

# Universal design for learning (UDL)

## WHAT IS THIS RESOURCE?

A brief overview of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and its connection to USC course design and teaching.

## HOW DO I USE IT?

After perusing the definition of UDL, reflect on how you are using the 4 critical elements and 3 principles of UDL in your course design and teaching, and plan any needed changes. Follow the links to additional resources for more in-depth information on UDL. For assistance, [contact CET](http://cet.usc.edu/) (cet.usc.edu).

The Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 defines Universal Design for Learning, or UDL, as a scientifically valid framework for guiding educational practice. This framework, or set of principles for developing curriculum, is meant to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all people.

### Therefore, UDL

* Is a way of presenting information that reduces barriers while maintaining high achievement expectations
* Provides flexibility in the way knowledge is presented and how students demonstrate their skills
* Is based on cognitive learning science, neuroscience, and educational theory

### Critical elements of UDL

There are 4 critical elements of UDL for instruction, as follows:

1. Instructor sets clear goals
2. Instructor uses variable instructional methods based on learner variability
3. Instructor includes learning-supportive materials in various formats
4. Instructor monitors student progress through timely assessments

For example, we use these critical elements in our course design and teaching when we do the following:

* Set specific and measurable course learning objectives and write them using verbs reflecting Bloom’s Taxonomy
* Promote a growth mindset and maintain high expectations, recognizing the diversity of our students and their strengths while supporting them through scaffolding and resources
* Select a variety of course media (images and text) in terms of both their format and viewpoint
* Align assessments to the learning objectives
* Have diverse types of assignments
* Grade with rubrics
* Include in our syllabi all information in the [Curriculum Coordination Office’s course syllabus template](https://arr.usc.edu/services/curriculum/resources.html), which provides documentation of the design and alignment of a course and that UDL has been followed

### Principles of UDL

The 4 critical elements of UDL are based on 3 principles about how the brain learns.

#### Recognition

Provide multiple means of presenting content in different ways, called the “what” of learning

#### Strategic

Provide multiple means for students to act, or express, what they know, called the “how” of learning.

#### Affective

Provide multiple means of engagement to stimulate student interest and engagement, called the “why” of learning.

### Connection to USC

USC Disability Services and Programs (DSP) and the CET use and recommend UDL. DSP advocates UDL because it makes educational settings and tools accessible; it meets the needs of diverse students with a wide variety of characteristics including disability. USC DSP recommends the following resources for more information on UDL.

* [USC Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS)](https://dsp.usc.edu/)
* [National Center for Universal Design for Learning](https://www.cast.org/)
* [Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST](https://www.cast.org/))