# Designing Lessons for ALL: Understanding Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

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*Changing lives, one word at a time.*

# Objectives

- Define learner variability
- Identify strategies and tools for learner variabilities
- Understand the framework of Universal Design for Learners
- Create UDL-supported activities

# Warm up

I learn best when I_____

Answer this sentence by doing one of the following:

- Draw a picture
- Choose an emoji, meme, or gif
- Write a word or sentence
- Provide an example of when you learned best

Take 2 minutes to finish this prompt.

You will share with the group.

# Let’s share!

I learn best when I_____

# Reflection

**What did you have to know about yourself as a learner to do this activity?**

**What strategies did I provide or did you use to complete the activity?**

# Surprise! We have used UDL to create an activity!

I learn best when I_____

Answer this sentence by doing one of the following:

- Draw a picture
- Choose an emoji, meme, or gif
- Write a word or sentence
- Provide an example of when you learned best

Take 3 minutes to finish this prompt.

You will share with the group.

Reflect (what did you need to know about yourself? What strategies did I provide)?

Provide sentence starters or prompts. Create scaffolding.

Provide student choice in activity. Create multiple ways students can respond.

Provide clear, supportive instructions and expectations.

Provide ways to build knowledge (connect prior knowledge, maximize transfer)

# Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

"UDL is a

- scientifically valid **framework** for guiding educational practice
- that **provides flexibility in the ways information is presented**,
- in the **ways students respond or demonstrate knowledge and skills**,
- and in the **ways students are engaged**;
- and **reduces barriers in instruction**,
- provides **appropriate accommodations, supports, and challenge**,
- and maintains **high achievement expectations** for all students, including students with disabilities and students who are limited English proficient." — The Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008

# UDL reduces barriers in instruction: identifying and adapting to learner variability

When a flower doesn't bloom, you fix  the environment in which it grows, not the flower."

– Alexander den Heijer

**Barriers** to learning exist in the *environment*, not the learner. (LINCS, Learning that Works for All, 2024)

# Variability is predictable in learning and can be designed for (LINCS, 2024)

What kind of barriers might our students face that complicate their learning?

"They have **many personal and work responsibilities** that must be balanced with the demands of learning. **Lack of time, financial resources, confidence, or information regarding opportunities to learn, scheduling difficulties**, as well as **childcare** and **transportation** issues can impact the adult learners' motivation to learn. **Past educational or work experiences** may be barriers to learning. This occurs if the new knowledge conflicts with past education or life experiences. This conflict needs to be addressed before the learners can actively engage in the learning." (Knowles, 2011).

# **Barriers** to learning exist in the *environment*, not the learner. (LINCS, 2024)

How do we identify barriers students might face?

Identify variability:

When we understand different variables the student has in their life, we can better prepare and adapt to create supportive learning environments.

- Learner Variability Navigator provides research-driven descriptions of learning factors with strategies for how to best accommodate the student.
- Use intake information. What information did Steven give you?
- Ask the student.
  - How might this work as an activity at the start of a session?

# Identifying Learner Variability: Ask the person (A.T.P.)

A helpful way to identify variabilities is to ask students questions that get students to explore and analyze:

- Positive and negative learning experiences
  - Identifies ways that they learn best, including educational strengths and weaknesses
  - Ways that are difficult for them to learn
  - Gives an opportunity to disclose any barriers or learning disabilities.
- Their educational history
  - Identifies how much schooling they have had
  - Provides a place to discuss opinions about school, learning disabilities, or trauma
- Attitudes towards learning
  - Identifies topics of interest, expertise or experiences (asset-driven approach)

# Ask the person (A.T.P.)
# How might A.T.P be incorporated in a lesson?

How might these questions be incorporated in our lessons?

- Their educational history
  - Draw a timeline together (opportunity for verb tenses and vocabulary)
  - Create a visual story of their life
    - Look in a picture dictionary together to find pictures that represent different stages of their life
    - They can bring in pictures
    - They can write or draw pictures
  - Sentence starters or writing prompts (When I was a child, I ____)
- Attitudes towards learning
  - Identify favorite subjects (sentence starters, discussions, picture dictionary)
  - Tell me/write about your favorite thing you've learned (and your least favorite)
  - Tell me about your favorite/least favorite teacher
  - Tell me about (or draw) a time that you taught someone something.
    - Teach me something (how can they show you the steps to do something?)

