

An ErasmusX Guide to Teaching with Universal Design for Learning

With Universal Design for Learning (UDL), we proactively lower barriers to learning by taking into account the diversity of needs that students bring with them, so that all students - including students with functional impairments (In this guide, we are using the terms 'functional impairment' and 'disability' interchangeably) - can access, develop and demonstrate learning. With this guide, let's begin our journey with UDL!

Role of the Teacher: Teachers proactively design for variability and in doing so, decrease the need for interventions later on.

Role of the Student: Students access a variety of resources and formats, advocate for their needs, make choices, and contribute feedback & ideas.

Context: Historically, students with functional impairments have been denied access to education, experiencing exclusion, or were educated separately from their general education peers, experiencing segregation. Nowadays, students with disabilities are often integrated, learning alongside their peers, while still feeling that they need to 'fit in' in a wider system that is designed for the majority of mainstream students. As learning institutions become more inclusive, more students begin to experience a sense of belonging. To go even further, we can adopt the mindset of Universal Design for Learning where all students, whether identified with an impairment or not, are considered different. With UDL, we accept, celebrate and mobilise students' variability.

Principles of Universal Design for Learning (Cast, 2018)

1. Provide multiple means of **ENGAGEMENT**: Stimulate interest and motivation for learning by focusing on the **WHY** of learning which engages the affective network of the brain.
2. Provide multiple means of **REPRESENTATION**: Present information and content in different ways to connect to the **WHAT** of learning which engages the recognition network of the brain.
3. Provide multiple means of **ACTION & EXPRESSION**: Differentiate the ways that students can express what they know, understand and are able to do, by focusing on the **HOW** of learning, which engages the strategic network of the brain.

Why?

Education is largely based on the idea of designing instruction for the mythical 'average student'. Such a model reinforces power structures that favour dominant groups, therefore excluding historically marginalised groups - such as students with functional impairments. With UDL, we acknowledge that all students are variable and come with intersecting identities (including minority ones), we invite diversity, and we deliberately design instruction for flexibility, so that all students can access high-quality education and achieve their potential.

Food for thought: What students and staff say:

- You can't just assume what people can or cannot do. Let's just talk about it.
- People understand accessibility only when they have experienced inaccessibility. I would like people to understand that meeting needs for access isn't a privilege, it's a right.
- My Autism is integral to who I am as a person.
- I feel safe on campus! The university has a lot of open spaces and is not too crowded.
- Getting clear and sufficient information about a course, a lecture or an event ahead of time helps me prepare, adjust and succeed.
- I am confronted with having to ask, prove, convince, deal with paperwork... All sorts of time-consuming bureaucracy & unpleasant conversations just to get my right to access fulfilled. It's really exhausting and distressing.
- We don't need teachers to be perfect or very knowledgeable about inclusion, we just need them to be open and flexible.
- When I saw that there was a SMF** Team at the university, I felt that there was a net to catch me if I fall. ** 'Studeren Met een Functiebeperking' (Studying with a functional impairment).
- Communication is so important. Experiences should be shared more often so everyone can feel seen and heard.
- We need to connect with one another at the human level through dialogue. That's where real inclusion lies.
- Awareness is a first step but we need acceptance.

How?

With UDL, we can lower or remove barriers so that all students can access high-quality learning. There are different ways we can apply the UDL principles. For example, by adding close captions to videos as this does not only benefits students with a hearing impairment but also those with dyslexia, language learners, and anyone who likes to watch lectures in silence (e.g. in the train or in a shared room). Let's take a look at 9 tips and their additional clickable resources, to implement UDL with our students right away!

Multiple Ways of Engagement: [Watch the video for more information \[Video\]](#)

Tip 1. Send a welcoming message: [Example of an invitational message to students \[Video\]](#)

Tip 2. Activate learning

- [Thinking routines for active learning \[Website\]](#)
- [Menti, an interactive tool for digital active learning \[Website\]](#)

Tip 3. Listen with an open heart: [Form to ask students some questions before a course \[Form\]](#)
[\[Duplicate EUR Form\]](#)

Multiple Ways of Representation: [Watch the video for more information \[Video\]](#)

Tip 4. Consider accessibility

- [Generate captions and a transcript for videos in Panopto \[Video\]](#)
- [Generate captions and transcript for videos on YouTube \[Video\]](#)
- [Captions with PowerPoint and in Teams \[Website\]](#)

Tip 5. Add modalities

- [Alternatives for visual information \[Website\]](#)
- [Alternatives for auditory information \[Website\]](#)

Tip 6. Encourage collaboration

- [Jigsaw strategy \[Video\]](#)
- [Team process tools \[Miro Board\]](#)

Multiple Ways of Action and Expression: [Watch the video for more information \[Video\]](#)

Tip 7. Give choices: [GRASPS Assessment template \[Website\]](#)

Tip 8. Be flexible

- [Feed-Back/Forward form for students \[Form\]](#) [\[Duplicate EUR Form\]](#)
- [Hybrid-Flexible Course Design \[Online Ebook\]](#)

Tip 9. Offer feedback

- [Explore different types of rubrics \[Website\]](#)
- [Autonomy-Supportive Feedback strategies \[Presentation\]](#)

Find out more about the research behind UDL

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