

Using Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in Daily Instruction

A Classroom Guide for Flexible, Accessible Teaching

Purpose & Overview

This guide supports teachers in applying Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to design instruction that is accessible to a wide range of learners from the very beginning. Rather than relying only on accommodations after barriers appear, UDL encourages teachers to anticipate learner variability and plan lessons that provide flexible pathways for engagement, understanding, and expression.

By embedding accessibility into lesson design, teachers can reduce frustration, increase participation, and ensure that all students including those with disabilities have meaningful opportunities to access grade-level learning.

Instructional Outcomes

Through the intentional use of UDL, teachers will be able to:

- Design lessons with built-in accessibility and flexibility
 - Provide multiple ways for students to access information and concepts
 - Offer varied options for demonstrating understanding
 - Increase motivation, participation, and persistence among diverse learners
 - Reduce instructional barriers before they impact learning
 - Strengthen alignment between classroom instruction, accommodations, and IEP goals
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Understanding Universal Design for Learning

Universal Design for Learning is a proactive instructional framework based on the idea that learners vary in how they engage with content, process information, and demonstrate knowledge. Instead of creating one rigid lesson and adjusting afterward, UDL encourages teachers to design flexible instruction from the start.

UDL does not replace accommodations or IEP supports. Instead, it creates a more accessible learning environment so that fewer barriers exist in the first place, allowing accommodations to be used more effectively and intentionally.

The Three Principles of UDL in Practice

<i>Principle</i>	<i>Focus</i>	<i>What It Looks Like in the Classroom</i>	<i>Example</i>
Engagement	Motivation, interest, and persistence	Students are offered choice, relevance, and opportunities for collaboration	Choice of topic, partner work, or goal setting
Representation	How information is presented	Content is delivered using varied formats to support understanding	Text, visuals, audio, demonstrations, guided notes
Expression	How students demonstrate learning	Students show understanding through different response options	Writing, speaking, drawing, digital response, or project

Together, these principles create flexible pathways for learning that support both students with disabilities and the broader classroom community.

Designing UDL-Aligned Lessons

When planning instruction, teachers can ask:

- How will students connect to this learning? (*Engagement*)
- How will students access and understand the content? (*Representation*)
- How will students show what they know in meaningful ways? (*Expression*)

Considering these questions during planning helps ensure lessons are inclusive, responsive, and instructionally strong.

Practical UDL Strategies for Daily Instruction

Teachers can begin implementing UDL through small, intentional shifts such as:

- Providing guided notes, visuals, or models alongside verbal instruction
- Allowing choice in reading materials, topics, or task order
- Offering multiple response formats for assignments or assessments
- Using technology tools that support access, organization, or expression

- Building collaborative and discussion-based learning opportunities
- Incorporating scaffolded supports that can be gradually removed

These practices support all learners, not only those with identified disabilities.

Teacher Reflection

During lesson planning or instruction, teachers may consider:

- Are multiple formats used to present key information and concepts?
- Do students have meaningful choices in how they engage with learning?
- Are varied response options available for demonstrating understanding?
- Are engagement strategies supporting motivation and persistence?
- Have potential learning barriers been reduced during lesson design?
- Do UDL practices align with existing accommodations or IEP supports?

Ongoing reflection helps ensure UDL remains intentional rather than incidental.

Connection to Inclusive and Effective Instruction

UDL strengthens:

- Access to grade-level curriculum
- Differentiation within whole-group instruction
- Student independence and confidence
- Alignment between instruction and IEP accommodations
- Equity in participation and learning outcomes

By planning for variability from the start, teachers create classrooms that are both inclusive and academically rigorous.
