

# UDL Guide | For Fully Online Learning Environments

The Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Guide | Online offers you some UDL elements to consider when designing, developing, and delivering curriculum for an online learning environment. This guide has been adapted from the online [UDL Course Assessment](#) and while you are still welcome to use the tool, at this time you may find it helpful to have a more streamlined resource solely focused on online learning environments.

Below you will find 30 questions, divided by the UDL networks. The goal of this guide is not necessarily to answer “yes” to every question, but to reflect on each of the UDL elements suggested and determine if you have included it in your course already. If you have not added the UDL element suggested, additional information and resources are offered to help you consider if the UDL element suggested is would be a good fit for your content, teaching style, learners, etc.

## Affective Networks – Multiple Means of Engagement

The following 12 questions and resources focus on how students are engaged in the learning process and what options could be provided to support self-regulation; sustaining effort and persistence; and recruiting interest.

1. Does the course encourage independent student responsibilities?

If you answered “no”, encouraging students to be independent with their learning responsibilities, and providing tools to do so, creates more informed and capable learners over time. Providing interim due dates, allowing a choice of assignment topics, and/or giving opportunities for reflection can help students regulate their learning.

2. Can students complete, at least some, course content at their own pace or in any order they wish?

If you answered “no”, when possible, having students complete some course requirements at their own pace provides flexibility, while allowing students to manage their own time. Weekly quizzes could be opened for an entire week (as opposed to a day or block) allowing students to

complete the quiz at a time that is ideal for them. Discussion posts or personal reflection assessments could be completed by mid-semester and semester end, instead of week by week. Providing options to students regarding the order they access content allows them to start with information they feel more comfortable with, then moving to information they find more challenging; essentially scaffolding their own learning based on their personal experience and prior knowledge. If possible, consider allowing students flexibility regarding the order in which they access and complete course work.

3. Is the course learning plan explicit and followed?

If you answered “no”, when learning plans are used and are explicit, students can better prepare for their semester and ensure work is completed on time. Having assessment information on the learning plan match the online course assessments area makes navigation easier for students. Work to ensure that the assignment information on the learning plan is reflected by using the same titles and verbiage in the Assignment tool in MyCanvas. For more information on how to develop a learning plan, check out the [Learning Plan webpage](#). If due dates need to change, inform students promptly using a variety of ways including updates to the learning plan, the online course announcements, emailing students and/or updating the course calendar.

**MyCanvas Tip:** If you update the due date in the Assignment tool, it will automatically update in the course calendar, and if you update a due date in the course calendar it will update in the assignment.

4. Do students have choice over how they submit, at least some, assignments?

If you answered “no”, when students are able to demonstrate their knowledge using a format of their choice, engagement is improved. Providing submission options for students allows them to display their knowledge of the assessment topic the best way they can, creating a more accurate opportunity to assess a learner’s knowledge. Consider providing submission options for at least some assessments. Options may include allowing learners to submit discussion posts as written text, a video, or an audio file; presentations completed using animations, voice over in PowerPoint, or recorded video. For more information regarding submission options review the [Submissions Options webpage](#).

5. Are course learning goals/outcomes clear?

If you answered “no”, clear and concise learning goals, based on the course learning outcomes, support students to understand the purpose and importance of course content. Consider informing students of the specific learning goals and outcomes for the course, as well as how and when the goals will be assessed. For support to develop clear learning outcomes, access the [How to Write Course Learning Outcomes webpage](#).

6. Do the assessments accurately evaluate the course learning goals and outcomes?

If you answered “no”, sometimes assessments evaluate factors that are outside of the learning goal; this can cause a problem if the assessment method impedes the student’s ability to meet the specific learning goal and allow faculty to accurately assess what the student knows. For example, if the learning goal is to examine an issue, having students write an essay that penalizes for spelling and grammar does not necessarily support the student to meet the learning goal in the best way for them. It also makes accurately assessing a student’s actual knowledge of the issue being examined challenging. Instead, consider offering assignment submission options and a rubric focused on the learning goal. In the same example a solution might be to allow students to examine the issue by writing an essay, creating a video, or developing an audio response. When assignment rubrics are based on the learning goals, the same rubric will be applicable to all submission options. For more assessment ideas, access the [How to Develop Assessment Tasks webpage](#).

7. Are students provided with assignment outlines that include explicit instructions, expectations, timelines and/or grading rubrics?

