



HOW UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING SUPPORTS INCLUSIVE LEARNING PRACTICES

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How do you make your learners feel included, seen, heard, and valued? Do you provide options, choices, and flexibility in your curriculum and learning environment? Are learners with disabilities included in your classroom as a member of the learning community or are they educated in separate spaces? Do you honor your students' different cultures and learning styles? Is instruction done in various ways with a clear goal? These questions help to point us to creating an inclusive learning environment in our classrooms. Inclusive teaching practices "support meaningful and accessible learning for all students."

When first learning about inclusive learning and teaching practices, teachers often have questions and concerns about how to implement these approaches in their classrooms. Factors such as large class sizes, curriculum expectations, and required assessment and testing objectives can make teachers feel that considering their students' individual needs and perspectives will be too difficult.

The answer to this challenge is to learn about Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and use the [UDL Guidelines](#) with intention.

WHAT IS UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING?

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework that can help teachers plan for different learners in their classes. Most materials, methods, and assessments are designed for the average learner in mind. UDL flips this approach and designs materials, methods, and assessments by first considering students with disabilities and other learning differences. Rooted in neuroscience, the UDL guidelines address three major areas of the brain involved in learning. As a result, the UDL guidelines help educators to provide multiple options for students to engage in learning, express and represent their learning, and act on what they have learned.

Through the intentional use of the Universal Design for Learning Guidelines in developing teaching materials, methods, assessments, and environments, educators can proactively plan for learner variability. When we plan for variability from the start, as opposed to after the fact, we are better able to meet the needs of all of our students.

Ways UDL Promotes Inclusion for Learners with Disabilities:

How many times have you taught a lesson and realized afterwards that you needed to provide something different for a particular learner or group of learners? How many times have you taught a lesson one way? Did you have a goal or learning target in mind? Teaching with only one kind of student in mind sometimes results in leaving some students bored, frustrated, or left out. In the Universally Designed classroom, the curriculum is designed to be flexible to account for the variability of learners. Furthermore, the Universally Designed classroom also actively involves learners in all facets of the learning process. Content is delivered in more than one way. Students are given choices and autonomy to show what they know. Assistive technologies are used regardless of the environment or the abilities of the students.

Assistive technology is any device, tool, or product that makes it easier for someone with a disability to learn in school. Assistive technology can range from low-tech tools such as pencil grips, sticky notes, and vocabulary word banks; to mid-tech tools such as graphic organizers, math equation templates, and picture dictionaries; to high-tech tools such as online dictionaries, translation apps, and specialized software for writing such as word prediction.

Think of UDL this way: Instead of waiting for a need to be identified before putting learning supports in place, the supports are simply part of the learning environment from the beginning. For example, ramps and elevators are designed for individuals with physical disabilities, yet others use these accommodations as well. UDL asks educators to apply this

concept of accessible spaces to curriculum, instruction, and learning environments. When we have these supports in place first, we are destigmatizing them and making them a natural part of the environment where learners with disabilities have access, and those who may need the same type of support but do not receive special education support are also able to access.

Ways Educators Can Support Inclusive Learning Practices with UDL

Provide Multiple Means of Engagement By:



- Using alerts and previews that can help learners with transitions (e.g., a visual timer, an agenda on the board).
- Using visual schedules to help learners feel safe and supported in the learning environment (e.g., pictures, icons, scheduling app)
- Using self-monitoring charts to help students meet learning goals (e.g., progress tracker, self-monitoring checklist)
- Using collaborative schedules, planners, or displays that can be customized to meet learners' needs (e.g., collaborative calendar, student planners).

Provide Multiple Means of Representation By:

- Allowing learners to change their digital tools by using larger font sizes, enlarging print materials, and resizing images.
- Allowing learners to use text-to-speech software (text-to-speech is where words are read on a device and are highlighted as the text is read).
- Allowing learners to use built-in dictionaries.
- Allowing the use of audiobooks or books that allow for text-to-speech for all learners (can also use listening stations where Wi-Fi access is limited)



Provide Multiple Means of Action and Expression By:

- Allowing students multiple options for demonstrating their knowledge (such as through videos, written text, drawings, etc.) and listen and support their own suggestions as to how they can best demonstrate their knowledge.
- Using content that is easy to use with assistive technologies (e.g., screen readers, Braille, alternatives to keyboard, mouse, etc.)
- Allowing students to use checklists, graphic organizers, and guides for written expression and note-taking (paper based or digital)
- Providing accessible rubrics and self-monitoring checklists.



BRaille SCREEN READER

These suggestions may seem like a lot at first. That's OK. Start small by taking a look at the UDL Guidelines and choosing ONE guideline to follow and ONE strategy to try in your classroom. Once you're comfortable, try another. Eventually, you will be honoring ALL learners in your spaces through using Universal Design for Learning!

Want to learn more? Visit the Teacher's Corner group on Facebook!

The AE Teacher's Corner is a closed Facebook group originally created for readers of Teacher's Corner on americanenglish.state.gov. As our group has grown, it has taken shape into a dynamic community of English language teachers and learners who learn together, collaborate and support each other. Every month we feature a new article from Teacher's Corner and throughout the month, participants are encouraged to engage in extended conversation, exchange teaching resources related to the theme, and participate in contests.

Join our private Teacher's Corner group here:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/AETeachersCorner/>. Please answer all three questions completely. You will not be accepted into the group unless you answer the questions.

This article was written by contributing author Hillary Goldthwait-Fowles Ph.D., ATP, for AE Teacher's Corner.

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