

# 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. 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*

## 3. Support diverse language skills.

- Use familiar language. Define any unfamiliar terms, acronyms, or jargon.
- Write concisely. Avoid including unnecessary information.
- Favor simple sentence structures over complex sentence structures.
- Choose active voice over passive voice.
- Organize your written content (e.g., follow a logical order; break content into sections, subsections, and paragraphs).

- *UDL Checkpoint 2.1*

## 4. Provide scaffolds to support comprehension.

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

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

## 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.

- *QM Standard 3.4*
- *UDL Checkpoints 5.1, 7.1*

## 6. 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*

## 7. 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 if needed?
    - Examples: Alternative text for images; live captioning and recordings for web conference applications.

- *QM Standards 8.1-8.6*
- *UDL Checkpoint 4.2*

## 8. 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.

- *QM Standard 3.5*

- *UDL Checkpoint 5.3*

## 9. 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 of a chapter, or what portion of a video, should they read/watch?
  - Where can students find required resources/tools?
  - Where/how/when should they submit?
  - Who should submit (group projects)?
  - How many posts/replies for a discussion board, and when?
  - Are there requirements for length, naming conventions, formatting?
- 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*

## 10. 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 time required feasible and 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.

## Resources

- [Universal Design and Accessibility](#)
- [Ten Steps Toward Universal Design of Online Courses](#)
- [Universal Design for Learning Guidelines](#)
- [Federal plain language guidelines](#)
- [Making content usable for people with cognitive and learning disabilities.](#)
- [Credit hours calculator](#)
- [Workload Estimator 2.0](#)