

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





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.

Let's share!



I learn best when I _____

Reflect in groups.

Come up with 2 takeaways for each response.



**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!



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Provide sentence starters or prompts. Create scaffolding.

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

Provide clear and supportive instructions and expectations.

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 challenges, 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](#)

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)



What is Universal Design for Learning?

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.
 - Ask the student.
 - How might this work as an activity at the start of a session?



ELLs and Learning Disabilities (LD)



Learning (Dis)abilities:

- Neurological, brain-based
- Lifelong
- Can impact speaking and written language, reading, thinking, spelling, mathematical calculations

English Language Learners and LDs:

- A LD might become apparent as someone learns a language in a way that wasn't apparent in their home language
- LD diagnosis and disclosure can be stigmatized or not recognized in some cultures
- May be attributed first to other barriers such as interrupted schooling, lack of study time, etc.

While a diagnosis and disclosure is tremendously helpful, we still can identify barriers and adapt our work without one.

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

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)

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



Activity.

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

- Positive and negative learning experiences
- Their educational history
- Attitudes towards learning

In groups:

- 1) Come up with a list of questions you could pose to students.
- 2) What are 3 different kinds of activities you could use for this topic? (Alternatives to writing or speaking). How could you do this with a low-level student?

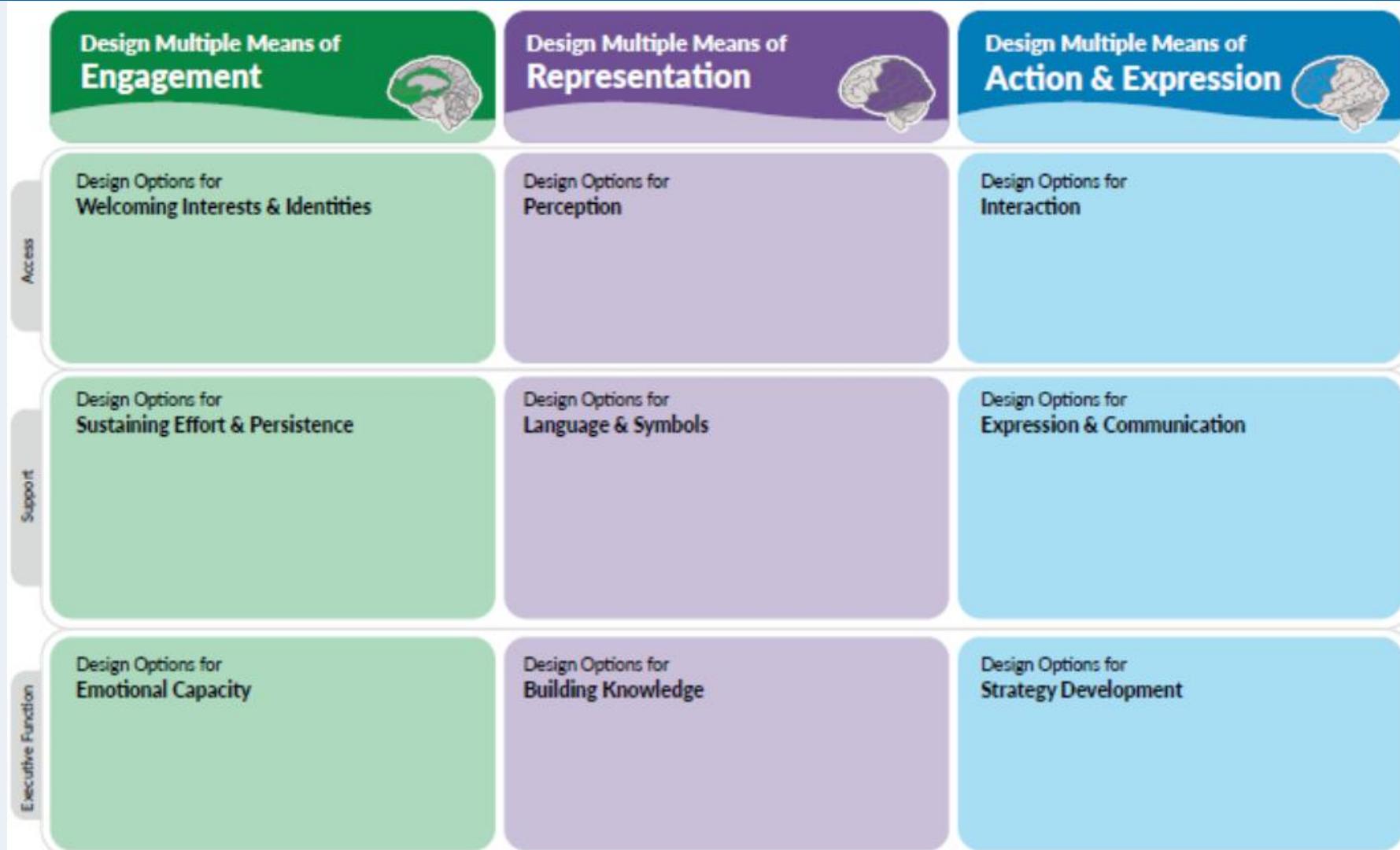
Write your answers on this [Padlet](#)

