

Supporting Struggling Learners Through Universal Design for Learning

Because individual learners bring a variety of learning styles, readiness levels, and interests to the classroom, it is necessary to design a flexible instructional plan that can be personalized to meet each student's needs. A universally designed curriculum is the foundation upon which customized student learning objectives, student growth objects, assessments, and materials are built.

Universal Design for Learning, developed by the nonprofit organization CAST, provides a proactive approach to meeting the needs of all learners in a classroom. As you consider an upcoming lesson or unit, consider the needs of students in your classroom, and incorporate a wide range of resources to provide optimal learning opportunities for all of your students.

As you complete the following steps, you may wish to visit CAST's virtual library to delve more deeply into the Universal Design for Learning philosophy.

Multiple Means of Engagement

Noted neuroscientist David Sousa contends that in order for information to move from short-term to long-term memory, it must make sense and have meaning. To ensure the sense and meaning needed for long-term retention, students must actively engage with skills/concepts in a unit.

Applications to Instruction	UDL Approach
How can I incorporate this into my planned activities?	<i>Provide options for self-regulation</i> 1.1 Promote expectations and beliefs that optimize motivation 1.2 Facilitate personal coping skills and strategies 1.3 Develop self-assessment and reflection
	<i>Provide options for sustaining effort and persistence</i> 2.1 Heighten salience of goals and objectives 2.2 Vary demands and resources to optimize challenge 2.3 Foster collaboration and community 2.4 Increase mastery-oriented feedback
	<i>Provide options for recruiting interest</i> 3.1 Optimize individual choice and autonomy 3.2 Optimize relevance, value, and authenticity 3.3 Minimize threats and distractions

Multiple Means of Representation

Students need a variety of venues by which they can process and gain mastery of key skills and concepts such as, but not limited to:

- benchmark lessons
- reading of text
- learning centers
- grouped activities
- interactive websites

Consider the instructional goals of the lesson/unit. Then list the resources and activities available for students to build skills. Use the specific needs, outlined through the UDL approach, and seek additional resources where appropriate.

Key Skills/Concepts	Current Resources/Practices	UDL Approach
What concepts/skills do I want my students to learn?	How do I plan to teach this? What resources do I have already?	<i>Provide options for comprehension</i> 4.1 Activate or supply background knowledge 4.2 Highlight patterns, critical features, big ideas, and relationships 4.3 Guide information processing, visualization, and manipulation 4.4 Maximize transfer and generalization
	How do I plan to teach this? What resources do I have already?	<i>Provide options for language, mathematical expressions, and symbols</i> 5.1 Clarify vocabulary and symbols 5.2 Clarify syntax and structure 5.3 Support decoding text, mathematical notation, and symbols 5.4 Promote understanding across languages 5.5 Illustrate through multiple media
	How do I plan to teach this? What resources do I have already?	<i>Provide options for perception</i> 6.1 Offer ways of customizing the display of information 6.2 Offer alternatives for auditory information 6.3 Offer alternatives for visual information

Additional Resources

What else do I need to find/create?

Multiple Means of Action and Expression

Students also need a range of opportunities to express mastery of core content. Some learners are very comfortable with written expression, and therefore, can be effectively assessed through a paper test, essay, or other type of written work. Other students may not be able to express content/skill mastery in writing, so other expression techniques must be offered. Consider multiple means for expressing mastery of learning outcomes. Use the UDL approach to plan for assessments that support every learner in your classroom.

Learning Outcomes	Assessments	UDL Approach
What do students need to have mastered by the end of this lesson/unit?	Formative Assessment How will I know that my students are learning?	<i>Provide options for executive functions</i> 7.1 Guide appropriate goal-setting 7.2 Support planning and strategy development 7.3 Enhance capacity for monitoring progress
	Summative Assessments How will I know what my students have learned?	
What do students need to have mastered by the end of this lesson/unit?	Formative Assessment How will I know that my students are learning?	<i>Provide options for sustaining effort and persistence</i> 8.1 Heighten salience of goals and objectives 8.2 Vary levels of challenge and support 8.3 Foster collaboration and communication 8.4 Increase mastery-oriented feedback
	Summative Assessments How will I know what my students have learned?	
What do students need to have mastered by the end of this lesson/unit?	Formative Assessment How will I know that my students are learning?	<i>Provide options for self-regulation</i> 9.1 Guide personal goal-setting and expectations 9.2 Scaffold coping skills and strategies 9.3 Develop self-assessment and reflection
	Summative Assessments How will I know what my students have learned?	