

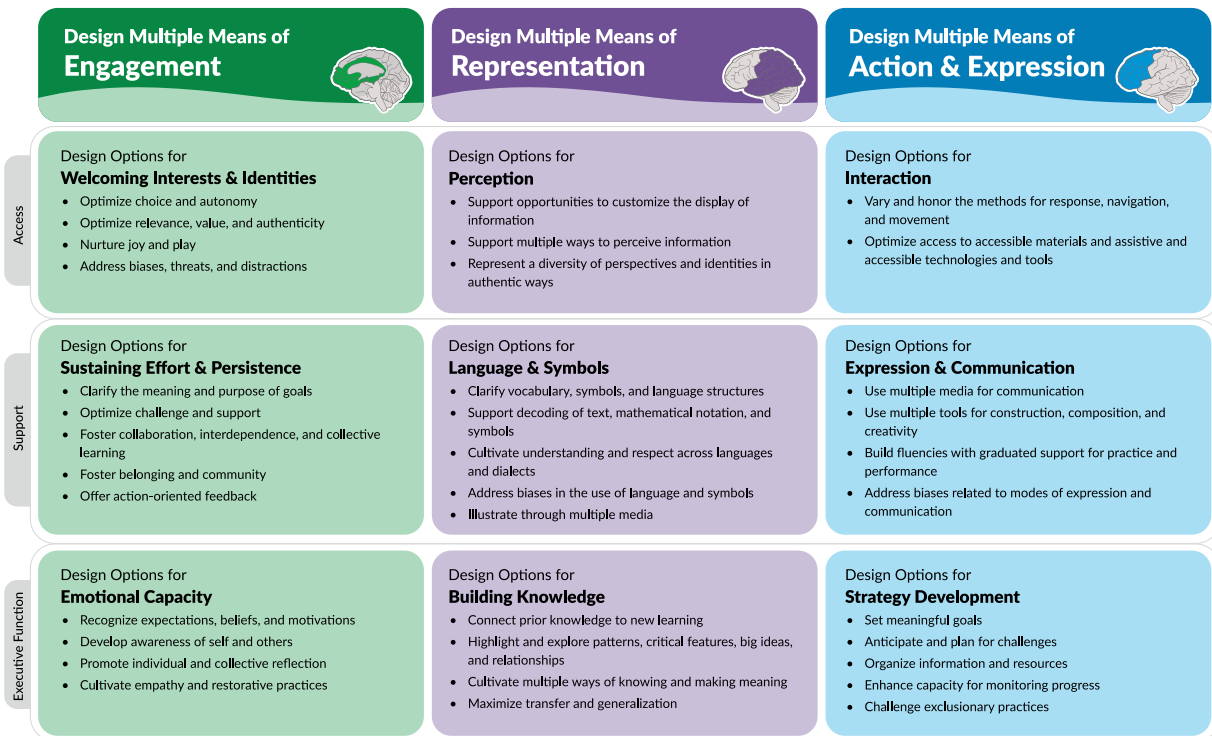
# Guide to Universal Design for Learning in Assessment

## Introduction

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is an educational framework that aims to create inclusive learning environments for all by minimizing barriers and providing multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression. The goal of UDL is learner agency that is purposeful and reflective, resourceful and authentic, strategic and action oriented. [The UDL guidelines](#) have been developed to support implementation of UDL over the last two decades with the latest version of the guidelines released in 2024 (see graphic organizer below) and represent the bases for this guide.

### The Universal Design for Learning Guidelines

The goal of UDL is **learner agency** that is purposeful & reflective, resourceful & authentic, strategic & action-oriented.



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In higher education, UDL aims to address the diverse learning needs of an increasingly diverse student population promoting equity and excellence in academic achievement for all, including traditional students, non-traditional learners, international students, and students with disabilities. Recognizing that we cannot use the checklist approach to implementation of UDL as a translational framework, we have developed some practical pointers to be considered when applying UDL principles to assessment in higher education:

## Multiple Means of Engagement

### Design Options for Self-Regulation

- Offer flexible deadlines when possible
- Design clear rubrics and expectations
- Support students to track their progress

### Optimize Relevance, Value, and Authenticity

- Connect assessments to real-world applications
- Enable students to choose topics that interest them
- Incorporate culturally relevant examples

### Foster Collaboration and Community

- Include peer-review components in assessments
- Design group project options
- Create discussion forums for assessment-related questions

## Multiple Means of Representation

### Design Ways of Customizing the Display of Information

- Design digital versions of assessments that allow text resizing
- Ensure high contrast between text and background
- Use clear, sans-serif fonts

### Design Alternatives for Auditory and Visual Information

- Write text descriptions for images used in assessments
- Provide transcripts for audio components
- Allow students to access assessment instructions in multiple formats (text, audio, video)

### Clarify Vocabulary and Symbols

- Define technical terms used in assessments
- Design a glossary of key terms
- Use consistent terminology throughout the course and assessments

