Universally Designed Assignments

Applying universal design principles helps to ensure that a course is accessible to as many people as possible, regardless of their physical or cognitive abilities, under as many circumstances as possible. This tip sheet focuses on how to provide learners with choices in how they demonstrate their learning.

Three Ways to Get Started

1. Allow students to submit work in one of a limited variety of formats.

A student's ability to demonstrate competency or knowledge often depends on his or her unique capabilities and characteristics. Some students are effective and practiced writers who best express their knowledge through essays, reports, or proposals. Other students may better demonstrate competency through oral presentations or videos. Letting students submit assignments in a variety of formats allows them to play to their strengths. (Wondering how to grade an assignment submitted in a variety of formats? Use a rubric that applies a single set of criteria to all formats.)

2. Build fluencies with graduated levels of support for practice and performance, including opportunities for students to receive feedback.

College courses ask students to develop a variety of fluencies (e.g., visual, auditory, mathematical, reading). As they do so, students benefit from multiple, scaffolded opportunities to practice and develop independence. Consider designing assignments so that students who need scaffolding can receive that support through, for example, prescribed steps and several occasions for feedback, while more confident and prepared students can choose to work more independently. Many students appreciate receiving several rounds of feedback on an assignment, so consider including multiple small milestones where they can demonstrate their learning.

3. Consider adding flexibility to deadlines.

Students work through assignments at different speeds and juggle multiple commitments. Incorporating flexibility into project timelines, including deadlines, often helps students to better manage their time and have greater control over their learning.

Want more help with universal design?
Visit idea.boisestate.edu
and contact the instructional design consultant assigned to your department.

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BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY
INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN AND EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT

Designing Assignments with UDL in Mind

In Professor Maxton's upper- and lower-division Communication courses, students who qualify for disability-related accommodations frequently request **additional time** on assignments. Rather than accommodate two or three students each semester, she has designed her assignments in such a way that all students can grant themselves additional time. Each assignment has a due date, but papers can be submitted, without penalty, up to a week past that due date.

Prof. Maxton also has noticed some students struggle to express themselves in writing, but excel when they give oral presentations. Other students have created insightful, thoughtful, informative videos demonstrating their understanding of course content. For a semester-long research assignment in an upper-division course, she lets students choose several **options for demonstrating what they've learned**, including a scholarly poster, an oral-presentation, a short video, or a paper.

As students work through the research assignment, they periodically submit drafts, outlines, and other developing artifacts, receiving **feedback** from both Professor Maxton and their classmates. The formal and informal formative assessment of these submissions helps students both grow as learners and stay on schedule.

In addition to this research assignment, the syllabus lists four other major assignments. However, students are required to complete only three, a policy that enables students to choose assignments that draw upon their strengths and life experience.

Resources

For more information on making your course materials, activities, and assessments accessible, visit "Accessibility and Universal Design for Learning at Boise State." (https://accessibility.boisestate.edu/)

For interdisciplinary case stories featuring UDL, see "UDL-Universe: A Comprehensive Universal Design for Learning Faculty Development Guide" (http://bit.ly/2fPj2uR) and "UDL in Higher Education." (http://bit.ly/2yVing8)

For a sample of a universally designed assignment, see "Sample Assignment Using the UDL Guideline *Multiple Means of Expression*." (http://bit.ly/2yHpGqY)

For more about building flexibility into assignments, see "The Accessible Syllabus." (https://accessiblesyllabus.tulane.edu/)