

# It's a Process: UDL Lesson Planning

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## Abstract

As educators become familiar with UDL, they frequently begin by asking "How do I do this?" They need an adaptable process, one that allows them to reflect on their own practice. This breakout session focuses on integrating the UDL principles into best practice by illustrating UDL lesson planning as an adjustable step-by-step process for teaching all learners. The UDL lesson planning process engages educators in six steps: (1) defining clear, S.M.A.R.T. learning goals based on standards, (2) considering the classroom impact of learner variability, (3) determining appropriate, meaningful assessments, (4) infuse UDL into traditional teaching methods and select materials and media that add value, (5) teach and assess, and (6) refine learning through self-reflection. Applicable to all levels, lesson reflection questions and application exercises immediately put UDL into practice.

## Keywords

UDL, lesson plan, S.M.A.R.T. goals, formative assessment, reflection

## INTRODUCTION

Educators who apply Universal Design for Learning (UDL) are able to successfully create engaging learning environments that activate thinking and scaffold deep understanding for all learners. Frequently however, educators struggle when they try to apply UDL to their lesson planning. They need a *process* to follow and guidance about *how to do it*. And they need to recognize what changes to their current planning process are most effective and efficient. Since UDL is all about honoring individuality and choice, a recipe approach that details specific tasks or ingredients required according to a precise formula doesn't really fit and is impractical. Learners are unique, teaching circumstances are different in various environments, and educators have enormous creativity. What's needed is an adaptable process that allows educators to reflect on their own practice. By incorporating ideas from *Your UDL Lesson Planner: The Step-by-Step Guide to Teaching All Learners* (Ralabate, 2016), educators who apply the UDL lesson planning process realize the joy that comes from effective instruction.

## BACKGROUND

In his exploration of the "inner landscape of a teacher's life," Palmer (1998) states "To educate is to guide students on an inner journey toward more truthful ways of seeing

and being in the world" (p. 6). He goes on to describe good teaching as more *process* than *product*. It is the *process* of envisioning, connecting, and reflecting that enables educators to concurrently rejoice in their daily work and hone their practice.

To apply the UDL lesson planning strategies from *Your UDL Lesson Planner: The Step-by-Step Guide to Teaching All Learners* (Ralabate, 2016), educators follow these six steps: (1) define flexible, clear S.M.A.R.T. learning goals based on standards, (2) consider the classroom impact of learner variability, (3) determine appropriate, meaningful assessments, (4) infuse UDL into traditional teaching methods and select materials and media that add value, (5) teach and assess, and (6) refine learning through self-reflection (Figure 1).

## TAKE THE SIX STEPS OF UDL LESSON PLANNING

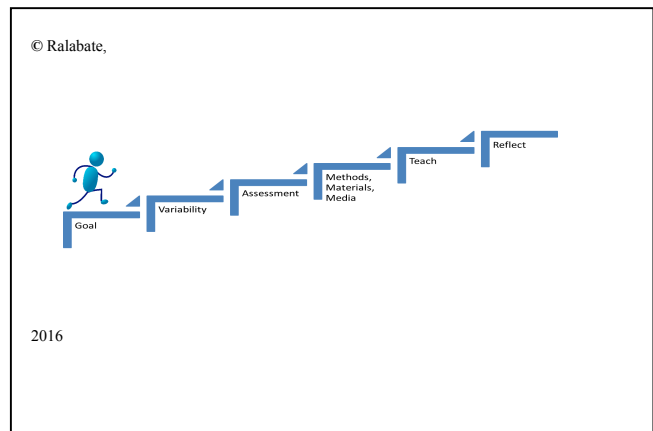


Figure 1. Six steps of UDL lesson planning

## PLANNING

### THE FIRST STEP – DEFINE A LEARNING GOAL

The first step in the UDL lesson planning process involves *developing a clearly defined, measurable learning goal*. The purpose of the lesson is **not** to cover the content or to complete the activity. Instead, the lesson's purpose is derived from the applicable discipline or subject matter content or performance standards. Effective learning goals focus on what students need to know or understand