These activities help you identify topics the student enjoyed, possible learning disabilities, areas of strength, and areas for growth.

# Reflection

Think about your student.

- What kinds of learning factors might they face?
- What are challenges or opportunities for growth that you see in your sessions?  What activities challenge your student the most?
- What are strengths that your student has?
- How might you bring in topics or activities related to the strengths your student has?

Take 3 minutes to think about this.

# Considering common variabilities

Let’s share. What are some factors you identified with your student?
What are ways you might utilize this in your session?

# Congratulations!

You just identified variabilities for your student! Now, you can better tailor your lessons to suit their needs.

# Variability is predictable in learning and can be designed for. (LINCS, 2024)

Once you have identified learner variability, you can then adapt lessons to reduce barriers to learning using UDL as a framework

UDL Key Ideas:

- The goal of UDL is student agency.
- Small changes can make a big difference
- What is necessary for some can be good for all.
- Consider an asset-driven approach. Use real life examples when possible. (What expertise, interests, or experience can the student use?)

(LINCS, 2024)

How can accessible curbs help people besides those in wheelchairs?

# Strategies for Learner Variability

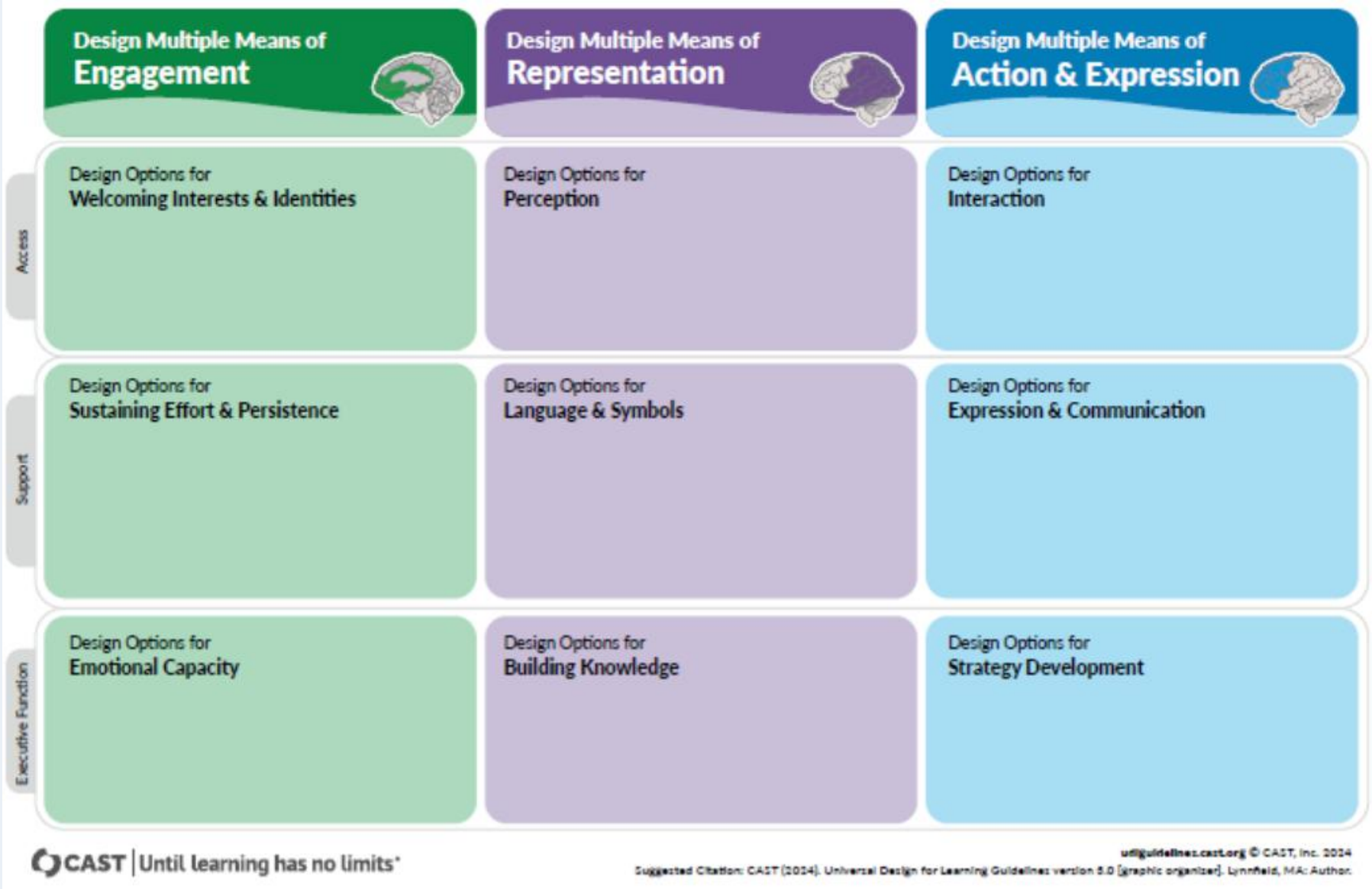
Often best practices for folks with learning disabilities are helpful for all students.

