



THE FACTS FOR FAMILIES

1) What is Universal Design and Universal Design for Learning?

The term “universal design” refers to the movement within architecture and product development to create places or things that are accessible to as many people as possible, including those with disabilities.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework and set of principles to provide ALL students equal opportunities to learn. It allows educators to choose from a menu of tools and strategies embedded in the curriculum. Using UDL principles in general education and special education classrooms makes curriculum and instruction accessible and engaging for all learners. Curriculum barriers are reduced; learning is supported; students gain knowledge, skills, and enthusiasm for learning; and their learning is validly assessed.

2) What are the benefits of UDL?

Students come to the classroom with a variety of needs, skills, talents, interests and diverse learning styles. For many learners, the typical curriculum is littered with barriers and roadblocks, while supports are relatively few.

UDL turns this scenario around and supports curriculum design that is responsive to today’s diverse classrooms. UDL improves educational outcomes for ALL students by ensuring meaningful access to the curriculum and accurate skill and knowledge assessment. In addition, UDL complements existing school reform initiatives, especially increased use of technology in education.

3) What are the principles of UDL?

- Provide multiple and flexible methods of ***presentation*** to give

students with diverse learning styles various ways of acquiring information and knowledge.

- Provide multiple and flexible means of ***expression*** to provide diverse students with alternatives for demonstrating what they have learned, and
- Provide multiple and flexible means of ***engagement*** to tap into diverse learners' interests, challenge them appropriately, and motivate them to learn.

Using these three principles, UDL embeds flexibility into the components of the curriculum: goals, teaching methods, instructional materials and assessments. UDL is more comprehensive than differentiated instruction, which primarily concentrates on teaching methods.

4) Isn't UDL just for students with disabilities?

Absolutely not. UDL was first mentioned in regard to making instruction accessible for students with disabilities, but it is a format that gives ALL students the opportunity to learn.

Both IDEA and NCLB recognize that all learners must make progress in the general education curriculum. Student performance increases as all students acquire greater knowledge and demonstrate progress when UDL is fully embraced and implemented

5) In what ways does UDL provide access to grade level curriculum?

Eliminating physical barriers to educational sites or materials (e.g., providing digital

textbooks) is an essential step in universal design but genuine learning requires much more than physical access—it requires cognitive (or intellectual) access, too.

For example, providing digital text with built-in comprehension supports is one way to apply the principle of multiple means of presentation to instructional materials. A student who has difficulty accessing printed text due to visual impairment, physical disability, dyslexia or other reading disability could use the text reader feature (physical access), while a student who struggles with comprehension could use comprehension supports that are designed for a variety of ability levels (cognitive access). These supports could include vocabulary definitions, highlighted abstract literary concepts, foreign language translations, or animated coaches that assist with answering comprehension questions. For examples see <http://udleditions.cast.org>.

UDL does not require the use of a computer and digital materials, although they provide the greatest flexibility. There are also many low-tech options. UDL materials should be available for home use to support homework and project tasks.

6) How does UDL help with modifying and adapting materials?

Universally designed instructional materials are designed from the start to be used by a wide range of learners, thereby minimizing the need for time-consuming adaptations and modifications. The materials should still be further individualized, if needed, but a lot of the work will have already been done.

7) What is being done to promote the implementation of UDL?

A number of States are working to support UDL implementation, with a special emphasis on teacher professional development, while postsecondary institutions are embracing UDL with increasing frequency.

The National UDL Task Force works to incorporate the principles of UDL into federal policy and practice initiatives. Recommendations of the Task Force on teacher and faculty preparation to use UDL strategies were incorporated into the recently passed Higher Education Opportunity Act. Recommendations have been made for the reauthorization of NCLB and will also be made for IDEA. In addition, the Task Force seeks increased dissemination of information about UDL by the U.S. Department of Education and other federal agencies. See the UDL Toolkit at www.osepideasthatwork.org/udl/

The National UDL Task Force is comprised of more than thirty education and disability organizations. A complete listing of Task Force members can be found at www.udl4allstudents.com.

8) Where can I find more information?

Please visit our website at www.udl4allstudents.com or contact Ricki Sabia at rsabia@ndss.org. A detailed parent guide on UDL is found at <http://www.ncl.org/publications-a-more/parent-aamp-advocacy-guides/a-parent-guide-to-udl>.

9) What can I do to help promote UDL?

- Share this Fact Sheet with others.
- Find out if the curriculum in your school district has been developed in accordance with UDL principles by asking your child's educators and the administrators involved in curriculum development. An educator checklist for implementing UDL can be found at <http://www.cast.org/publications/UDLguidelines/version1.html>
- Contact your district, state and national policymakers and ask them to support UDL.

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