If you answered “no”, assignment instructions and an explicit grading rubric allows learners to plan their time accordingly to complete the work to the best of their ability. When assignment expectations are clear, grading can be more efficient and concise. More information regarding how to create rubrics can be found on the [Rubric Design webpage](#) or the [Rubrics and UDL webpage](#).

8. Are due dates clear?

If you answered “no”, clear due dates inform students of their responsibilities and supports on time submissions. Providing due dates in

multiple areas in the course will ensure learners know what work is due and when. Consider including clear due dates on the course learning plan, in the online calendar, on each assignment outline, and/or in the assignments section of the online course.

**MyCanvas Tip:** All due dates set using the Assessment tool in MyCanvas will auto populate and update in a number of other areas of the course (for example updating the an assessment in the tool will also update the course calendar and student to do lists).

9. Are students prompted when due dates are coming up?

If you answered “no”, prompting students using the online calendar and announcements, or emailing students about upcoming due dates supports students to complete work on time and reduces issues caused, for students and faculty, by late submissions. Promoting due dates also helps students to develop and improve their executive functioning skills for subsequent courses and semesters.

**MyCanvas Tip:** You can prepare reminder announcements in advance and use the date functions to have them posted automatically.

10. Are large course elements, such as modules/units or assessments, broken down into smaller sections?

If you answered “no”, providing additional time management assistance supports students to use their time more efficiently, especially with the competing demands many of our students are experiencing as they try to balance working, care giving, learning from home, etc. If modules/units are particularly large, consider breaking down content by week. If assessments are large, consider chunking them into smaller portions and providing interim due dates. For more information on how to provide interim due dates check out the [Interim Due Dates webpage](#).

11. Do students have opportunities to choose to work individually, in pairs or in groups?

If you answered “no”, if group work is not a course learning outcome, allowing students choice regarding if they work alone, in pairs or in groups for an assignment can relieve the anxiety group work creates for some learners, while creating greater options for collaboration for others. Consider making an individual assignment optional for a group/pairs or vice versa. Just be sure to be explicit about the assignment expectations (for example, the assignment and rubric will remain the same, capping

the size of a group, etc.) to ensure additional work is not created for faculty.

**MyCanvas Tip:** You can easily create groups in the People tool. Student enrollment into groups can be manual, automatic, or self-enrollment. When using Groups in MyCanvas students are automatically given a space for group collaborations.

12. Are instructions for assignments, quizzes, and tests presented in a way that is inclusive and supportive?

If you answered “no”, to support students to accurately account of what they know, they need to be able to understand the assessment. Having explicit and accessible assessment instructions supports learners to provide their best work for evaluation. When creating instructions consider paring information to just the most important, providing a checklist of what needs to be completed and in what order, including interim due dates to support student planning, and/or offering instructions in a number of locations to support increased and convenient access. In addition, ensuring instructions are accessible allows all students to access assignment information promptly. Instructions to create accessible documents can be found on the [Accessibility Tools and Resources webpage](#).

## Recognition Networks – Multiple Means of Representation

The following 8 questions and resources focus on how content is represented in the course and what options could be provided to students for comprehension; language, math and symbols; and perception.

13. Have students been informed, explicitly, of the UDL elements included in the course?

If you answered “no”, letting students know which UDL elements have been implemented in the course to improve inclusivity and accessibility can showcase how students will be supported in the learning environment and limit the need, and time required, to arrange individual supports. Please copy, paste, and modify the standard UDL statement found on the [UDL Implementation webpage](#). Your customized UDL statement can then be included on the course learning plan, in the online course information area, and/or identified in an informational video for students.

**MyCanvas Tip:** The CTL Course Template with UDL Elements for Mohawk and the Template Home Page, found in The Commons, includes a section for the UDL Statement with an exemplar, a Quick Access button, as well as a space provided for the statement on the Learning Plan template.

14. Is the course content provided in multiple ways?

If you answered “no”, offering multiple ways for students to learn the course content allows them to choose the resources that best supports their learning. Providing content in multiple ways can include articles, textbook readings, videos, podcasts, online activities, textbook exercises, etc. For more information on content options, check out the [Content Options webpage](#). If you need assistance finding additional resources contact one of [Mohawk College’s librarians](#).

**MyCanvas Tip:** The CTL Course Template with UDL Elements for Mohawk has two layout options that both include space for a variety of resources, with exemplars, to support your course development and delivery. The course template can be found in The Commons.

15. Do the learning opportunities and assignments in this course use students’ prior knowledge?

If you answered “no”, activating prior knowledge can improve retention. Providing opportunities to use prior knowledge could include offering a reflective discussion post for each module, key concept or new skill; allowing students to choose assignment topics (possibly from a predetermined list of topics); and/or encouraging discussions online that promote students incorporating previous experience with new course material.