VALRC's handout on LD, tools, and instructional strategies is incredibly helpful.

A few key strategies:

- Explicit instruction that is both verbal and written
- Guided notes, highlights, bullet points for important information
- Sample work
- Chunking, prompts, or scaffolding assignments (ex. sentence starters)
- Allowing for choice and variety in how an assignment is completed

# How can we, as instructors, provide different ways for students to access the work (**action/expression**), show their knowledge (**representation**), and connect with the work (**engagement**)?

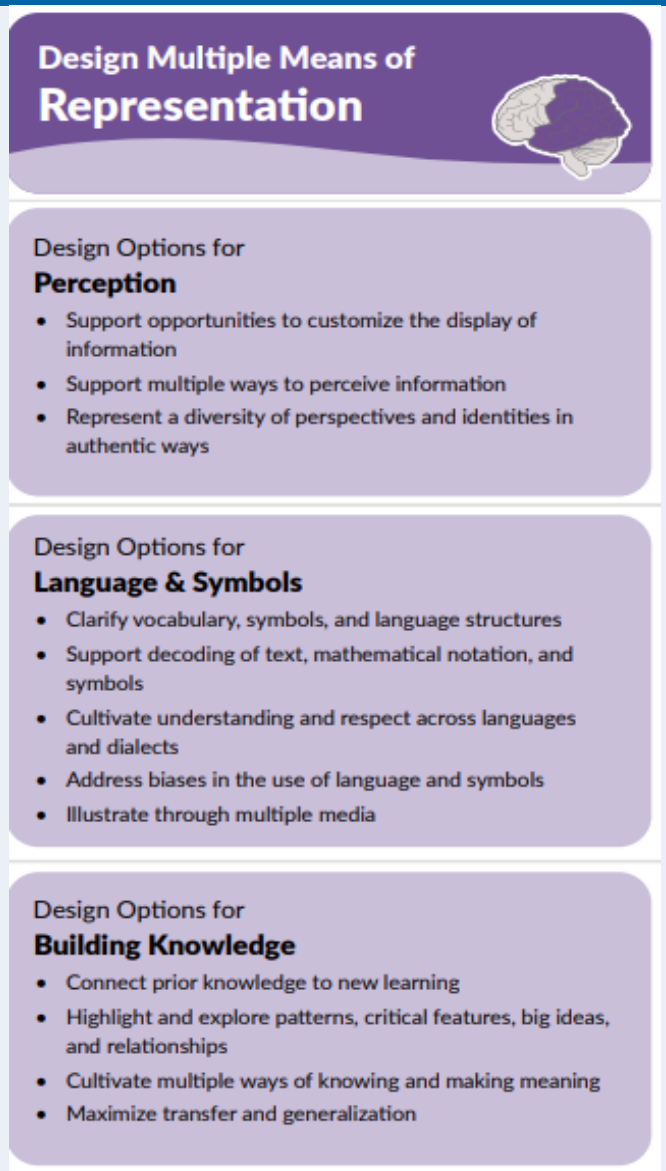


# Multiple Means of Engagement (the why)

What does this look like?

- Providing students choice in what they want to focus on or how they want to demonstrate knowledge.
- Make it fun!
- Bring in their own experiences or expertise.
  - What do they already know? What can they teach you?
  - Asset-driven approach
- Explain purpose of lesson or work.
- Come up with goals. How does this work towards their goals? How will it help them?