<https://tinyurl.com/LVCAUDLPadlet> or scan QR code.

You will have 5 minutes



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)



Design Multiple Means of Representation



Design Options for Perception

- Support opportunities to customize the display of information
- Support multiple ways to perceive information
- Represent a diversity of perspectives and identities in authentic ways

Design Options for Language & Symbols

- Clarify vocabulary, symbols, and language structures
- Support decoding of text, mathematical notation, and symbols
- Cultivate understanding and respect across languages and dialects
- Address biases in the use of language and symbols
- Illustrate through multiple media

Design Options for Building Knowledge

- Connect prior knowledge to new learning
- Highlight and explore patterns, critical features, big ideas, and relationships
- Cultivate multiple ways of knowing and making meaning
- Maximize transfer and generalization

What does this look like?

- Customize information for student
- Change up ways you are presenting information (videos, writing, speaking, digital, etc)
- Explicit instruction of concepts
 - Make connections to prior knowledge.
 - Show connections to other concepts
 - Scaffolding!

Multiple Means of Action and Expression (the how)



Design Multiple Means of Action & Expression



Design Options for Interaction

- Vary and honor the methods for response, navigation, and movement
- Optimize access to accessible materials and assistive and accessible technologies and tools

Design Options for Expression & Communication

- Use multiple media for communication
- Use multiple tools for construction, composition, and creativity
- Build fluencies with graduated support for practice and performance
- Address biases related to modes of expression and communication

Design Options for Strategy Development

- Set meaningful goals
- Anticipate and plan for challenges
- Organize information and resources
- Enhance capacity for monitoring progress
- Challenge exclusionary practices

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!
 - 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 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 guiding questions
 - Integrate discussion questions
- 4. Use metaphors and analogies (LINCS, 2024)**

UDL in practice



I learn best when I _____

Answer this sentence by doing one of the following:

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Take 3 minutes to finish this prompt.

You will share with the group.

Provide sentence starters or prompts. Create scaffolding.

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

Provide clear and supportive instructions and expectations.

UDL in practice - try it!



In groups, create two welcoming activities that can support two of your students. Each should be a different mean of expression (different medium, activity, goal, etc).

Key questions:

- How is your student engaging with the topic?
- How is the material being presented to your student?
- How is your student being asked to respond?

Take 5 minutes

Use the Padlet to record your answers.

<https://tinyurl.com/LVCAUDLPadlet> or scan QR code.



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.
- Use your student's strengths as the foundation for assignments.
- Ask for help! We are here to help offer ideas and strategies.

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](#)
- LVCA staff!

Reach out:

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