

Top 10 UDL Tips for Designing an Engaging Learning Environment

In the most recent version of the UDL Guidelines, which appears in [Universal Design for Learning: Theory & Practice](#), engagement appears in the first column, emphasizing its essential role in the perception and strategic action necessary for learning. In a UDL space, learners are engaged through deliberate design of the learning environment. How can educators design learning environments that support the growth and development of purposeful, motivated learners?



See the full version of the [UDL Guidelines](#) on the UDL Center website, and dive deeper into each of the guidelines by exploring the [UDL Guidelines full text version](#), [examples and resources](#), and [research evidence](#) supporting the guidelines.

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Support risk-taking

In an environment that supports engagement, learners are motivated to push themselves beyond baseline expectations.

Try it! When flexible options are available in the environment, learners can challenge themselves in new ways in order to achieve the learning objective.

Ask yourself:

- Are the expectations clear? Do learners know what success looks like?
- What options are available in the learning environment to encourage learners to push beyond the baseline expectations?

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Offer time for active reflection on learning and engagement

Reflection on how different resources and strategies helped a learner achieve the intended goal can build an understanding of his/her individual strengths and challenges.

Try it! Offer an exit ticket that asks learners which strategies they used to achieve the learning goals. Include a question about their engagement in the learning process.

Ask yourself:

- How have I offered the option for my learners to reflect on the tools and strategies they used to achieve the learning goals?
- Are there opportunities for to reflect on the learners' engagement as they strive towards the goal, such as using the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence's [Mood Meter app](#)?

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Share examples and non-examples

Model examples help make expectations clear so that learners know where to focus their efforts.

Try it! Provide an example and a non-example for an assignment, and highlight the key components that achieve the learning goal.

Ask yourself:

- How have I highlighted the essential components of the learning event?
- How have I made the expectations clear?

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Increase opportunities for collaboration

Fostering collaboration can generate new ideas, consolidate understanding, generate ideas for building relevancy, and offer the opportunity for active processing.

Try it! Strategies can include brief moments to turn-and-talk or more deliberate opportunities for debate and structured discussion.

Ask yourself:

- How have I offered options for collaboration and community?
- Are the options to collaborate supportive of the intended learning goal?



Ensure resources and supports meet the demands of a task

In an environment designed to support engagement, there are options available that are relevant to the task.

Try it! Resources may include technology, but do not need to be limited to technology. Revisit materials that may be tucked away in the closet. You may be able to use them in a new way, and they may be just what you need to enhance your learning environment.

Ask yourself:

- Do the resources available provide options to achieve the learning goal?
- How have I provided purposeful options that support the learning goal?



Incorporate authentic and relevant examples

Authenticity, when relevant to the intended learning goal and the learners themselves, helps recruit learner interest towards achieving rigorous goals.

Try it! Present the option for students to make their own personal connections to the learning goal. This can help content become more relevant and transferable.

Ask yourself:

- Are the examples that I offer relevant to the targeted learning goal?
- Are there options for learners to include their own relevant examples that relate to the intended learning goal?



Provide frequent, formative feedback

Progress-oriented feedback, offered in a timely way, encourages learners to persist through challenges, according to [Carol Dweck's work on growth mindset](#).

Try it! Offer verbal or written feedback that focuses on the process and the learning goal. Encourage students to also offer this kind of feedback to each other.

Ask yourself:

- How have I offered specific, frequent feedback that is connected to the targeted learning goal?
- How will I use information gained from the feedback to adjust upcoming instructional materials and methods?



Present flexible assessment options

Offering options for how learners can demonstrate what they know encourages creative mastery of high level learning goals.

Try it! Try these free resources as new assessment options: [Kahoot](#) and [Quizizz](#).

Ask yourself:

- Is my assessment flexible, providing multiple options for learners to showcase their knowledge?
- Does my assessment demonstrate the actual knowledge of my learners?

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Minimize distractions

What engages one learner may distract another. This is why options are so important; with options, learners can remove themselves from distracting situations and put themselves in a situation more engaging to them, which helps them move closer to the learning goal.

Try it! Offer options within the learning environment for different noise level preferences. For instance, there may be the option to use headphones or listen to soft music.

Ask yourself:

- How are there options to minimize or reduce distractions in the learning environment?
- How are the options offered aligned to the learning goal?

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Create clear, specific goals

In a UDL classroom, the goals are posted in specific, clear language. Once learners understand the goal, they can design their own path towards it from a “menu” of options.

Try it! Lift the curtain! Involve learners in the understanding (or even creation) of the goal to promote a context in which they can be genuinely engaged.

Ask yourself:

- Is the intended learning goal clear and understandable for the learners?
- Are there options for learners to help create their own learning goals?

Additional Resources

[UDL Now! A Teacher's Monday-Morning Guide to Implementing Common Core Standards Using Universal Design for Learning](#) by Katie Novak

[Universal Design for Learning: Theory and Practice](#) by Anne Meyer, David Rose, and David Gordon

[CAST Research & Development](#)

[Maryland Learning Links: Putting UDL Into Action](#)

[CAST Professional Learning UDL Institutes](#)

[CAST UDL Symposium](#)

[CAST Professional Learning Online Courses](#)