

Top 10 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?



Build communities of practice that support curricular modifications from assessment data

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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 topics to collect and analyze data, discuss outcomes, examine challenges, and recommend solutions can be both effective and empowering.

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 I adjust my instruction or curricular decisions after evaluating assessment results/ data?

Reflect on summative assessments for future lesson design

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Summative assessments focus on learner performance after instruction has occurred, such as unit exams, state 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 teaching strategies and to further design goal-directed learning environments.

Ask yourself:

- What kinds of summative assessments am I using to measure my learners’ learning outcomes? Are there barriers to accessibility?
- What are the summative assessments measuring and how can that data be used to inform my future instructional design?

Involve learners in their learning progress through assessment data

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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 skill. This allows learners to become active advocates and take ownership their learning.

Ask yourself:

- Have I offered timely, goal-related feedback on the assessment?
- Have I offered learners the opportunity to assess individual learning progress and process (for example, through regular check-ins)?
- Have I shared options, strategies, and background knowledge needed to build the necessary skills and expertise for achieving the targeted learning goals?

Use and share rubrics to clarify expectations

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Rubrics are effective in making the goals and expectations of an assignment explicit. They can serve as a baseline of what is expected and can even include room for students 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?
- Have components that are not tied to the goal been removed or reduced in my rubric?
- Are there opportunities for choice within the rubric to engage learners in the assignment?

Support learner variability through flexible assessments using UDL Guidelines

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To ensure accurate assessment of a skill or knowledge, consider the UDL principles (engagement, representation, action & expression) when designing your assessments. Flexible options available in an assessment can enhance access, support learner performance, and reduce possible perceived threats.

Ask yourself:

- Is it possible to include choice in how my assessment is represented, how my learners can show what they know, or how my learners engage in the assessment process?
- How do the flexible options still support the intended learning objectives that need to be measured?

Eliminate unnecessary barriers in assessments

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

Ask yourself:

- 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?

Include frequent formative assessments

4 Formative assessments are ongoing and frequent ways to measure learners' progress toward the targeted learning goal. Data from formative assessments should influence instructional decisions. Examples of formative assessments might include reflection questions on exit tickets, "do now" questions, portfolio collections, journal entries, or quick polls with individual whiteboards or [Plickers](#). Formative assessments can be used to determine which learning environments are effectively supporting learners towards achieving the intended goals.

Ask yourself:

- How do I use information from formative assessments to adjust future instruction?
- If my learners are not achieving the intended goal, how will I redesign my instruction?

Assess engagement as well as content knowledge

3 Assessing student engagement in the learning process can support metacognitive reflection about students' own learning. Engagement is essential for the learning process, so learning how to use resources strategically towards given demands in a task can encourage resourceful, goal-driven, purposeful learning. Consider a resource such as the [Mood Meter](#) to build vocabulary and reflection around emotion and engagement.

Ask yourself:

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

Offer authentic opportunities for assessment

2 Offering relevant, authentic options for assessment can help learners transfer usable knowledge and understand the "what," the "how," and the "why" of their 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 authentic experiences?

Align assessments to learning goals

1 When the learning goals are clear, assessments allow educators and learners to observe and measure whether learners have achieved the intended goal. Consider designing assessments alongside learning goals so that you can ensure you are measuring the intended goals of your lesson.

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?

Additional resources for UDL and assessment:

- [Establish learning goals that allow authentic assessment of every learner's progress](#) (Source: UDL-IRN Instructional Planning Process).
- [Design assessments with learner variability in mind](#) (Source: UDL On Campus).
- [Use assessments that focus on the specific knowledge and skills you are teaching](#) (Source: A Policy Reader in Universal Design for learning by David Gordon, Jenna Gravel, and Laura Schifter).
- [Offer alternatives for learners to demonstrate their learning](#) (Source: Maryland Learning Links).
- [Use assessments to measure both product and process](#) (Source: Universal Design for Learning: Theory and Practice by Anne Meyer, David H. Rose, and David Gordon).
- [Encourage choice by using rubrics to evaluate student work](#) (Source: Universal Design for Learning in British Columbia).
- [Use formative assessment to evaluate learning as it is occurring](#) (Source: Southeast Comprehensive Center at SEDL)
- [Use summative assessments to evaluate the 'big picture' effectiveness of the curriculum](#) (Source: Universal Design for Learning: Theory and Practice by Anne Meyer, David H. Rose, and David Gordon).
- [Explore affective growth through learner reflection](#) (Source: UDL Quick Tips from the ACCESS Project at Colorado State University).
- [Offer learners constructive, timely feedback](#) (Source: TEAL, Just Write! Guide)

Reference:

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