Supporting Students to Become Expert Learners with Universal Design for Learning

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What are expert learners?

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) defines expert learners as learners who are resourceful and knowledgeable, strategic and goal-directed, and purposeful and motivated (Meyer et al. 2014). Stobart (2014) states, "Expert learners are able to give themselves feedback that allows them to adjust their performance" (p. 139).

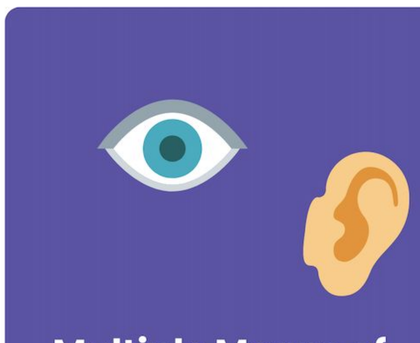
The framework itself makes the learning process visible to students and supports them in learning how to learn, thereby promoting student to engage in expert learning. Expert learning occurs when students actively engage in the learning process and with the learning materials, making decisions for themselves about how to learn and how to demonstrate their learning.

The graphic to the right identifies the UDL guidelines and describes how using each guideline can support students to become expert learners.

Multiple Means of Engagement

Creates Learners who are Purposeful & Motivated

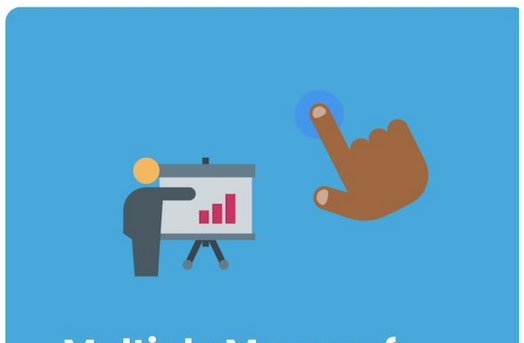
These learners know how to set and pursue learning goals. They can monitor their learning and make adjustments as needed, remaining motivated even when challenged.



Multiple Means of Representation

Creates Learners who are Resourceful & Knowledgeable

These learners use their prior knowledge about a topic to make connections and learn new things. They can identify, access, and use resources and tools to support their new learning.



Multiple Means of Action & Expression

Creates Learners who are Strategic & Goal-Directed

These learners can plan their learning and use effective strategies to achieve their learning goals. They recognize their own strengths and challenges, and revise plans as needed.

Top 5 Tips for Fostering Expert Learners

(Center for Applied Special Technology [CAST], 2017)

1 Support Relevant Goal-Setting

- Provide clear and relevant course goals and unit objectives.
- Prompt students to set their own goals for the course.

2 Communicate High Expectations for All

- Provide feedback with suggestions and encouragement.
- Share relevant resources when providing feedback.

3 Promote Disciplinary Expertise

- Share discipline-specific examples with annotations identifying and modeling relevant thinking and skills.
- Prompt students to find/use resources within the discipline.

4 Focus on Process, Not Just Outcome

- Use iterative peer feedback process to learn from mistakes.
- Offer mastery-oriented feedback on drafts before grading.

5 Guide Self-Reflection

- Use process letters/memos for reflection and questions.
- Provide module reflections to prompt introspection.
- Model the process of self-reflection and iteration about the design and delivery of the course.

Center for Applied Special Technology. (2017). Top 5 UDL tips for fostering expert learners. Retrieved from https://www.cast.org/products-services/resources/2017/udl-tips-fostering-expert-learners

Why is expert learning necessary?

"[I]n today's world, specific competencies are insufficient. Graduates of our schools, colleges, universities, and trade schools must be expert learners who are eager and ready to keep learning. This flexible, engaged readiness to learn new things is required by the changing workplace and the changing society, driven in part by communication technologies that are in constant flux, requiring that users learn new skills constantly just to keep current."
(Meyer et al., 2014, p. 44)

How does UDL foster expert learning?

To support students to become expert learners, learning environments must be engaging, flexible, and supportive. The UDL framework provides strategies and concepts that can be used to design such environments, thereby supporting students in becoming expert learners. In fact, the Center for Applied Special Technology ([CAST], 2017) has identified the top five tips for fostering expert learners. These tips are listed in the graphic to the left, along with strategies from the author's course designed using the UDL framework.

What do students think?

Student feedback on the course design suggests that expert learning was promoted. For example, one student wrote, "For other classes, I typically do not find myself reflecting on whether or not I have met the learning objectives, but for this course, I evaluated whether I had met those objectives each week knowing that the information obtained would greatly help me progress throughout the semester."

Want to learn more?

Do you want to see examples from the author's course designed with UDL, hear more feedback from students who participated in the course, access related resources and references, or get in touch? Please reach out! To access a website built to accompany this presentation, scan the QR code at right or go to www.udlinot.weebly.com.

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