**MyCanvas Tip:** You can use the Discussions tool to promote and to support online discussions and communication within your course. With MyCanvas you can allow students to create and start their own discussions or put students into groups; providing them with an online space for further collaboration.

16. Are new terms, symbols and/or acronyms explained?

If you answered “no”, offering a legend of commonly used terms, acronyms, and/or symbols provides a time saving reference for students. Placing the legend prominently and drawing attention to it will support use. For more information on options to create a legend, check out the [Language and Symbol Options webpage](#).

**MyCanvas Tip:** You can create a page that lists any new terms, symbols or acronyms as a quick reference for students.

17. Are there links throughout the course materials that provide easy access to course activities, content, and assessments?

If you answered “no”, providing explicit links to resources, course materials already housed in the online course, learning activities, or assessment information allows learners quick and easy access to course content, as well as access to that content from multiple locations in the course. Consider linking resources wherever possible. When hyperlinking, use the title of the reference as the link (for an example look at the links in this tool). If faculty require assistance to link resources from one part of a course to another they can contact their designated [Educational Technology Specialist](#).

18. Are the course materials and resources accessible?

If you answered “no”, proactively creating accessible resources supports a wide range of learners, including those with disabilities and saves faculty and students time during the semester. Detailed resources to support the development of accessible content can be found on the [Accessibility Tools and Resources webpage](#). In addition, including content in more than one format can support improved accessibility for all learners. For more information review the [Content Options webpage](#).

19. Does the course have interactive learning activities online?

If you answered “no”, providing interactive activities within a course creates an opportunity for students to practice skills and solidify concepts, while increasing engagement with the course content. The [Designing Activities/Anatomy of an Activity webpage](#) offers information to support the development of learning activities.

**MyCanvas Tip:** Online activities such as PollEverywhere, Padlets, knowledge check quizzes, discussions, etc. can be embedded into the online course to reinforce information and more actively engage students with course content. Consider exploring the use of embedded H5P for additional online activities.

20. Are learning materials and presentations explicit and uncluttered?

If you answered “no”, course materials and presentations that are explicit and uncluttered reduce distractions for learners and allow for more focus

on the key content. Ideally, all course presentations will have an agenda to ensure students know what to expect, tie the content to the course learning outcomes, have clear and accessible content, and provide next steps including additional resources (if any). For more information on developing accessible course materials and presentations review the [Creating Accessible Documents and Alternate Formats webpage](#) or contact Accessible Learning Services.

## Strategic Networks – Multiple Means of Action and Expression

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The following 10 questions and resources focus on how learning is facilitated in the course and what options could be provided to students for executive functions; expression and communication; and physical action.

21. Have course navigation instructions been provided for students?

If you answered “no”, navigation instructions provide learners with explicit information regarding how to proceed through the course. Navigation instructions also support students to access important information quickly and easily. For more information regarding how to develop course navigation instructions, check out the [Course Navigation Instructions webpage](#).

**MyCanvas Tip:** The CTL Course Template with UDL Elements for Mohawk, found in The Commons, has a designated location and instructions to make including course navigation instructions more convenient.

22. Has note taking support been provided for students?

If you answered “no”, providing note taking support prior to delivery of content encourages students to prepare for each lesson, allows students to reflect on content, and provides accurate study aides. In addition, note taking is one of the most common disability related accommodations. Consider posting lecture notes or PowerPoint slides to the online course site in advance of class, offering a transcript of any videos you create, providing questions for students to answer during lectures (delivered synchronously or asynchronously), and/or employing crowdsourcing of lecture notes. A variety of UDL options for note taking support can be found on the [Note Taking Support webpage](#).



**MyCanvas Tip:** The [Note Taking Support webpage](#) offers detailed instructions on how to configure your course settings to support crowdsourcing lecture notes if you are offering asynchronous or synchronous lectures.

23. Are tools provided to guide goal setting and expectations?

If you answered “no”, helping students to set course goals and expectations supports more efficient and better quality work. Providing an overview for each week, module, or assignment gives students direction regarding the time required for course work and allows them to plan accordingly. When large assignments are administered, including interim due dates offers completion goals for the learner, as well as a better sense of the assignment workload. To learn more about how to provide interim due dates, check out the [Interim Due Dates webpage](#).

