

Inclusive in-person learning

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in the physical classroom environment presents a different set of challenges compared with virtual programming. It can be much more difficult to engage learners in a large conference room, for example, and there are challenges from the physical environment that learners don't face when attending a remote session. The real benefit, though, is immediate feedback from students. Instructors can see when they are losing the focus of the audience in the room and change the delivery method or pacing to bring things back on course.

Authentic, engaging learning experiences

Use a variety of multimedia material, lecture styles, and interactive activities to keep the entire audience engaged. Try to change styles often so learners don't lose interest.



Help students remain alert and focused by encouraging participation and feedback, incorporating gamification or humor, and using concrete examples relevant to the audience.



Allow opportunities for participants to reflect on and discuss the material in breakout groups as well as small groups or pairings. The social aspect will help make the content memorable.

A knowledgeable, prepared instructor who is outwardly passionate about the subject can save the most boring material, as can providing a safe and inclusive space for discussion that respects diverse experiences and viewpoints.



Navigating environmental challenges

The transition to hybrid working and learning happened seemingly overnight under the specter of the COVID-19 pandemic. While online conferences and learning present challenges of their own, remote participation allows participants to join from their own homes or offices. For many demographics, being in a familiar environment with easy access to self care and comfort essentials allows for more relaxed attendance and participation. Learners can have much more control over environmental factors like noise, temperature, socialization, and lighting. With an in-person event, however, responsibility shifts to the presenter or host to work with sponsors or facilities to ensure that everyone can participate.

Before the event

Visit the venue prior to the presentation (or send an agent).
Be observant of potential barriers for learners with diverse physical, emotional, or sensory needs.
Ask about the ability to adjust lighting, volume, and temperature. If presenters cannot, find a point of contact.
Note anything attendees might not anticipate before arriving such as accessible parking or entrance locations, directions to the registration table, or the availability of comfort features such as family or nonbinary restrooms.
Consider the size of the space and the relationship of the participants to the instructor. Would additional lighting, a higher contrast backdrop, or a presenter platform help?
Ensure that event staff are notified timely of any requests you receive to help your attendees participate fully.

Day of the presentation

Arrive early and look for any additional barriers or changes that might affect the audience members.
Be sure that facility staff know about the event so that they can direct wayward attendees to the right area.
Encourage presenters to provide handouts and slides ahead of time in a digital format so attendees can use their assistive technologies if necessary.
Ensure that every presenter uses a microphone regardless of their speaking volume or the size of the room. This ensures better access for the hard of hearing and will improve captioning, if provided.
Remind students throughout the day of ways they can contact staff if new accommodation needs arise.
Be aware of temperature, volume, and lighting elements in the room and try to ensure that attendees' sensory needs are met.

Universal Design for Learning

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is an approach to education that ensures all students can learn, regardless of their needs, backgrounds, or abilities. UDL incorporates different styles of teaching and learning to support the diverse needs of students. UDL is important because it makes sure that all students have equal access to learning opportunities and can show what they know in different ways. It can save schools, companies, and organizations time and money in the long run by reducing the need for individualized accommodations.

UDL means making the course presentation fit the learners.



Learning styles

Present materials in a variety of ways to target different learning styles.

For example, include a transcript of your video lecture for those who would prefer to read it instead or have it for reference alongside the video.



Assessment styles

Give learners different options for demonstrating what they've learned.

The final for a college course might allow students to choose from more creative options than just a final essay, like a presentation, creative writing assignment, or video.



Engagement styles

Keep the audience motivated to engage with the content, instructor, and one another.

A trainer allows participants to choose group discussions or online discussion boards to interact, according to their preference.

Strategies for improving the learning experience

Be prepared: Gather as much information as possible about the different learning styles, abilities, and backgrounds of your learner group.

Be multi-modal: Incorporate different types of materials and media, such as text, images, video, audio, and demonstration to provide multiple means of delivering your content.

Be flexible: Provide different options for learners to participate and express themselves, such as written response, oral presentation, visual project, or other methods.

Be engaging: Offer activities that are relevant, motivating, and interesting to your audience, and provide them with choices and flexibility in how they engage with the material.

Be understandable: Use simple, straightforward language that is easy to understand and avoid complex vocabulary or jargon.

Be organized: Present information in a clear and organized manner, using headings, bullet points, and other organizational tools to help students understand the relationships between concepts and ideas.

Be visual: Use visual aids such as charts, diagrams, slides, and illustrations to supplement verbal explanations and make complex information easier to understand.

Be aware: Ensure that all materials are accessible to all students, including those with disabilities or other special needs. Plan alternative ways to present the information in case the participants have difficulties.

Be reflective: Provide opportunities for students to reflect on their learning and monitor their progress, offering self-assessment and feedback.

Be proactive: Visit the venue or test the technology in advance so that you can help your attendees find accessible routes, identify possible distractions, and avoid surprises during the event or course.

For more information about accessible learning including free resources and technical assistance, visit the HDI Universal Design web portal at hdi.uky.edu/universal-design