

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Strategies

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework that optimizes learning environments for all students by reducing barriers to access and participation. From the initial stages of class-wide instructional planning, barriers to learning are identified, then reduced or eliminated. Even students whose learning challenges have not been identified can benefit from a UDL approach because multiple means of engagement, representation, action, and expression are front loaded into teaching and assessment practices for all students. Since classroom instruction happens almost exclusively through the oral and written language modalities, speech-language pathologists (S-LPs) are uniquely positioned to play a critical role in helping education teams identify barriers and put in place strategies to facilitate students' access to the curriculum.



Common Barriers

For students with speech, language and communication challenges, barriers to accessing and participating in learning may include:

- Rate of presentation of the information
- Complexity of the information presented, including language complexity
- Demands related to modality of presentation (i.e., oral, written, visual)
- Cognitive load
- Elements that interfere with speech perception (e.g., classroom acoustics)
- Cultural differences
- Learner characteristics (e.g., overdependence on the adult)

Some UDL Strategies Recommended by S-LPs

Strategies promoted by S-LPs to help students **understand and retain** content include:

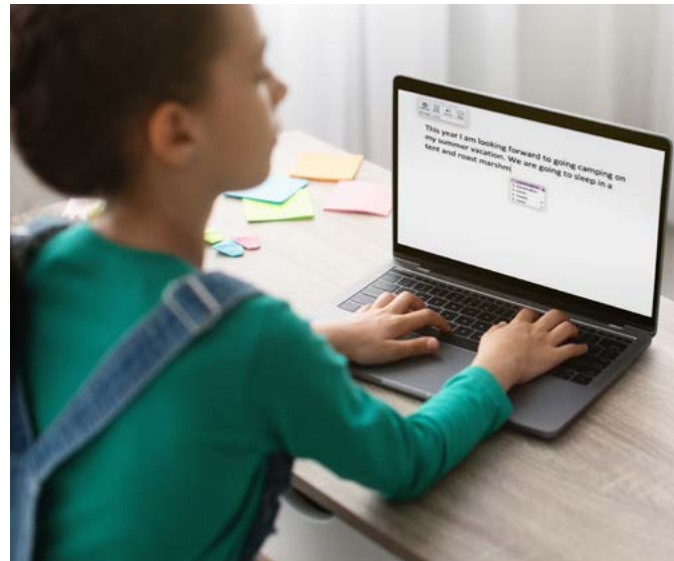
- Allow more time
- Speak more slowly, pausing frequently and articulating clearly
- Repeat information and instructions
- Rephrase information and instructions using simpler terms
- Use visual supports to accompany instructions (e.g., pictures, drawings, videos, gesture/miming, graphic organizers, visual dictionary)
- Provide models of the desired final product
- Present information in related chunks
- Provide mnemonic strategies
- Provide sufficient retrieval practice
- Ensure automaticity in foundational skills (i.e., number sense, decoding)
- Reduce background noise and reverberation – [see SAC Classroom Acoustics Infosheet](#)
- Activate background knowledge
- Preview vocabulary and material
- Clarify symbols and mathematical notation
- Provide worked out examples in math and science
- Clarify the meaning of terms that have similar meanings (e.g., sum, add, plus, total)
- Clarify the meaning of signal or transition words (e.g., although, nevertheless, in contrast)
- Build and provide semantic webs to foster making connections between ideas
- Support oral information by also writing key words
- Review written information verbally
- Avoid adding unnecessary layers of complexity when teaching new content (e.g., teach inferences in the oral modality rather than through written form)
- For multilingual learners, facilitate language transfer by teaching languages in complementarity and highlighting similarities and differences across languages
- For multilingual learners, provide some strategic instruction in the student's first language (part of what is referred to as *translanguaging*), when possible
- Ensure cultural relevance of texts and other materials
- If necessary and when possible, support decoding of text using text-to-speech technology
- If necessary and when possible, provide options of text at a simpler level



Student watching video.

Strategies promoted by S-LPs to help students *communicate* about content include:

- Allow more time for responses
- Offer choice of responses
- Provide word banks
- Provide sentence starters or story starters
- Provide verbal, visual, or gestural prompts
- Allow students to underline/highlight answers in texts rather than writing them out
- Allow students to record their answers and to listen back to the recording to organize their ideas before writing
- Allow students to respond verbally rather than in writing, when possible
- Ensure automaticity in foundational skills (i.e., encoding, calligraphy)
- If necessary and when possible, support spelling and writing using speech-to-text, word prediction/correction technology
- Allow use of graphic organizers when responding
- Allow use of drawings, pictures and pictograms when responding, when possible
- For multilingual learners, allow responses in the student's first language, in subjects other than language arts, when possible (part of what is referred to as *translanguaging*)
- Support the use of Alternative Augmentative Communication (AAC)



Student using WordQ.

It takes a team to support a classroom of students with diverse educational needs. S-LPs possess particular expertise that allows them to play a key role in this respect.

[More information about UDL](#)