

UDL Tips for Assessment

In CAST's [Universal Design for Learning: Theory and Practice](#), assessment is defined as “the process of gathering information about a learner’s performance to make educational decisions” (Salvia & Ysseldyke, 2009). Universal Design for Learning (UDL) encourages “assessment by design,” but what does that mean specifically for educators?

How can you use the UDL framework to design and reflect on assessments – whether the assessments are through remote learning environments or in a face-to-face experience?

Align assessments to learning goals.

When the learning goals are clear, the assessments should align so they measure whether learners have achieved the intended goal. Design assessments alongside learning goals so that you can ensure you are measuring the intended goals of your learning experience. There can be flexibility in the assessment options when the construct, or focus for the assessment, is clear.

Ask yourself:



- Are my learning objectives/goals clear?
- Does my assessment reflect and measure the intended learning goals, or are there additional components or skills that are also being measured by my assessment?

Offer authentic opportunities for assessment.

Offering relevant, authentic options for assessment can help learners transfer usable knowledge and understand the “what,” the “how,” and the “why” of their learning. Whether you are in a face to face setting or in a remote learning environment, ensure that the assessment can be personally relatable and culturally relevant.

Ask yourself:



- In what ways do my assessments engage learners in understanding the authenticity and relevance of the content?
- How am I providing opportunities for learners to apply new knowledge to novel situations and relatable experiences?

Assess engagement as well as content knowledge.

We know that engagement is essential for learning. Assessing engagement in the learning process can invite metacognitive reflection, so learners have the opportunity to assess their own learning process. As part of the reflection process, assess and understand how learners engaged with and used resources strategically towards given demands in a task.

Consider a resource such as the [Mood Meter](#) to build vocabulary and reflection around emotion and engagement during learning. It can be critical to develop this kind of communication for remote learning, as educators are not necessarily able to accurately evaluate learners' engagement in the same ways in the remote context.

Ask yourself:



- How have I assessed learner engagement during the learning process?
- What strategies or supports helped a learner persist through a challenge to engage in the assessment?

Include frequent formative assessments.

Formative assessments are ongoing, frequent checks to measure learners' progress toward the targeted learning goals. Data from formative assessments should influence instructional decisions and help determine how the options supported learners to achieve the intended goals.

Examples of formative assessments might include reflection questions on exit tickets, "do now" questions, portfolio collections, journal entries, or quick polls such as [Plickers](#). Note that formative assessments should be incorporated in any learning experience, including remote learning.

Ask yourself:



- In what ways do my assessments engage learners in understanding the authenticity and relevance of the content?
- How am I providing opportunities for learners to apply new knowledge to novel situations and relatable experiences?

Reduce unnecessary barriers to access.

Assessments often have additional barriers or challenges for learners that are not connected with measuring the intended learning goal. Where possible, reduce the barriers that do not tie to the learning goals you want to measure.

For example, options such as practice assessments, review guides, flexible timing, assistive technologies, or support resources can be made available for all learners.

Ask yourself:



- Are there accessibility barriers my learners may encounter in my assessments?
- What are the targeted skills or understandings this assessment is intended to measure?
- What may be preventing learners from showing what they know in my assessment?

Support learner variability through flexible assessments.

In any assessment, we can anticipate variability in how our learners engage, are prepared, and can show what they know. Flexible options not only enhance access, but can also reduce perceived threats or distractions and ensure all learners are able to demonstrate their skills.

For example, assessments should reflect the learning experience. Just as we use the UDL framework to design our lessons, the UDL principles (provide multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression) should also guide the design of our assessments.

Ask yourself:



- What is some of the variability I can anticipate in my learners, especially during assessments?
- How do the flexible options for engagement, representation, and action and expression in my assessments align to the intended learning objectives and support learner variability?

Use and share rubrics to clarify expectations.

Rubrics are effective in making the goals and expectations of an assignment explicit. They can serve as a baseline for what is required and then can include opportunities for learners to add goals they have for a given assignment. Clear communication of expectations through a rubric can allow for consistent measurement of the intended goal.

Ask yourself:



- Does the rubric align to the intended skills or knowledge?
- Are there opportunities for learners to contribute to the rubric in ways that are meaningful to them?

Involve learners in assessing their learning progress.

Communicate with learners about their progress towards the intended learning goals through formative assessment data, [mastery-oriented feedback](#), and providing guidance for possible adjustments or new strategies that may support the intended goal. This allows learners to become active advocates and take ownership of their learning.

Ask yourself:



- Have I offered timely, goal-related feedback for my learners on the assessment?
- Have I offered opportunities for learners to assess their own progress and process (for example, through regular check-ins)?

Reflect on summative assessments for future design.

Summative assessments focus on learner performance after instruction has occurred, such as unit exams, course summative tests, final project artifacts, or chapter summaries. They are often used for accountability purposes, criterion for admittance, or to compare learner performance. Summative assessments can also be used to reflect on ways to improve learning strategies and to further design goal-directed learning environments.

Ask yourself:



- What kinds of summative assessments am I using to measure the learning outcomes for this learning experience?
- What are the summative assessments measuring and how can that data be used to inform my future instructional design?

Build communities of practice that support reflective design.

Both formative and summative assessments can be used to reflect on the purpose and effectiveness of instructional materials and learning strategies. Collaborating with colleagues around these assessment topics, collecting and analyzing data, discussing outcomes, examining challenges, and recommending solutions can be both effective and empowering. Find ways to have these important discussions, whether together during team meetings or through remote and online platforms.

Ask yourself:



- How do I collaborate with other educators to design effective instruction and curricular materials that support the targeted learning goals as measured through the assessments?
- In what ways do our teams or departments adjust instruction or curricular decisions after evaluating assessment results/ data?

Additional Resources

- [UDL Instructional Planning Process](#) from the UDL-IRN
- [UDL and Assessment](#) from CAST's UDL on Campus
- [A Policy Reader in Universal Design for Learning](#) by David Gordon, Jenna Gravel, and Laura Schifter
- [Universal Design for Learning: Theory and Practice](#) by Anne Meyer, David H. Rose, and David Gordon
- [Using Formative Assessment to Improve Student Achievement in the Core Content Areas](#), a briefing paper from the Southeast Comprehensive Center at SEDL
- [UDL Quick Tips](#) from the ACCESS Project at Colorado State University
- [Just Write! Guide](#) from TEAL (Teaching Excellence in Adult Literacy)

Reference

Salvia, J., Ysseldyke, J.E. & Bolt, S. (2009). *Assessment in special and inclusive education*. (11th edition). Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

