

Resource Guide

Incorporating UDL Principles in Online Courses

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is an approach to teaching and course design that seeks to anticipate learner variability by intentionally building in multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression (CAST, 2024). In online courses, where students interact with content, peers, and instructors using digital tools and platforms, UDL becomes especially important. By offering even one additional way for students to interact with course materials, participate in activities, or demonstrate their learning, instructors can create more engaging and flexible online learning experiences (Tobin and Behling, 2016). The following suggestions illustrate how the [UDL 3.0 guidelines](#) can be applied in the online courses you teach.

- **Designing multiple options for engagement online.** Guidelines 7, 8, and 9 emphasize supporting learner belonging, persistence, and emotional capacity. In an online course, this might include giving students choice in assignment topics or readings, allowing flexibility in which discussion questions they respond to, or offering both synchronous and asynchronous participation options. You might also consider building in regular, low-stakes assignments in your course modules or ask students to engage with reflective prompts after watching a video lecture or engaging in a learning activity. Introductory discussions and assignment or discussion prompts that invite students to connect course content with their own experiences can also help foster a sense of belonging and provide meaning in the learning process (Rose et al., 2006, pp. 136-137).
- **Designing multiple options for representing course content and information online.** Guidelines 1, 2, and 3 focus on how information is presented and retrieved. In online courses, this can involve providing materials in multiple formats, such as transcripts that accompany video lectures or audio explanations alongside written descriptions. Varying the representation of your content may also include incorporating diverse voices and perspectives within course materials and clarifying discipline-specific language. The Rich Content Editor in Canvas makes it easy to integrate both text and multimedia (e.g., video and audio), while the Modules and Pages tools enable you to engage students through external links, files, multimedia, and interactive tools.
- **Designing multiple options for how students can demonstrate their learning online.** Guidelines 4, 5, and 6 emphasize how students demonstrate their learning. In an online course, this might mean offering flexible assignment submission options, such as written papers, recorded presentations, or quick voice blogs. Providing clear instructions, examples, and rubrics (using the Canvas rubrics tool or assignment guidelines) can help create transparency in expectations. Incorporating opportunities

for revision and feedback further supports student agency and can help students recalibrate their learning to show you whether they are meeting key learning objectives or not.

Resources

CAST (2024). [CAST Universal Design for Learning Guidelines version 3.0](https://udlguidelines.cast.org). Retrieved from <https://udlguidelines.cast.org>.

Rose, D., Harbour, W., Johnston, C., Daley, S., Abarbanell, L. (2006). [Universal design for learning in postsecondary education: Reflections on principles and their application](#). Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability 19(2): 131-151.

Tobin, T. J., & Behling, K. T. (2018). [Reach everyone, teach everyone: Universal design for learning in higher education](#). West Virginia University Press.

For more information or to discuss how you might incorporate these ideas into your courses, contact the Reinert Center by [email](#) or submit a [consultation request form](#).