10 Tips for Designing an Accessible Online Course

1. Make learning meaningful & relevant for a diverse audience.

- Choose materials, examples, and assignments that will be relevant to students with diverse goals, interests, cultures, and backgrounds.
- Communicate the purpose and relevance of your materials and assignments to your students.

> *UDL Checkpoints 7.2, 8.1; QM Standard 2.4*

2. Support diverse language skills.

- Use familiar language. Define any unfamiliar terms, acronyms, or jargon.
- Write concisely.
- Use simple sentence structures.
- Choose active voice over passive voice.
- Organize your written content (e.g., logical order, structured into sections, subsections, paragraphs).

> *UDL Checkpoint 2.1*

3. Provide scaffolds to support comprehension.

- Offer aids such as outlines, checklists, templates, graphic organizers, and concept maps.
- Leverage learners' existing knowledge (e.g., use analogies, metaphors; connect to previously learned concepts, personal experiences, current events).
- Emphasize key concepts, patterns, relationships.

> *UDL Checkpoints 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4*

4. Present content in multiple formats.

- Allow students to access information in variety of formats (e.g., text, image, audio, video) rather than limiting students to a single modality.

> *UDL Checkpoints 1.2, 1.3; QM Standard 4.5*

5. Allow learners to communicate & demonstrate learning in multiple ways.

- Include a variety of assignments/assessments in your course rather than relying on a single type.
- Consider offering students input or options for how they can demonstrate their achievement of an objective.
- Consider offering students the option to discuss course concepts or to complete assignments in a modality/format of their choosing (e.g. written, spoken, visual).
- Make sure that individuals with disabilities have accessible ways to communicate/collaborate.

> *UDL Checkpoints 5.1, 7.1; QM Standard 3.4*

6. Give clear instructions and expectations.

- Provide detailed instructions for all activities and spell out any requirements.
  - What steps should be taken, in what order?
  - Which pages, or what portion of a video, should they read/watch?
  - Where/how/when should they submit?
  - How many posts/replies for a discussion board, and when?
  - Length/formatting requirements?
- Provide a rubric, checklist, or some other explanation of grading criteria so students understand how they will be evaluated.
- Consider providing exemplars of assignments, discussion posts, etc.

> *QM Standards 1.3, 3.3, 5.4*

7. Be prepared to accommodate a range of technology skills.

- Inform students at the start of the course which technologies they'll be expected to use to participate in course activities.
- Provide support and resources for students who may be unfamiliar in course technologies.
- Consider providing low-stakes practice opportunities at the start of the course to familiarize students with course technologies.

> QM Standards 1.5, 1.6

8. Select technology tools carefully.

- Be aware of the barriers a tool might pose. Refer to the vendor accessibility statement or VPAT.
- Be prepared with alternative tools or activities.
- Questions to ask:
  - Is the tool compatible with screen readers?
  - Does the tool support keyboard navigation?
  - Does the tool require a pace of interaction that disadvantages certain students?
    - Example: The pace of real-time chats may pose a barrier to students with learning disabilities that impact reading/writing, or to second language learners.
  - Can the tool present content in alternate formats?
    - Examples: Alternative text for images; live captioning and recordings for web conference applications.

> UDL Checkpoint 4.2; QM Standards 8.1-8.6

9. Ensure students have enough time to complete required activities.

- Consider how long it will take to complete the assigned readings, lectures, and assignments.
- Is the workload reasonable for the length & type of course?
- Give students adequate time to complete timed quizzes/tests. Some student accommodations will require you to provide extended time.
- Communicate deadlines in advance so students can plan and manage their time.

10. Provide opportunities for practice & feedback.

- Knowledge checks with automated feedback or example responses.
- Practice or low-stakes quizzes.
- Opportunities to submit drafts of major assignments and receive feedback.
- Opportunities to revise after receiving feedback.
- Ability to submit large projects in parts (milestones) over time to receive feedback, course correct, and make revisions before submitting the final project as a whole.

> UDL Checkpoint 5.3; QM Standard 3.5

Resources

- Universal Design and Accessibility
- Ten Steps Toward Universal Design of Online Courses
- Universal Design for Learning Guidelines
- Making content usable for people with cognitive and learning disabilities.
- Credit hours calculator
- Workload Estimator 2.0