate outputs, and students quickly learn to review reference elements closely.

Adoption is also a habit, and habits take time. A few students were slower to lean into the tool, and the requirement plus faculty follow-up is what helped bring them along. As Dr. Smith noted, a tool can create the conditions for success, but student engagement is still part of the equation.

Lessons & Recommendations

Require it, don't just offer it – making PERRLA optional puts the burden on students who are already balancing a lot. Requiring it removes that decision and creates the repetition that makes the tool stick. Campbellsville University's adoption numbers reflect that choice directly.

Build in practice before the stakes are high – introducing PERRLA during orientation with low-stakes assignments gives students a chance to learn the tool before grades are on the line. By the time real papers start, the workflow is already familiar.

Pair PERRLA with a foundational APA resource – PERRLA handles formatting, but students still benefit from understanding what goes into a reference and why. *The Concise Guide to APA* gave Campbellsville University's BSN students the context to use the tool well, not just habitually.

Case Study at a Glance

1-year case study: August 2024 – July 2025

2 fully online programs: RN to BSN and MSN

1,279 papers, **3,710** references, and **4,921** citations in one academic year

Now a multi-year site license for their nursing students

The Challenge (continued)

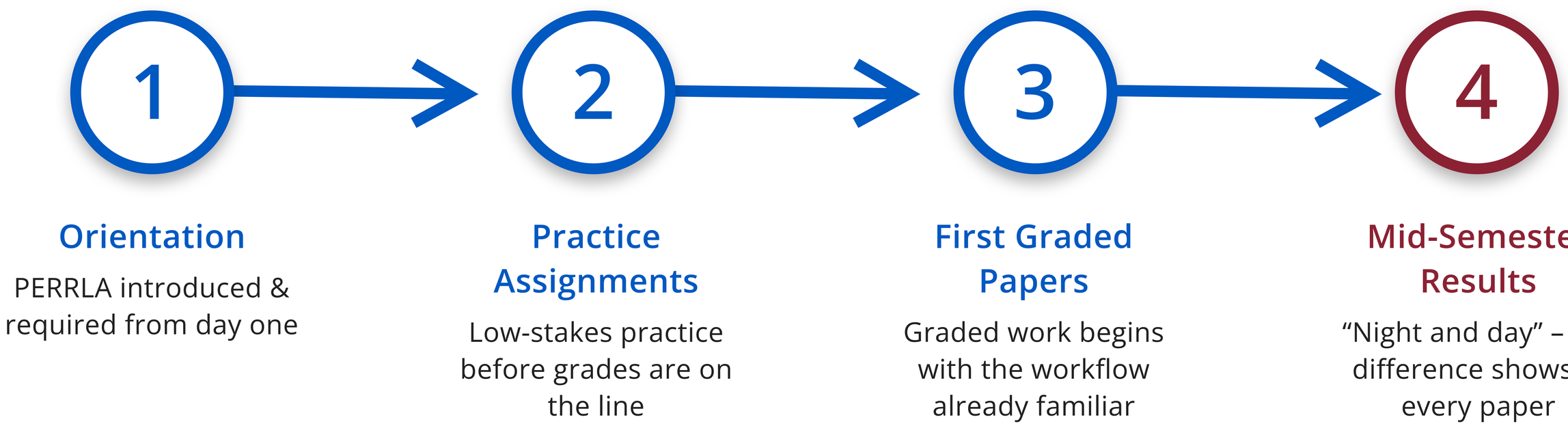
As a result, some students submit early papers with challenges in areas such as in-text citation, reference formatting, and overall APA consistency. These issues are not typically a matter of effort, but of APA exposure and familiarity. Faculty provide a range of resources – including Purdue OWL, the APA manual, examples, and detailed instructions – to support student success, though engagement with any single resource naturally varies.

For faculty, this can mean more time spent on writing mechanics during grading, sometimes shifting focus away from higher-level content such as clinical reasoning and professional application. As one faculty member noted, the experience can feel like teaching foundational writing skills alongside course content.

Student Voices

The clearest student reaction came unprompted. After working through their first papers with PERRLA, students in Dr. Smith's January cohort didn't just say they liked it – they wanted to know why they hadn't had it sooner.

"Why haven't we had this before? This would have been fabulous much earlier."



How We Rolled Out

The decision to require PERRLA rather than offer it as an optional resource was deliberate – and both Dr. Smith and Dr. Harris are clear that it was the right call. As Dr. Harris says requiring PERRLA helped students overcome the initial push to learn a new tool that would help them tackle APA writing.

PERRLA was introduced during orientation with practice assignments before real papers – giving students a chance to learn the tool before grades were on the line.

The BSN program also paired PERRLA with the *Concise Guide to APA*, giving students a reference for the broader writing context that PERRLA doesn't cover.

Dr. Harris went a step further, adding an assignment to her MSN orientation module to support students through the adoption process. Rather than quizzing students on what to italicize or capitalize, she shifted the focus to understanding source elements – what makes a book edited, what an issue number is, how to identify what goes into a reference. The goal was to help students use the tool correctly, not just know that it existed.