

Top 5 UDL Tips for Fostering Expert Learners

The [UDL framework](#) emphasizes the importance of building expert learners in any context. Learning and expertise are not static. They are continual processes that involve practice, adjustment, and refinement. CAST defines expert learners as purposeful and motivated, resourceful and knowledgeable, and strategic and goal-directed. These **Top 5 UDL Tips for Fostering Expert Learners** can be used to support the development of expert learners—so learning has no limits.

Expert Learners are...



Purposeful
& Motivated



Resourceful &
Knowledgeable



Strategic &
Goal-directed

1

Support relevant goal-setting

Expert learners know what they are working to achieve and why it is relevant and important. The goals are clear, whether they are content-related, tied to discipline standards, behavioral or skill-based, or about group work and collaboration. The UDL guidelines can be used to guide goal setting to be focused on directing purposeful, resourceful, and strategic learning.

Try it! Invite learners to reflect on a learning goal through the lens of their personal experience or work they want to accomplish. If a learning goal is too easy or too far out of scope, this is a great opportunity for discussion. Through making relevant connections, the goals become purposeful and meaningful and will maximize opportunity for transfer to real world experiences.

Ask yourself:

- Are the goals clear and relevant for my learners?
- How can I better support my learners to set their own relevant and meaningful goals?

2

Communicate high expectations for all and recognize variability

Expert learners go for gold! Encourage high expectations for all learners and recognize that each will progress in a unique way toward achieving the goals. Expert learners know how to use relevant resources in service of rigorous goals and can reflect on choices made- adjusting strategies and choices to reduce barriers to learning.

Try it! Use [wise feedback](#) that lets all learners know they are capable of achieving the high expectations. For example, you may say, “I realize this is a challenge and I am confident you can use the resources available to reach this goal.” Use the [UDL Guidelines](#) to help think of ways to offer options for engagement, representation, and action & expression to support the variability of your learners.

Ask yourself:

- Have I communicated consistent, high expectations for all learners?
- Have I supported my students to set high expectations for themselves?
- What resources have I made available in the learning environment for learners to use for engagement, representation, and action & expression?

3

Promote disciplinary expertise

Expert learning differs across disciplines as there are specific practices, habits of mind, and commitments unique to each content area. For example, writing and thinking like a scientist is different from writing and thinking like a historian. Expert learners are purposeful and motivated, resourceful and knowledgeable, and strategic and goal-directed in particular, discipline-specific ways.

Try it! Clarify distinguishing features of disciplinary experts in your domain. Discuss and highlight how disciplinary experts engage in their discipline. What are the practices, habits of mind, and commitments that students need to develop in order to actually *do* the discipline?

Ask yourself:

- Have I defined and shared disciplinary expertise in my domain?
- In what ways are there opportunities for learners to become purposeful, resourceful, and strategic in the different disciplines I teach?



4

Focus on the process, not just the outcome

Expert learners understand that learning is a process that takes effort and value relevant feedback. They see challenges as opportunities to learn—to expand their knowledge. Use [mastery-oriented feedback](#) to encourage focus on the process of learning.

Try it! Showcase the steps that lead to a final product. For example, share editing drafts, mistakes in a math problem, or misunderstandings about content. Allow time for learners to discuss mistakes or mishaps they may have made. These are valuable for learning.

Ask yourself:

- How do I highlight the learning process in my discipline?
- Am I offering mastery-oriented feedback throughout the learning experience?

5

Guide self-reflection

Expert learners pause for introspection. They reflect on how resources and choices have helped or posed barriers to their learning. They recognize the importance of formative and process-based feedback throughout their learning, not just at the end of an experience. If goals are not met, expert learners know to reflect on why. They recognize where things didn't go as well and think about how they might make different choices next time.

Try it! Have learners share reflections about their learning frequently, such as through an exit ticket, online feedback option (such as [PollEverywhere](#)), or verbally. Encourage learners to take risks and stretch beyond their typical learning choices, and allow for reflection on successes and challenges.

Ask yourself:

- Have I offered time for reflection about the learning process, and how that process varies across disciplines?
- Where can I foster collaboration among learners to share about their learning processes in pursuit of the goal?
- How do I model the process of expert learning for learners?

Additional Resources

Wise Feedback: Background on the importance of providing high standards and ensuring learners they have the skills needed to achieve the goals.

Process-Based Feedback: A short video that shares the importance of process-based feedback as described by the work of Carol Dweck.

SMART Goals: A website that outlines the basic ways to make goals specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and timely.

Self-Determination Theory: A short video about Deci and Ryan's theory that includes autonomy, relatedness, and competency.