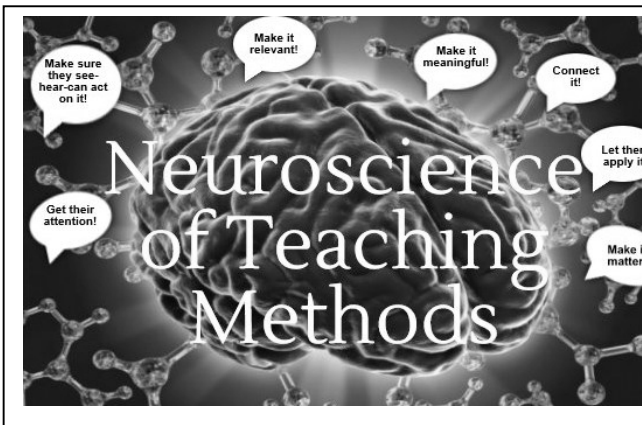
(knowledge), what they need to be able to do (skills), or what they believe (attitudes or perceptions).

Points to consider in developing clear, flexible learning goals:

- Make sure learning goals are S.M.A.R.T.: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Results-oriented, and Time-bound.
- Build learner engagement by sharing the learning goal with students.
- Take a backward design approach to align sequential lessons in a coordinated manner and build big ideas or knowledge and skills.
- Use a flexible (e.g., compose) rather than a constricted (e.g., write) verb as much as possible to allow multiple ways to accomplish the goal.
- Include scaffolding strategies, particularly for learning goals that must contain constricted verbs.

### TAKE A VARIABILITY PERSPECTIVE

The second step in the UDL lesson planning process entails *taking a variability perspective*. Even though each individual brain has a distinct pattern of activity, the UDL guidelines offer systematic, predictable characteristics of variability that can guide lesson design (CAST, 2011). To effectively address learner variability, it's important to consider the three brain networks: (1) Affective networks help learners to initiate actions and respond based on how they feel about what they perceive; (2) Recognition networks control how learners perceive information, which is greatly influenced by context; and (3) Strategic networks plan, organize, initiate, sequence, coordinate, and monitor purposeful actions. In essence, because the UDL principles attend to these three brain networks, they offer educators a dynamic collage of learner strengths, needs, interests, preferences, and dispositions, i.e., a *variability perspective*.



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Figure 2. Neuroscience of Teaching Methods

Learning is more than knowing facts and details; it is the *process of gaining knowledge or skill by studying, practicing, being taught, or experiencing* the environment. Neuroscience tells us that new information is processed by the brain in a specific manner. First, a learner alerts to novel content using her short-term memory, then working memory holds onto it until it's deemed worthy of remembering and moved into long-term memory or dismissed (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000; Ebert, Ebert, & Bentley, 2011). Seven lesson aspects that help learners move novel content to long term memory are: (1) get their attention; (2) make it accessible: ensure they can see, hear, and act on it; (3) make it relevant; (4) make it meaningful; (5) connect it; (6) let them apply it; and (7) make it matter. Providing students with *experiences* during lessons will help them to build a deep understanding that is transferrable to other contexts.

### MAKE LESSONS MATTER – ASSESSMENT

The third step in the UDL lesson planning process is *matching clearly defined, learning goals with flexible, meaningful assessments*. Assessment should measure both learner *products and the process* of learning and be ongoing, and informative to both teachers and students (Meyer, Rose, & Gordon, 2014). Either summative (i.e., assessment *of learning*) or formative (i.e., assessment *as learning*) assessments can be used effectively to evaluate learning in a UDL lesson plan depending on what type of scoring measurement is used. However, standardized assessments are generally not well-suited to measuring learning in a UDL lesson. Moreover, certain scoring measures (e.g., raw scores, percentages of correct responses, rubrics, proficiency scales, progress monitoring, and checks for understanding) work better for UDL lesson planning because they provide meaningful information, are flexible, and can be used to assess individual student growth.

