Universal Instructional Design for Learning

One Size Does Not Fit All

Note that the term "universal" does not imply that one size fits all. It's just the opposite! Think of universal access to your workshops not a universal workshop design.

Universal Instructional Design for Learning is a framework for designing training that enables all individuals to gain knowledge, skills, and enthusiasm for learning. It provides rich supports for learning and reduces barriers to learning while maintaining high achievement standards for all. (Adapted from: http://www.cast.org/)

Principles of Universal Instructional Design

Create a welcoming classroom climate

Setting a welcoming tone up front allows participants an opportunity to tell you what their needs are. Here are some ways to set a welcoming tone:

- Establish ground rules. A good way to create ground rules is to elicit them from and develop them with the class.
- Avoid singling out individuals. If you need to talk with a participant, for example, about alternate testing arrangements, do it in private.
- Recognize personal experience. Know that the participant with any specific situation is usually the one who best understands it and how it may impact their learning.
- Attend to the physical needs of all participants. Telling them where the bathrooms are and allowing occasional breaks in longer classes lets them know that you have an interest in their comfort.
- Share your own experiences.
- Honour diversity and cultural differences.
- Develop an inclusive workshop design statement and highlight it verbally the first day of class. This is a powerful way to communicate to participants that the learning experience is intended to be accessible to *all* participants..

Determine the essential outcomes of the course

If you identify the essential outcomes that you can expect *all* participants in your workshop to demonstrate, you can fairly evaluate all participants and not have to worry about "watering down" the workshop.

Essential **outcomes** (including skills, knowledge, and attitudes) that all participants must demonstrate **with or without using accommodations** must be evaluated in a non-discriminatory manner. In other words, some might use accommodations and some might not, but *all* participants must achieve the same outcomes. Process is important, of course, but not necessarily essential. Focusing on your workshop outcomes will help you to define your essential components.

The difference between essential and nonessential workshop components is similar to the difference between "essential" and "preferred" skills commonly listed in job descriptions. As an employer, you may want to see *both* sets of skills, but only the essential skills are an absolute requirement of employment. Similarly, in your workshops, you can articulate essential outcomes that all participants must demonstrate in order to successfully complete the workshop, as well as preferred outcomes you *hope* participants will be able to demonstrate.

Finally, consider allowing some flexibility in getting to the outcomes. For example, an individual who has the use of only one hand may still give a patient an injection, although they may need to use different procedures to achieve this outcome. Or, an individual with a panic disorder may be unable to give a class presentation but may give the presentation privately to the trainer. The accommodation in this example is the private nature of the presentation; the essential component, the presentation, remains.

Provide clear expectations and feedback

Having expectations clearly laid out in the workshop and providing participants with regular feedback on their performance are just two examples of ways to provide clear expectations and feedback.

Explore ways to incorporate natural supports for learning

Natural supports are non-accommodation-based strategies that are built into a workshop. They benefit all participants. For example, study guides, discussion groups, and practice tests may benefit all participants, not just those with challenges. More examples of natural supports that support all students:

- Electronic archives of lecture notes can be created to make participation by participants with visual disabilities, hearing impairments, sick children, or for those who cannot take time off work to attend more fully possible.
- Instructions for important assignments can be included in the print outline, explained orally, and reinforced individually to ensure that the participant's strongest sensory mode is addressed.
- Key course concepts can be taught by lecture, discussion, reading, and group work, to accommodate a range of learning styles.
- Office hours can be held face-to-face, as is traditional, but also through e-mail, phone, or real-time online chat.

Use varied instructional methods

Providing different ways to access material creates an accessible environment for all participants. Some thrive in lectures; others obtain information more effectively from text; while still others learn best through visual media such as diagrams, illustrations, charts, or videos.
What instructional strategies or methods are available to you? (Remember that what is possible is determined by such factors as class size, available technology, this workshop's place in a sequence of courses, etc.)

In addition to the teaching strategies included in Chapter 3, here are some proven instructional strategies you might also consider:

- PowerPoint presentation of key ideas
- Webinars
- active lab in combination with demonstration or virtual lab
- Web supports such as archived lecture notes
- discussion (face-to-face and technology mediated)
- group editing
- group problem-solving.

Provide a variety of ways for students to demonstrate knowledge

Just as no single mode of presentation suits all participants, neither does one single mode for demonstrating knowledge. Providing participants with choices in demonstration of knowledge, such as allowing them to choose between writing a paper, presenting a speech, or conducting a multimedia project allows them to show what they know in a manner that works for them and does not conflict with your workshop's essential components.

Training that employs *Universal Instructional Design* will logically look for ways to use multiple, varied, and broadly accessible approaches to testing and other modes of assessing learning.

Here are some ideas to get you thinking about your methods of testing or evaluation:

- What modes of testing or evaluation do you prefer? In which workshops? Why?
- What modes of testing do others in your field employ? Under what conditions would you consider employing them?
- What modes of testing or evaluation would you employ under ideal conditions?
- How do you and your colleagues determine the most appropriate modes of testing or evaluation in your field?

Use technology to enhance learning opportunities

Technology may be the key to increasing flexibility in your workshops. Putting materials on-line, arranging for workshop list-serves, and selecting software that is compatible with screen readers may assist the participants in accessing materials in their own time and in a manner that is accessible to them. The key is not to exclude students by using technology that is inaccessible.

Encourage trainer-participant contact

Trainer-participant contact is one of the strongest indicators for student retention. Trainer involvement with participants and active self-directed learning by workshop participants contribute highly to measurable learner success.

Source: Center for Applied Special Technology (www.cast.org).