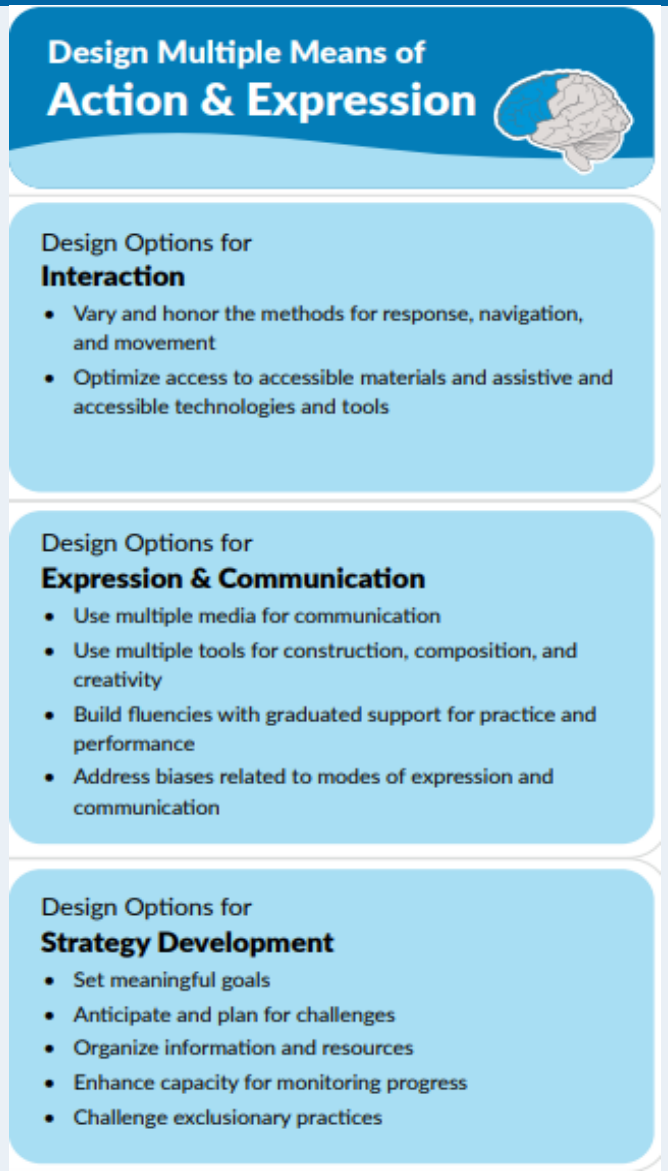
# Multiple Means of Representation (the what)




What does this look like?

- Customize information for student
  - Make copies for pages if students work better with writing things down
  - Create guided notes, graphic organizers, prompts, sentence stems
- Change up ways you are presenting information (videos, writing, speaking, digital, etc)
- Explicit instruction of concepts
  - Bring in decoding
  - Make connections to prior knowledge.
  - Show connections to other concepts
  - Scaffolding!

# Multiple Means of Action and Expression (the how)




What does this look like?

- Students can have a variety of ways to demonstrate knowledge
  - How can students have choice in demonstrating knowledge?
  - How are you mixing up ways students do work? (Videos, digital, movement, drawing, writing, speaking, etc)
- Consider assistive tools or strategies for responses
  - Sentence starters! Prompts! Scaffolding! Routines!
  - Spell check. Talk to text.
  - Timers.
- Students can monitor progress in a variety of ways.

# Key UDL approaches

1. **Use case studies in your instruction:** Bring in real-life examples to help draw students in. How might they use their own experiences?
2. **Use prompts, graphic organizers, or sentence-starters.** What other scaffolding approaches can you bring in? How might repetition help you build momentum?
3. **Use video:**
   - Keep videos short (2:30 minutes to 3:30 minutes)
   - Always have captions on
   - Use signaling to highlight important ideas or concepts
   - Use pre-reading or guiding questions
   - Integrate discussion questions (LINCS, 2024)

# UDL in practice:

I learn best when I_____

Answer this sentence by doing one of the following:

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Reflect (what did you need to know about yourself? What strategies did I provide)?

Provide sentence starters or prompts. Create scaffolding.

