# Top 5 UDL Tips for Learning Environments

At CAST, we reflect on all aspects of a learning environment before a learner walks into the room. Using the UDL framework, we can proactively design learning environments so that everyone can work toward becoming expert learners.

Use the **Top 5 UDL Tips for Learning Environments** as a tool to reflect on your learning environment.

AFFECTIVE NETWORKS:
THE **WHY** OF LEARNING
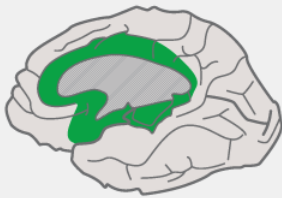
Engagement

For purposeful, motivated learners, stimulate interest and motivation for learning.

RECOGNITION NETWORKS:
THE **WHAT** OF LEARNING

Representation

For resourceful, knowledgeable learners, present information and content in different ways.

STRATEGIC NETWORKS:
THE **HOW** OF LEARNING

Action & Expression

For strategic, goal-directed learners, differentiate the ways that students can express what they know.

1 ## Design the space to match the goal

Identify the learning goal for a given learning event. Then, consider how the physical spaces could shift to align with the target goals of different activities. For example, if collaboration is part of the goal, how could the desks, chairs, and other parts of the environment be arranged to foster collaboration? This arrangement would be different than if the goal was to have a full class discussion or independent learner work time.

Try it! For an upcoming lesson, identify a specific learning goal and reflect on how you can reconfigure desks, materials, and work spaces to support that goal.

Ask yourself:

- How is my classroom configuration flexible so it can support my learning goals?
- How can I make the most relevant materials or resources available in the learning space?

2 Offer resource areas accessible to all

Resource areas provide scaffolds and supports for learners to use as needed. For example, there may be an area with options such as dictionaries, thesaurus, calculators, writing tools, graphic organizers, and assorted lined, graph, or colored paper. There may be a quiet area with low lights, headphones, and comfortable chairs. You may repurpose old items from storage in new ways, such as using an old overhead projector to display a summary of key ideas each day. This resource can become part of the work space that learners may choose to support their learning.

Try it! Craft a new learning space and offer learners the option to use this space as they need during their learning. Learners can begin to notice how different tools, materials, and resources support their learning.

Ask yourself:

- How can I offer an area in my learning environment where learners have a choice of tools, materials and resources?
- In what ways do I reflect with learners about the use of these resources in their learning?

3 Integrate digital resources and materials

Digital resources offer flexibility that traditional print materials do not. Digital text can have features that are essential for some learners, but are also good for all learners, such as:

- read-aloud capacity using text-to-speech tools,
- flexibility in the display of content (color, contrast, size),
- built-in supports like dictionaries, highlighting, and in-line note taking,
- open and closed captions,
- audio descriptions for video,
- image descriptions.

Try it! Take one resource from an upcoming lesson and make an accessible digital version available. Share some of the possible features and then reflect with learners about how any of the digital options supported their learning.

Ask yourself:

- How can I increase the availability of digital options for my resources and materials?
- In what ways do I provide accessible resources and materials for all learners?

4 Highlight the learning processes in the environment

Frequent, formative feedback is important for learning. The learning environment can highlight the learning process, not just the end result. Posting the different stages of a project can help learners see the value of the process towards achieving a final product.

Try it! Think about ways you can highlight and showcase work that represents the learning process for one of the concepts you're working on with learners. For example, post learner work that shows the progress of crafting an essay, the process of solving a complex math problem, or the construction of a poster.

Ask yourself:

- How is the learning process made accessible and visible in my learning environment?
- What are flexible ways I can encourage learners to share their learning process?

5 Ensure access to target goals in the learning environment

When the learning goal is clear and accessible in multiple places in the learning environment, educators and learners can make purposeful choices about the options available and the use of those options.

Try it! Offer at least two ways for learners to access the target learning goal in the environment. For example, you may state the goal verbally, write it, discuss it as a group, and highlight goals on all handouts. Having goals accessible in the environment improves the likelihood that learners can frequently reference the goal and work purposefully towards it.

Ask yourself:

- In what ways do I represent learning goals in my environment?
- How might I encourage learners to frequently refer to the learning goal?

Additional Resources

- Designing Inclusive Learning Environments: What Do Blind Students Need?
- Considering Learning Spaces: How Do We Design Inclusive Classrooms?
- Faculty Interview: Jon Mundorf, University of Florida - Design Considerations from the Universal Design for Learning Perspective
- Learning Environment Digital Resource Roundup