

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

Inclusive virtual learning

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) can enhance presentations in the synchronous virtual space. Virtual presentations present a very different set of challenges compared with in-person training. Keeping learners engaged remains the top priority although it can be much harder without direct feedback and often without even seeing the audience. It is much easier for students to become distracted when they are in their own environment but they are also better able to use existing, familiar accommodations that give them a greater ability to participate authentically.

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.



Mastering the virtual domain

Audience engagement is especially crucial for remote learning. Without the 'captive' nature of an in-person experience, a lost learner is much less likely to reengage. As remote training has become mainstream and normalized, it is becoming mission-critical for presenters to learn about the platforms and tools available to them. The flexibility of virtual means being able to offer a lot more diversity of experiences but a presenter must know how to access tools and share resources in a virtual manner.

Get to know your platform ahead of time: Modern virtual meeting and webinar solutions like those from Zoom, GoToMeeting, Teams, Webex, and more offer a host of tools to help with engagement. Some platforms allow the audience to review materials at their own pace, split to breakout rooms for discussion, and interact with presenters during the presentation. Find a tutorial or just set up a practice meeting with a colleague and start clicking buttons!

Look for third party tools: While the conferencing platforms have some cool features, there are many other tools available to do things like live brainstorming, whiteboards, or even simple and easy websites to host course material for review by learners beforehand. These tools make the presentation more interactive and give students variety while allowing presenters to use multiple means to assess learning outcomes.

Rehearse: Test the entire presentation in-platform to make sure your materials and tools work together and are accessible regardless of the students' ability levels.

Support the learners: Some audiences are less comfortable with technology than others. Provide clear instructions for using features and keep a technical support person on standby so they can troubleshoot user issues without interrupting training.

Accessible slide decks

Universal design means utilizing lots of methods of instruction. For many presenters, the trusty slideshow remains the basis of the session with a variety of multimedia and interaction mixed in. Here are some tips for building accessible slides:

- Use **simple, straightforward language** that is easy to understand and avoids jargon or complex vocabulary.
- Use relevant and high-quality images, graphics, and videos to supplement text and **convey information in multiple ways**. Use readable fonts on high-contrast backgrounds and limit the amount of text and elements on each slide.
- Ensure that all materials, including PowerPoint slides and handouts, are **accessible to all attendees**. Every image must have alternative text and every video must be captioned. When displaying media or demonstrating live, the presenter should describe everything appearing on the screen aloud.
- Use polls, quizzes, and other **interactive elements** to engage and involve the audience in the presentation. Check out services like Wooclap, Kahoot!, Poll Everywhere, Mentimeter, and Pear Deck for more creative ideas.