

# Universal Design in a Nutshell

## Universally Designed Course Content

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. Some practices, such as captioning videos, are required by the Americans with Disabilities Act. This tip sheet focuses on how to ensure students can best access and understand the information and resources you share in your course.

### Three Ways to Get Started

#### 1. Provide the same or similar information in multiple formats.

Many students want to access information in different formats, often because of a disability, life circumstances, or personal preference. For instance, a busy mother may find that her best time to focus is on the bus ride to campus, so she prefers to listen to an audio recording of a reading assignment. Another student may need the visual and audio scaffolding provided by video. Yet another may want the familiar structure of a chapter in a textbook.

In many cases, students don't need to access the exact same information, but rather similar information. Use class time or online activities to have students work together to exchange information in multiple formats, thereby expanding their knowledge and understanding of the content.

#### 2. Choose materials with “live text” that can be read aloud by software.

Text-to-speech software allows written content to be read aloud in a computer-generated voice. Creating or selecting course materials that have accessible text will allow students to use such software. HINT: Text that can be highlighted and copied can be read by text-to-speech software.

#### 3. Select audio and video resources with closed captioning and/or transcripts.

Students with various disabilities, English language learners, and others often require alternate ways to access the information contained in video or audio resources. If your first-choice video does not have closed captioning, find another video that conveys similar information but also offers closed captioning. If you are sharing a video in class, turn on the captioning. Allow students with low vision or disabilities that affect their focus to use mobile devices to watch the video and read captions. Provide transcripts of audio recordings.

---

Want more help with universal design?

Visit [idea.boisestate.edu](http://idea.boisestate.edu)

and contact the instructional design consultant  
assigned to your department.



**BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY**

INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN AND EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons  
Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License.  
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

# Case Study

In her biology class, Professor Garcia asks her students to read the textbook's description of meiosis. However, she knows from past experience that not all students understand meiosis after reading the description, so she sets off to find an animation that shows how meiosis occurs.

On YouTube, Professor Garcia finds a great video. She notices it has closed captioning, but the closed captioning isn't accurate. She searches YouTube again but is unable to find a version of the video that is accurately captioned. Fortunately, YouTube offers another 160,000 videos about meiosis, and she easily finds one that contains the desired information **and** provides closed captioning.

For students who might want to listen to a clear description of meiosis without visual distraction, she includes a link to the AP Biology Podcast episode on meiosis.

She asks students to read or listen to at least two of these three resources before class. In class, she divides them into groups to work through an activity that requires them to share what they have learned, and she asks students questions to check for gaps in their understanding.

## Resources

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

To learn more about the principles and research supporting these practices, visit the UDL Center's page on [multiple means of representation.](http://bit.ly/1zIVHNM) (<http://bit.ly/1zIVHNM>)

For examples of instructors using multiple means of representation in higher education, see "[UDL Examples](http://bit.ly/2yGu09U)" (<http://bit.ly/2yGu09U>) on the website "[UDL on Campus.](http://bit.ly/2fIP3kM)" (<http://bit.ly/2fIP3kM>)

---

Want more help with universal design?

Visit [idea.boisestate.edu](http://idea.boisestate.edu)

and contact the instructional design consultant assigned to your department.



**BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY**

INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN AND EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License.  
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>