**MyCanvas Tip:** Using Due Dates in MyCanvas will also populate the course calendar and student to-do lists, supporting students to regulate their workload and meet course expectations.

24. Does the course include a variety of assessment methods?

If you answered “no”, including a variety of assessment methods within a course allows learners to more accurately demonstrate their knowledge. Assessment methods may include written assignments, projects, video or audio presentations, discussions, etc. Consider including three or more assessment methods within the course. For support to create authentic assessment options, check out [How to Develop Assessment Tasks webpage](#).

25. Can students demonstrate their knowledge in multiple ways within the assessment methods offered?

If you answered “no”, providing options regarding assessments allows students to demonstrate their knowledge in the best way they can, while supporting faculty to more accurately assess what a student knows. Faculty can provide students with options by allowing students to choose assignment topics (this can be from a defined list if needed), allowing students to work in groups or individually, as well as offering options for how assignments are submitted. For example, faculty might request that discussion posts are completed by writing 250 words, uploading a 2 minute audio file, or providing a link to a 2 minute video. For more information, check out the [Submission Options webpage](#).

26. Do students have multiple ways to communicate with you and classmates?

If you answered “no”, a variety of communication options ensures that all learners can effectively communicate with their faculty, and each other. Consider providing students with a phone number, email address, and designated office hours to support communication with you on the course homepage. Consider setting up a general discussion or group area for students to communicate, share and/or collaborate within the online learning environment.

**MyCanvas Tip:** The CTL Course Template with UDL Elements for Mohawk, as well as the Template Home Page, has a designated section to highlight the communication options of the course. Once you determine how you would like students to connect with you outside of class, you can fill in the indicated sections and delete what you do not need. Both of these templates can be found in The Commons.

27. Are students encouraged to communicate with faculty and classmates within the course?

If you answered “no”, encouraging communication in a variety of forms helps to create a strong learning community. Consider using a general discussion area, implementing the online collaboration tools, as well as explicitly stating when and how students can connect with you and each other. If you have questions regarding online course communication tools and options, connect with the [Educational Technology Specialist](#) for your area.

**MyCanvas Tip:** Setting up a course Question & Answer section in the Discussion area can encourage students to problem solve and learn from each other. The CTL Course Template with UDL Elements for Mohawk includes this section already, with a Quick Link on the course home page to provide easier access. This template is available for import in The Commons.

28. Do assessments build on each other and allow for multiple opportunities for students to show their knowledge?

If you answered “no”, consider developing assessments that include smaller assignments that allow learners to practice and master individual skills, building to a final assignment that incorporates the skills learned throughout the course. This scaffolding approach allows both faculty and

students to identify learning challenges early, so that targeted learning supports can be offered prior to higher stakes assessments.

29. Are online quizzes/tests/exams untimed, or have had additional time proactively added?

If you answered “no”, providing additional time on quizzes/tests/exams allows all students to read questions over more carefully, evaluate their answers more thoroughly, complete the assessment with less anxiety related to time, and can provide a better reflection of their knowledge. Furthermore, additional time for testing is the most commonly used disability related accommodation. When appropriate, applying UDL and proactively including additional time may reduce or eliminate the need for individualized accommodations. More information about including additional time for quizzes/tests/exams and a standard statement to inform learners that additional time has proactively been added, can be found on the [Additional Time for Quizzes/Tests/Exams webpage](#).

30. Are students able to access course content, activities, and assessments from multiple areas of the online course?

If you answered “no”, providing multiple avenues for students to access content, activities, and assessments makes it less likely that students will miss important information. Consider including assessment information in the week it is assigned and/or due, in a separate assignment module, as well as linked on the learning plan. Readings can be included in the week they are meant to be read, as well as linked on the course learning plan. General course information can be provided on the course outline, learning plan, and on the course home page.

**MyCanvas Tip:** The CTL Course Template with UDL Elements for Mohawk includes a number of the access points indicated above already built in to make implementation more convenient. You can find the template in The Commons.

## Thank You

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Thank you again for your interest in implementing UDL.

If you would like additional UDL information, you can:

- Attend professional development opportunities through the Centre for Teaching & Learning.

- Review the [Universal Design for Learning webpages](#), including [implementation](#) and [resources](#).
- Contact Darla Benton Kearney, UDL Curriculum Consultant, at [darla.benton@mohawkcollege.ca](mailto:darla.benton@mohawkcollege.ca) or 905-575-1212 extension 3688.

If you have questions or comments regarding UDL, or the UDL Guide | Online, please connect with Darla Benton Kearney using the contact information above.