## Multiple Means of Action and Expression

### Vary the Methods for Response and Navigation

- Offer multiple submission formats (e.g., written, oral, video)
- Use multiple tools for construction, composition and creativity
- Use multiple media for communication

### Optimize Access to Tools and Assistive Technologies

- Inform students about accessible and assistive technologies

- Permit use of calculators or formula sheets or other educational technologies when appropriate
- Ensure compatibility with screen readers and other assistive technologies

#### Support Student to Gradually Build Their Competence

- Design practice assessments or sample questions
- Design scaffolded assessments to support student to prepare for assessment
- Support students in revising and resubmitting work based on feedback

### Implementing UDL in Different Assessment Types

Using UDL in teaching and assessment may seem more time consuming than a non-UDL approach. However, starting with simple steps, the UDL way of thinking and our commitment to enabling equitable opportunities to all learners may take us a long way. When planning assessments that adhere to UDL principles:

- think about diversity of the student body and their diverse backgrounds and learning needs when designing authentic, culturally relevant assessments with real-world experience that align with course learning outcomes; your starting points are knowing who your students are, recognizing their diversity and variability in their learning needs, and clear learning outcomes
- aim to design assessments that give students choice and flexibility in demonstrating that they have achieved learning outcomes by designing multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression and incorporating flexibility in timing, format, and submission methods
- give clear instructions and rubrics with clear expectations, and design scaffolding, support, practice opportunities, and sample assessments
- design students with opportunities for peer review and self-reflection
- continuously improve assessment methods by soliciting students' feedback on assessment, analyze data and revise assessment

Following are some ideas on practical application of UDL principles to different types of assessment.

#### In Class Exams

- Design extended time options
- Design a mix of question types (multiple choice, short answer, essay)
- Allow students to choose a subset of questions to answer
- Design questions in both text and audio format
- Permit use of assistive technologies

#### Take Home Exams

- Design choice in topic selection
- Allow multiple submission formats (e.g., traditional essay, infographic, presentation, video, podcast)
- Design scaffolded deadlines for feedback on outline, draft, and final submission
- Include peer review component for collaborative learning

#### Oral Exams and Presentations

- Design multiple format options (e.g., traditional oral exam, presentation with Q&A, dialogue-based assessment, short-interactive oral exam)
- Design multi-modal question and response options (verbal, written, visual aids)
- Allow for preparation time and the use of assistive technologies
- Design alternatives to live presentations (e.g., recorded video, podcast)
- Allow use of visual aids or props
- Design options for individual or group presentations

#### Laboratory and Practical Assessments

- Design clear, step-by-step instructions in multiple formats (text, video, infographic)
- Allow choice in experiment design or practical exercise
- Design multiple ways of data presentations (graphs, tables, narratives)
- Design multiple attempts when feasible
- Allow students to demonstrate skills in various ways

#### Group Exams

- Allow students to choose roles based on their strengths
- Design options for final presentation format (e.g. in-person presentation, video, website)
- Design multiple check-in points and feedback opportunities
- Include individual and group components in assessment

### Technology and UDL in Assessment

HVL aims to ensure the use of universal design in ICT. This means that our digital systems and educational technologies that we use in teaching and learning are accessible to everyone, regardless of their functional ability, age or technical skills. Universal design in ICT aims to enable as many learners as possible in our increasingly diverse student body to use our education programs without requests for additional individual accommodation. For more information and practical tips consult [Universal design in ICT](#).

#### Canvas

- Utilize Canvas features for flexible timing and adaptive release
- Use built-in accessibility checkers
- Leverage analytics to identify areas where students may need additional support

#### Multimedia Tools

- Incorporate video or audio components in assessments
- Use interactive tools for engagement (e.g. online quizzes, simulations)
- Ensure all multimedia elements have accessible alternatives

#### Collaboration Tools

- Use online discussion boards for collaborative assessments
- Implement digital peer review processes
- Utilize shared document platforms for group projects

## Conclusion

Implementing UDL principles in assessment practices can significantly enhance the learning experience for all students, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds. By providing multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression, professors can create more inclusive and effective assessment strategies that accurately measure student learning while accommodating diverse needs and preferences.

UDL is a flexible framework, and its implementation should be iterative. Continuously seek feedback from students and adapt your assessment strategies accordingly.

## Resources

- CAST UDL Guidelines: <http://udlguidelines.cast.org/>
- National Center on Universal Design for Learning: <http://www.udlcenter.org/>
- UDL on Campus: <http://udloncampus.cast.org/>
- UDL On Campus: UDL and Assessment [http://udloncampus.cast.org/page/assessment\\_udl](http://udloncampus.cast.org/page/assessment_udl)
- UDL Tips for Assessment  
<https://www.cast.org/binaries/content/assets/common/publications/downloads/cast-udltipsforassessment-20200920-a11y.pdf>
- UD Assess Collab: Universal design for learning and assessment annotated bibliography