

## Using UDL in planning

### Summary

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework for designing and delivering flexible approaches to teaching and learning. The UDL framework addresses barriers to the learning process for all students.

Using UDL, teachers deconstruct the approved curriculum to focus on the relevant knowledge and skills, and learners' strengths and barriers to the learning process (functional impact). The framework supports teachers to identify strategies to support student success, and apply these strategies to the lesson planning process.

The underlying principles, guidelines, and checkpoints of UDL provide educators with guidelines for implementing instruction in a flexible manner (He, 2014; Katz & Sokal, 2016; Navarro et al., 2016; Rose et al., 2005).

### Australian Professional Standards for Teachers related to this practice

- 1.5 - differentiate teaching to meet the specific learning needs of students across the full range of abilities
- 1.6 - strategies to support the full participation of students with disability
- 4.2 - manage classroom activities

For further information, see [Australian Professional Standards for Teachers AITSL page](#)

## Preparing to Teach

### UDL or Universal Design for Learning

Although you may not be familiar with the term 'Universal Design for Learning', you will have benefitted from it or seen it. For example:

- Closed captions on TV - not only benefits those with hearing impairments, but can be of benefit for everyone in noisy environments.
- Public transport that enables people with disability to access and use transportation - hearing sound systems, mobile ticketing, visual, tactile and aural cues at pedestrian crossings.

### UDL in learning

UDL is about removing barriers and enabling students to be active participants in the learning process.

There are 3 underlying principles of UDL

- engaging students in multiple ways,
- representing knowledge and skills in multiple ways,
- and allowing students to provide evidence of their learning in multiple ways.

## Implementing the Universal Design for Learning framework

There are 7 steps in implementing the UDL framework in lesson planning:

### 1. Work collaboratively

- When teachers work together in collaborative teams, they
  - sharpen their pedagogy by sharing specific instructional strategies for teaching more effectively, and
  - deepen their curriculum knowledge of what students need to master.
- By working collaboratively teachers become better at their profession (Many & Sparks-Many, 2015). The best team structure for improving student achievement is a team of teachers who teach the same curriculum area or year level (DuFour et al., 2017).

### 2. Deconstruct the approved curriculum to make it more inclusive

- Teachers need to collaboratively identify:
  - the knowledge to be taught to students and skills to be modelled, and
  - what students need to essentially demonstrate as evidence of learning.
- This enables teachers to focus on the relevant curriculum elements and minimises the risk of being distracted by non-essential curriculum elements. This process helps ensure assessment tasks assess the required elements of the approved curriculum.

### 3. Know the strengths and barriers to the learning process (functional impacts) for all students

- Teachers need to identify the common characteristics they see in their classrooms, and the associated strengths and functional impacts of their students.
- By leveraging students' strengths teachers can support students' access to the learning process and support their functional impacts.

### 4. Know the Universal Design for Learning framework

UDL is not a set of strategies but a way of thinking about the planning, teaching, and assessment cycle. UDL is underpinned by 3 principles.



Principle	Example
<p><b>Principle 1</b></p> <p>Teachers engage students in the learning process in multiple ways. To achieve this, teachers recruit their students' interests, support them to sustain their effort and persistence, and to develop self-regulation.</p>	<p><i>A teacher may connect a group of students' interest in supporting their favourite football team to the process of demonstrating Nationalism (recruiting interest), use targeted group and peer work when learning about Nationalism (sustaining effort and persistence), and regularly use charts, templates and feedback displays for students to develop self-assessment and reflection skills.</i></p>
<p><b>Principle 2</b></p> <p>Teachers represent the knowledge and skills within the approved curriculum in multiple ways. During the planning process teachers ensure that all students can physically access the knowledge and skills. They also clarify all language and symbols used and provide supports to transform information into useable knowledge (comprehension).</p>	<p><i>A group of students might access a short story by reading a hard copy in a book, have the story read to them by the teacher, read the story on an iPad, or have the iPad read the story to them whilst wearing headphones. This ensures all students can physically access the short story. During another reading of the short story, the teacher and students might highlight difficult terms/words and look them up on Google Images to develop a collaborative definition, which is then added to a Frayer Model. During a third reading of the short story, the teacher and students might identify important characters and events in the story and add these to a collaboratively developed Mind Map (Comprehension).</i></p>
<p><b>Principle 3</b></p> <p>Students need to be able to provide evidence of their learning in multiple ways. To achieve this, students first need to be able to physically demonstrate their learning before demonstrating it with expression and communication. Students are then supported to become strategic and goal directed by developing appropriate goal setting and other means of enhancing their capacity to monitor progress.</p>	<p><i>In Mathematics, a student might demonstrate their understanding of number using concrete materials and drawing an image consisting of several dots, before writing the abstract numbers.</i></p> <p><i>In English a student might physically build the scene of their story using LEGO, verbally explain it to the teacher, then type it using a laptop or speak into a speech-to-text device. Students then monitor their progress against the approved curriculum by looking at the success criteria for the lesson.</i></p>