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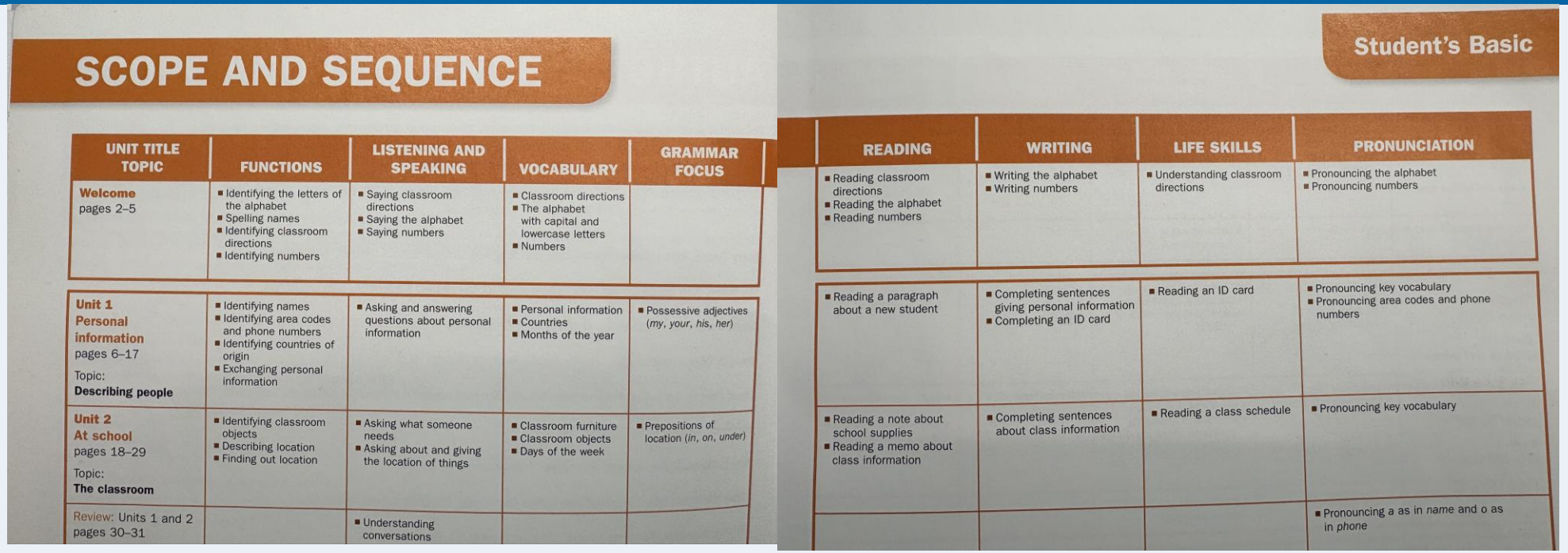
Provide ways to build knowledge (connect prior knowledge, maximize transfer)

