UDL Tips for Developing Learning Goals

Goals are the foundation of any effective learning experience — whether it is a face-to-face class, a remote learning opportunity, or other kind of learning interaction. When we clarify what we want learners to accomplish, then we can select flexible assessments, methods, and materials that effectively support that goal.

Start with a clear goal.

It is critical that learners know the intended goals of the learning experience. This is the first step to developing flexible and accessible opportunities. Make sure the goals are crafted using language that is easy for your learners to understand. Each should know exactly what they are working to achieve — whether it is independent, remote, or collaborative team work.

Ask yourself:

- Do my learners know what the goal is and what the goal means?
- Are my learners able to visualize and/or describe the goal in their own way?

Share goals in multiple ways.

Sharing the goal in multiple formats ensures learners can access what it is they are working to achieve.

For example, you may share the goal verbally, have it posted at the top of a digital handout, or ask learners to restate the goal in their own words.

Ask yourself:

- What options do my learners have to perceive the goal?
- Do all of my learners know where to find the goal of the learning experience and reference it at any point during their work?

Frame goals with expert learning in mind.

Disciplinary habits of mind, college and career readiness, and other standards articulate what the educational community values. Reflect on how the goals support all learners to gain meaningful and challenging learning opportunities — whether you are designing for a face-to-face environment or a remote learning experience.

For example, use **CAST's Expert Learner Characteristics** to reflect on how your goals support the development of expert learners in your learning environment.

Ask yourself: ✓

- How are my goals encouraging challenging disciplinary expertise or habits of mind?
- How are my selected assessments, materials, and methods encouraging expert learning?

Separate the goal from the means.

Where possible, separate the goal from the means, or "how" learners can achieve the goal. When there is flexibility in the means, it empowers learners to make choices that maximize their strengths and support their learning needs. When there are clear goals, we can open the door to flexible methods, materials, and assessments, whether we're designing for an in-person or virtual experience.

Ask yourself: ✓

- How have I offered flexibility in how my learners can work toward the goal?
- How have I empowered learners to choose the means they will use to achieve the goal?

Prepare your assessment with the goals in mind.

Aligning assessments to the goal ensures that the assessments are measuring what you've intended. Make sure you're aware of and attempt to eliminate elements within your assessments that are not essential for the learning goals.

For example, if you are measuring reading comprehension, there can be flexibility in how learners can access the required content, such as through text or audio options.

Ask yourself:

- Does my assessment align with my learning goals?
- What barriers are there in my assessment that may impact my learners' abilities to show what they know?
- How could flexible assessment options reduce those barriers?

Include opportunities for personal connections to the goals.

Affective goals, such as developing enthusiasm for learning and finding meaningful connections, are also important for learners in any context. Engagement strategies not only recruit interest, but make it more likely learners will sustain effort and persistence through challenges.

For example, you could work with learners to discuss how the goal connects to real world challenges and relevant examples.

Ask yourself:

- In what ways can my learners personally relate to and engage with this goal?
- Have I provided opportunities for learners to articulate their own personal goals within a learning experience?

Divide large goals into sub-goals or objectives.

Breaking larger, long-term goals into smaller, short-term goals makes the learning process feel obtainable. It also provides opportunities to celebrate milestones or to reduce barriers along the way. This is important whether learners are working independently in remote settings or together in a shared space.

Ask yourself:

- Are my goals manageable for the time period allocated?
- Have I provided opportunities for learners to create their own milestones and long-term goals?
- Are there resources to meet the demands of each subtask within a long-term assignment?

Consider the process as well as the end product.

The process of learning can be just as valuable as the end result. Mistakes are an opportunity for reflection about what it takes to achieve a goal.

For example, standards such as the [Common Core State Standards](#), the [Next Generation Science Standards](#), and the [ISTE Standards](#) explicitly call out process-oriented goals.

Ask yourself:

- In what ways does my goal encourage learning skills and processes, as well as content?
- How are learners able to self-reflect on their learning process?
- Are there opportunities for feedback along the way?

Provide models and examples.

Offering examples of what excellence looks like (or "sounds like" or "feels like") gives learners a clear model of what to work toward. Use models and non-models to highlight the critical features so learners have a baseline for their work. This is especially important when learners are working remotely or if they have not had previous background experience with the concept.

Ask yourself:

- Are there clear examples for learners to understand what constitutes excellence?
- Are there checklists or rubrics with clear expectations, so learners can self-evaluate their work toward the goal?

Make time for reflection.

We're busy. Whether we are working asynchronously online or together in the same learning space, there is always a lot of curricular ground to cover. It is important to pause and encourage time for learners to reflect on how the goals and design of the experiences supported — or did not support — their learning and goals.

Ask yourself:

- Have I given learners opportunities to reflect on their experiences in relation to the goals?
- What barriers did learners face in the goals that could be adjusted next time?

Additional Resources

- **Teaching Every Student in the Digital Age: Universal Design for Learning** by David H. Rose, Anne Meyer, Nicole Strangman and Gabrielle Rappolt

- **UDL Quick Tips** from the ACCESS Project at Colorado State University

- **Key Questions to Consider When Planning Lessons** from CAST

- **Making Goals SMART** from Rider University, Lawrenceville, NJ

- **Critical Elements of UDL in Instruction** from the UDL-IRN

- **Universal Design for Learning in British Columbia** from the legacy of the BC UDL Project

- **Heighten salience of goals and objectives** from the UDL Guidelines

- **Build fluencies with graduated levels of support for practice and performance** from the UDL Guidelines

- **UDL Instructional Planning Process** from the UDL-IRN