## 5. Apply the strategies associated with the UDL framework to your students' strengths and functional impacts

Teachers think about the strengths and functional impacts of all the students in their class. They then develop strategies, aligned to the UDL framework, that clearly connect to their students' strengths and functional impacts.

### Examples

If a group of students have an interest in Minecraft, you could connect the study of Australian Curriculum HASS (Geography) to building a world in the video game.



If a group of students have difficulties with working memory, you could film the teacher modelling the task or activity, and send it to all students via email or loading it on to the class OneNote page. This will allow students to watch the video multiple times if they can't remember how to complete a task.

## 6. Apply the deconstructed curriculum to the four stages of the lesson planning process

- Within the Gradual Release of Responsibility, there are four stages of the learning process:

Stage	Example
Contextualisation of knowledge	Within the contextualisation stage teachers introduce students to the essential knowledge from the approved curriculum
Teacher modelling of skills	Teachers then model for their students the essential skills from the approved curriculum
Student group work	During group work and independent work students provide evidence of learning against the approved curriculum.
Independent work	

## 7. Apply the strategies associated with the Universal Design for Learning framework to the four stages of the lesson planning process

- Principle 1 of the UDL framework applies during all four stages of the lesson planning process.
- Principle 2 applies during the contextualisation and teacher modelling stages.
- Principle 3 applies when students work in groups and independently.

## In the classroom

### Our guidelines for applying the UDL framework

#### Step 1: Work collaboratively

- Identify teachers in the same year level teaching group or subject area.
- Establish regular meetings so you can work together and share knowledge.

#### Step 2: Deconstruct the curriculum to make it more inclusive

- As a team, revise your knowledge of the curriculum to identify the essential knowledge and skills students must be taught, and evidence the students must provide against the approved curriculum.
- Review and reflect as a team regularly.

## Step 3: Know your students and their strengths and abilities

- Know your students' strengths and barriers to the learning process.
- Observe students and seek feedback to better understand their strengths and barriers to learning.
- Know what interests and engages your students.
- Use this information to adjust and refine activities.

## Step 4: Know the UDL framework

Apply the UDL principles through strategies which harness your students' strengths and supports them to overcome their barriers to the learning process (functional impacts):

- Provide opportunities that recruit students' interests, support them to sustain their effort and persistence in learning, and provide opportunities to support self-regulation.
  - for example, minimising threats and distractions in the classroom, targeted use of feedback to move learning forward, and using real life situations in the classroom to demonstrate coping strategies.
- Connect learners to the content and skills in the approved curriculum
  - Not all learners will process or access the information in the same way – ensure all students are able to access the information by providing different options for how the content can be represented or accessed – visual, video, auditory, text to speech, printed media. Once all students can access the information it can then be decoded.
- Support students to navigate the learning environment
  - Students need to be supported to:
    - physically demonstrate their learning
    - demonstrate their learning through language and symbols
    - guide appropriate goal setting through strategies for planning and monitoring progress

## Steps 5 -7: Apply the strategies

Applying the strategies associated with the Universal Design for Learning framework to the four stages of the lesson planning process.

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- Principle 2 applies during the contextualisation and teacher modelling stages.
- Principle 3 applies when students work in groups and independently.

## Materials informing this practice

Capp, M. J. (2018) Teacher confidence to implement the principles, guidelines, and checkpoints of universal design for learning. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, DOI: [10.1080/13603116.2018.1482014](https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2018.1482014)

CAST (2018) UDL Guidelines. Retrieved from <http://udlguidelines.cast.org/>



**inclusion ED**  
supporting diverse learners

## PRACTICE BRIEF

Carrington, S.; Saggars, B.; Webster, A.; Harper-Hill, K. and Nickerson, J. (2020) What Universal Design for Learning principles, guidelines, and checkpoints are evident in educators' descriptions of their practice when supporting students on the autism spectrum? *International Journal of Educational Research*, 102, Article number: 101583 1-11. <https://eprints.qut.edu.au/201024/>