# UDL in practice: Identify purpose



## SCOPE AND SEQUENCE

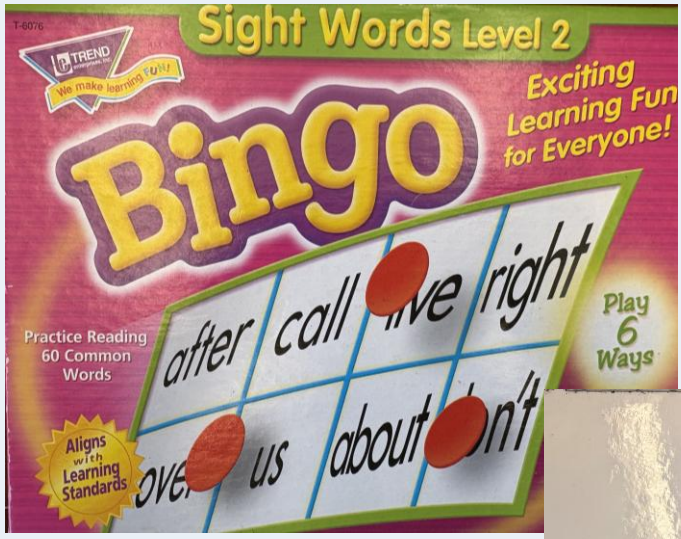
Student's Basic

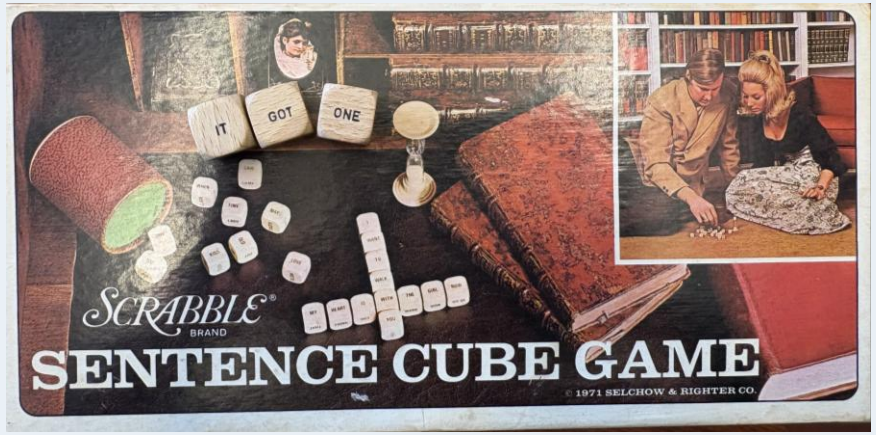
| UNIT TITLE TOPIC | FUNCTIONS | LISTENING AND SPEAKING | VOCABULARY | GRAMMAR FOCUS | READING | WRITING | LIFE SKILLS | PRONUNCIATION |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Welcome** pages 2–5 | ▪ Identifying the letters of the alphabet<br>▪ Spelling names<br>▪ Identifying classroom directions<br>▪ Identifying numbers | ▪ Saying classroom directions<br>▪ Saying the alphabet<br>▪ Saying numbers | ▪ Classroom directions<br>▪ The alphabet with capital and lowercase letters<br>▪ Numbers | | ▪ Reading classroom directions<br>▪ Reading the alphabet<br>▪ Reading numbers | ▪ Writing the alphabet<br>▪ Writing numbers | ▪ Understanding classroom directions | ▪ Pronouncing the alphabet<br>▪ Pronouncing numbers |
| **Unit 1** **Personal information** pages 6–17<br>Topic: **Describing people** | ▪ Identifying names<br>▪ Identifying area codes and phone numbers<br>▪ Identifying countries of origin<br>▪ Exchanging personal information | ▪ Asking and answering questions about personal information | ▪ Personal information<br>▪ Countries<br>▪ Months of the year | ▪ Possessive adjectives (*my, your, his, her*) | ▪ Reading a paragraph about a new student | ▪ Completing sentences giving personal information<br>▪ Completing an ID card | ▪ Reading an ID card | ▪ Pronouncing key vocabulary<br>▪ Pronouncing area codes and phone numbers |
| **Unit 2** **At school** pages 18–29<br>Topic: **The classroom** | ▪ Identifying classroom objects<br>▪ Describing location<br>▪ Finding out location | ▪ Asking what someone needs<br>▪ Asking about and giving the location of things | ▪ Classroom furniture<br>▪ Classroom objects<br>▪ Days of the week | ▪ Prepositions of location (*in, on, under*) | ▪ Reading a note about school supplies<br>▪ Reading a memo about class information | ▪ Completing sentences about class information | ▪ Reading a class schedule | ▪ Pronouncing key vocabulary |
| Review: Units 1 and 2 pages 30–31 | | ▪ Understanding conversations | | | | | | ▪ Pronouncing a as in *name* and o as in *phone* |

Identify the key content features of the unit.
This helps you clearly define the purpose for each activity and can help you connect to past lessons.
From there, consider how you can adapt content to better suit your student's needs

# UDL in practice: Activity considerations

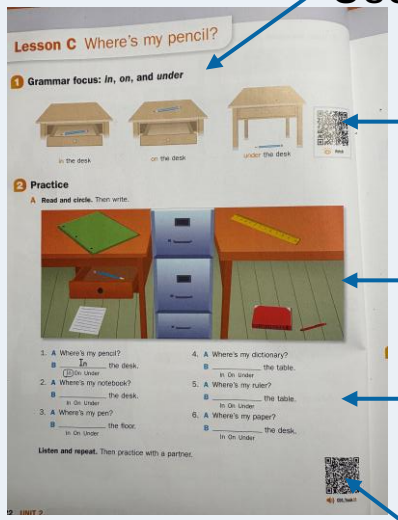
- Can you bring in their own experiences?
- Can you make it a game?
- Can you make it active?
- Can you give them options?
- Can you build concepts into multiple activities?
- Can you tie this to previous lessons?