### INFUSE UDL

*Choosing methods, material and media* is the fourth step in the UDL lesson planning process. Wise educators choose methods that offer flexibility, relevance, and an appropriate balance of assistance and challenge. Nevertheless, the UDL principles can be infused no matter what teaching method is selected (e.g., direct instruction, question and answer, drill and practice, discussion, reciprocal teaching, cooperative learning, mental modeling and problem-solving, discovery learning, inquiry-based or problem-based learning, or case-based learning).

Digital technology can make instruction more accessible and engaging. However, it's not necessary to include web tools and digital resources in a lesson to make it a *UDL lesson*. Turning the UDL guidelines into questions can guide selection of materials and media. For example, the following questions reflect specific UDL guidelines:

- Do your materials offer flexibility and choice? (Engagement)

- Do your materials highlight big ideas, patterns, critical features, and relationships? (Representation)
- Are your materials physically accessible and easily accessed? (Action and Expression)

To address learner variability, teaching materials and media can serve as key scaffolds that are available to all learners as well as supports, accommodations, and modifications that are student-specific. In this way, the same lesson can meet the learning and engagement needs of all learners without lowering expectations. Planning UDL lessons may initially take more time so maintaining a learning environment that is organized with learner variability and the UDL framework in mind will ultimately save planning and instructional time.

### REFLECT ON EXPERTISE

*The final and critically important step in UDL lesson planning is reflection.* In many ways, how an educator reflects on UDL lesson planning can depend on her level of expertise. To reflect deeply, teachers examine the lesson's goal and then use the UDL principles and guidelines to analyze its effectiveness.

In essence, educators who apply the UDL framework successfully to their lesson planning become expert learners, i.e., resourceful and knowledgeable, strategic and goal-directed, and purposeful and motivated to achieve mastery (Meyer, et al., 2014). And, they help their students to become expert learners.

Everyone can become an expert learner but not all expert learners are experts. There is a difference. According to Dreyfus & Dreyfus (1986), there are five stages to becoming an expert: Novice, Advanced Beginner, Proficient, Competent, and Expert. Experts notice features and meaningful patterns; what they know is organized around big ideas; they understand the relevance of their content, when and why to apply concepts; and they can retrieve key information without much effort.

Developing into a UDL lesson planning expert requires an accumulation of experiences and takes time. Collaborating with a partner, as a member of a team of co-teachers, or as a member of a professional learning community (PLC) is a powerful way to increase the impact of lesson reflections. PLCs that focus on learning about UDL are particularly effective.

### CONCLUSION

After learning about the UDL framework, educators often struggle when they try to employ it in their lesson planning. This paper outlines the UDL lesson planning *process* and offers an explanation of strategies described in *Your UDL Lesson Planner: The Step-by-Step Guide to Teaching All Learners* (Ralabate, 2016). As educators apply the six steps of the UDL lesson planning process, they not only can improve their understanding of UDL but they also can enrich their practice.

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## Check-In: Lesson Analysis

LESSON TITLE: WEB LOCATION (if applicable):			
Lesson analysis criteria	Yes	No	How would enhance this lesson?
1. The lesson goal is flexible, clearly defined, and SMART.			
2. The lesson plan considers learner variability, including learning gaps and barriers.			
3. The lesson includes meaningful, informative assessments of learning that is aligned to the lesson goal.			
4. The lesson addresses UDL Guidelines by using appropriate, engaging, meaningful, and goal-oriented teaching methods, materials, and media.			
a. The lesson engages learners.			
b. The learners are able to access and understand content.			
c. The lesson provides opportunities for learners to apply content and show what they know and are able to do.			
5. The lesson plan includes assessment for learning, offering an opportunity to collect relevant data about learner progress for teacher and student reflection.			

*Your UDL Lesson Planner: The Step-by-Step Guide for Teaching All Learners*, by Patti Kelly Ralabate.  
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**Figure 7.4.** Check-In: Lesson Analysis.—?’