

Incorporating Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in Your Classes

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a mindset devised to optimize teaching and learning for diverse groups of students based on scientific insights into how people learn best. Taking a Universal Design approach to instruction encompasses setting goals, identifying potential barriers, and addressing them by employing multiple means of engagement, presentation, and assessment.

UDL's goal is to **maximize access for all diverse learners and to minimize the need for individual accommodations.**

Here are some ways to incorporate the concepts of UDL to “level the playing field” and promote educational excellence by all students.



A. CLASSROOM DYNAMICS

1. **Keep students actively engaged** by incorporating opportunities for brainstorming, problem-solving, or discussing newly presented information in pairs or small groups.
2. **Count to 10** after asking a question to allow students time to reflect and respond.
3. **Face students** while talking (minimize talking while facing the blackboard or whiteboard).
4. **Encourage voluntary in-class reading** of passages (rather than asking students to read aloud).
5. **Provide choices for engagement** (e.g., “Before sharing your thoughts on this, take 5 minutes to either jot them down alone, with a classmate, or dictate them into your phone.”)

B. PHYSICAL CONSIDERATIONS

- **Minimize distractions** by closing doors to the classroom and lowering blinds (or putting up posters) on doors or windows that reveal passers-by.
- When possible, **arrange the room in a U** so that you're easily seen and heard by all. If this isn't possible, rotate “who sits where” throughout the semester.



C. INSTRUCTION AND CLASS DOCUMENTS

1. **Promote interest and motivation** through hands-on learning and opportunities to make choices.
2. **Use multiple modalities in instruction** (lectures, film, graphs, charts, demonstrations, site visits, illustrations, PowerPoints, student presentations, “think, pair, share,” etc.).
3. **Supplement oral instructions** with written guidelines, visual aids, and perhaps video guidance.
4. **Make PowerPoints, graphics, and handouts available to students online** – ideally prior to class.
5. **Describe what you're presenting on ppt slides.** (Not only visually impaired students will benefit.)
6. **Provide closed captioning for videos** (if uploaded to YouTube, there's a captioning feature).
7. **Have class notes posted for all to access** – maybe via rotating note-takers.
8. **Create documents that are “reader friendly”** by using headers, bullet points, tables, graphics, bold fonts, and separating spaces to support focus and recall.
9. **Ensure that any uploaded documents can be read aloud by a computer.**



D. ASSESSMENTS AND ASSIGNMENTS

1. **Use multiple means for assessing students** (open note tests, podcasts, videos, different writing assignments, recorded responses, presentations, class participation, no/low stakes quizzes...)
2. **Provide opportunities for students to...**
 - a. **confirm their grasp** of your instructions for assignments before working on them
 - b. **demonstrate their understanding** of what you've taught before being tested on it

Consider giving "Previous class take-away" quizzes where students earn a point just for taking the quiz (regardless of correctness) and another for asking a follow up question. (This promotes attendance, engagement, confidence, motivation, and usually positive evaluation ratings. 😊)

(This will also provide you with feedback as to whether you presented information clearly enough for your students to understand before grading their comprehension.)



3. **Tell students what the format of test is going to be and what you'll be measuring.**
4. **Test students using the same structures you have used in class**—not necessarily using the same words or examples, but in a format that you've already used with them.
5. **Use a computer lab for essay tests.** (Imagine having to write a research article in a blue book!)
6. **To maximize understanding and retention, assess students on manageable amounts of information** (increasing the number of quizzes is better than only a few comprehensive exams).
7. To **minimize distractions for test-takers**, set up a number of desks to be facing the wall and/or have available "tri-fold" cardboard privacy screens.
8. **Consider eliminating timed tests**, as they often aren't the best reflection of skills and knowledge.
9. **Provide scaffolding that trains students to start assignments early and to obtain feedback on drafts** by structuring long-term assignments into assigned subtasks (such their thesis statement, list of arguments and counterarguments, outlines, potential sources, etc.)
10. **Give clear and explicit written instructions for assignments**, including:
 - The due date (see "How to Create Inclusive & Accessible Syllabi")
 - How and in what format the assignment may/must be turned in
 - Each important step of a lengthy assignment
 - A grading rubric, making clear your expectations



11. **Offer students several "no questions asked" passes** for missing class and/or turning in assignments late to use at their discretion. (Both your students and you will benefit!)
12. **Make clear the consequences for late assignments** (those not available for "turn it in late" passes) and stick to them so as to thwart enabling chronic procrastination.
13. **Remind students of all the possible resources available to them**, including the Writing Center, the Wellness Center, peer tutors, **and of course YOU!** (Not every student feels comfortable attending office hours without an explicit invitation or encouragement to come to them.)

Just as disability-driven environmental designs like curb cuts, elevators, and sliding doors are appreciated by all, so too are teaching strategies that embody Universal Design for Learning.

Learn more by going to www.dickinson.edu/UDL