**UDL in practice:** Lesson Objective: Your student is learning the prepositions “on,” “in,” and “under.” They often need breaks throughout the lesson and have also started a new job recently.

Textbook




Uses visual to define

Video to explain

Visual to guide answer

Written response with prompt

Auditory component

Movement:
Take turns practicing placing something “in,” “on,” “under”
How can you make it a game?

Physical movement can help cement ideas while also helping get energy out.

Pictures you create:
Find pictures on your phone of something “in,” “on,” or “under”
Next step: Could this become a picture dictionary?

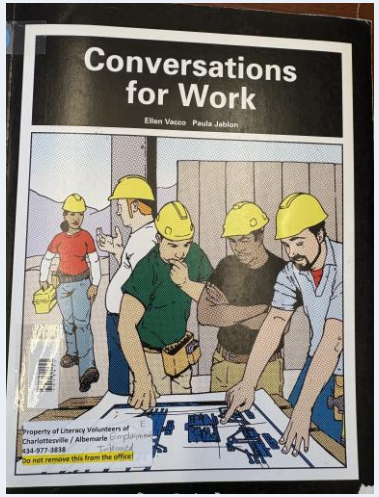
Walk around. Take pictures of things in, on, or under

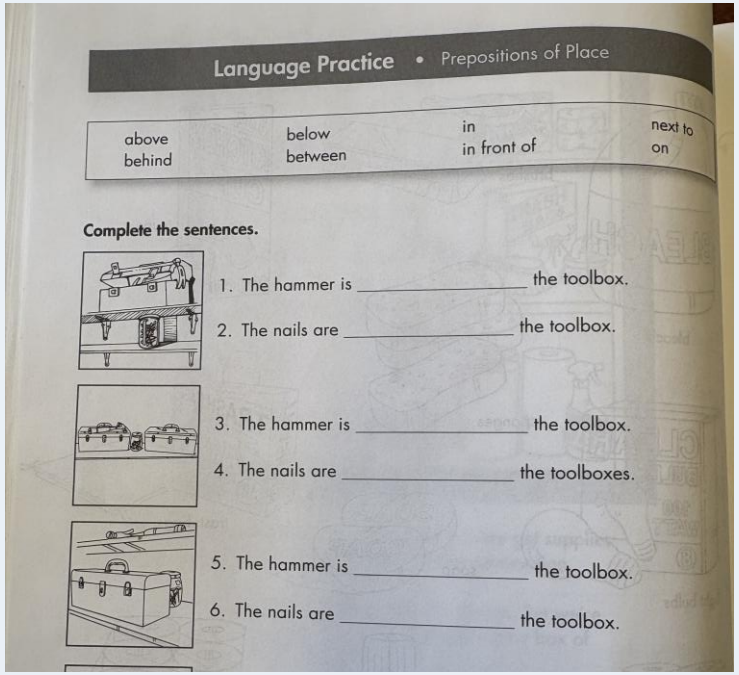
Creating the visual gives student choice, especially if they enjoy creative work.

