



THE FACTS FOR EDUCATORS*

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. Using UDL principles in the general education classroom 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?

As any educator knows, 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.

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.

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. For example, video captioning is of great help to students with hearing impairments—and is also beneficial to students who are learning English, students who are struggling readers, students with attention deficits, and even students working in a noisy classroom.

*Educators refers to teachers, paraeducators and specialized instructional support personnel

5) In what ways does UDL provide access to the general education curriculum for all students?

Brain research tells us that learning requires interconnections. Using the principles of UDL embeds flexibility into key aspects of the general education curriculum: goals, teaching methods, instructional materials and assessments. UDL allows ALL learners to make interconnections and use their skills and interests to fully engage in the learning situation.

Increasing physical access and eliminating physical barriers to educational sites 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 a digital text of a novel 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 reading printed text could use the text reader feature, while a student who needs help with reading comprehension could use imbedded 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>.

6) What legislation calls for the use of UDL?

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 and the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 have provisions for Universal Design and Universal Design for Learning.

7) What is the role of educators in UDL implementation?

Educators are key to UDL implementation. They can promote the use of UDL by:

- Serving on curriculum selection committees and encouraging school districts to purchase curriculum

materials that incorporate UDL principles.

- Adopting UDL principles in designing and planning the instructional strategies for their classrooms.
- Demonstrating how to use UDL principles to their teaching colleagues.
- Requesting professional development on UDL for all educators in their school or district.

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

The National UDL Task Force works to incorporate the principles of UDL into federal policy and practice initiatives and to promote UDL in the school environment.

Language recommended by the Task Force was incorporated into the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008. In addition, the Task Force has recommended UDL legislative language for the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and will make recommendations for the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The Task Force also seeks increased dissemination of information about UDL by the U.S. Department of Education and other federal agencies. See the UDL Toolkit at <http://www.osepideasthatwork.org/udl/>.

The National UDL Task Force is comprised of more than thirty national education and disability organizations. For a complete listing of Task Force members, visit our website at www.udl4allstudents.com.

9) Where can I find more information?

We welcome your support - come join us in our efforts. Visit our website at www.udl4allstudents.com or contact Ricki Sabia at rsabia@ndss.org.

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