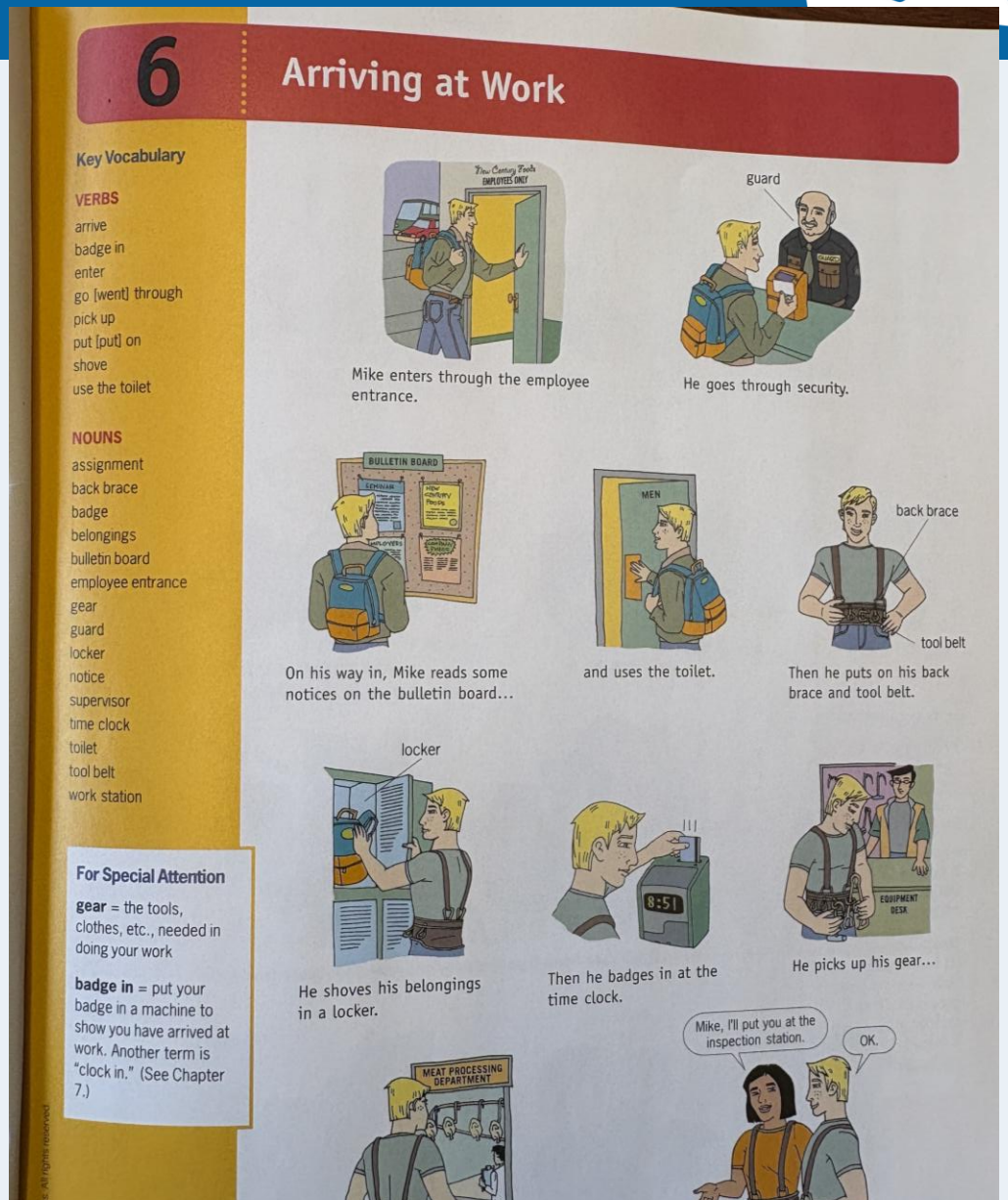
What else?

# **UDL in practice:** Lesson Objective: Your student needs to learn prepositions. They often need breaks throughout the lesson and have also started a new job recently.

Prepositions at work:
The student explains how they do something at work using in, on, or under.
How might they use a picture process? (explain or draw)





# Key reminders

- Start small! Little changes make a big difference!
- UDL is a framework, not a checklist (you don’t have to do it all)
- Understanding your student is the start of it all.
  - Continually modify and adapt assignments as you get to know your student
- Mix it up! Experiment with what you think might work well with your student. Try different ways to do something. Sometimes this means changing your lesson in the middle of a session.
- Use your student’s strengths as the foundation for assignments.
- Ask for help! We are here to help offer ideas and strategies.

# Time to try it yourself!

What is one activity you see your student struggling with?

What is one activity that they do easily?

What is the difference? How might you adapt the thing that they struggle with?

How are you using reading, writing, speaking, and listening throughout your lesson?

Let’s share!

# Resources

- https://udlguidelines.cast.org/
- https://lincs.ed.gov/state-resources/federal-initiatives/udl
- https://valrc.org/adults-with-disabilities-featured-instructional-resources/
- LINCS (2024). *Learning that Works for All* [PowerPoint Slides].
- Learner Variability Navigator
- What is Universal Design for Learning, YouTube Video
- Google Drive Folder
- LVCA staff!

Reach out:
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