

This checklist was developed with the assistance of generative AI. I designed the prompts and framework, and the AI drafted the checklist content based on my direction and a compilation of UDL and language-learning research. I reviewed, edited, and verified all content for accuracy.

Universal Design for Learning in the College Foreign-Language Classroom Practical Best Practices for Supporting Learner Variability

The goal of UDL is not to lower language-learning standards. It is to reduce unnecessary barriers so that students can access instruction, practice skills, and demonstrate what they know while maintaining the essential course and language-learning outcomes.

BEFORE CLASS: Design for Access

✓ Make course expectations predictable

- Post weekly learning objectives and a consistent weekly course structure.
- Provide assignment directions in **writing as well as orally**.
- Break complex assignments into smaller, clearly numbered steps.
- Provide examples or models of successful work.

✓ Make materials accessible

- Provide accessible digital documents rather than scanned PDFs.
- Use headings, clear formatting, sufficient contrast, and descriptive links.
- Avoid relying on color alone to convey meaning.
- When appropriate, provide **text + audio + visual supports**.

✓ Prepare students for new vocabulary

Consider providing:

- Written vocabulary
- Pronunciation/audio
- Images or contextual examples
- Sample sentences
- Opportunities for low-stakes practice before assessment

DURING INSTRUCTION: Provide Multiple Ways to Learn

✓ Use multiple means of representation

Present important information through combinations of:

- Instructor explanation
- Written directions
- Visual examples
- Demonstrations
- Audio/video
- Models of completed work

✓ Build in processing time

Avoid making **rapid processing** an unintended requirement unless it is part of the learning objective.

For listening activities, consider:

1. First listen: students hear the material without interruption.
2. Second listen: students may replay or work with key vocabulary.

3. Follow-up: students demonstrate comprehension.

✓ **Scaffold language production**

Move students through:

Instructor model → Guided practice → Partner/small-group practice → Independent practice → Assessment

Provide sentence starters, vocabulary banks, conversation prompts, or graphic organizers when appropriate—and gradually remove scaffolds as students gain proficiency.

SPEAKING & LISTENING: Keep the Objective, Vary the Path

If the objective is **oral language proficiency**, consider multiple ways for students to demonstrate it:

- Individual conversation with the instructor
- Partner practice
- Small-group conversation
- Recorded oral response
- Recorded dialogue
- Virtual conversation

Ask: Is public speaking actually the learning outcome, or is it simply the traditional way the outcome has been assessed?

When spontaneous interpersonal communication is itself an essential learning outcome, preserve that component while considering how unnecessary barriers can be reduced.

READING & WRITING: Support the Process

For reading

- Provide accessible digital text.
- Allow students to enlarge text and use assistive technology.
- Consider text + audio for appropriate activities.
- Pre-teach essential vocabulary.
- Identify the specific reading skill being assessed.

For writing

- Provide models and exemplars.
- Use graphic organizers or outlines.
- Allow drafting and revision.
- Break larger assignments into stages.
- Provide targeted feedback rather than correcting every error when that is not the instructional objective.

ASSESSMENT: Measure the Intended Skill

Before an assessment, ask:

“What exactly am I trying to measure?”

Then ask:

“Is this feature of the assignment necessary to measuring that skill?”

For example:

Learning objective: Demonstrate understanding of spoken French.

Potential unintended barrier: Students hear a passage once, must immediately write their responses, and receive no opportunity to replay it.

UDL approach: Clarify directions, preview relevant vocabulary, provide an appropriate opportunity for replay, and separate listening comprehension from unnecessary demands on memory or processing speed.

Important: UDL does not replace individualized accommodations. A student may still require accommodations such as extended testing time, a distraction-reduced environment, or assistive technology.

A Simple Faculty Checklist

Before introducing a lesson, assignment, or exam, ask:

- ☐ Are the learning objectives clear?
- ☐ Are directions available in writing?
- ☐ Have I separated the **essential language skill** from unnecessary barriers?
- ☐ Do students have more than one way to access important information?
- ☐ Have I provided opportunities to practice before grading?
- ☐ Have I provided models, examples, or scaffolds when appropriate?
- ☐ Does the assessment measure the intended language skill rather than speed, memory, organization, or another unrelated ability?
- ☐ Are materials and technology accessible?
- ☐ Am I maintaining the same essential academic and language-learning expectations for all students?

The UDL Mindset

Don't ask:

"How can I make an exception for this student?"

Ask:

"How can I design this learning experience so that predictable differences among learners do not create unnecessary barriers?"

UDL + individualized accommodations = a more accessible and equitable college language classroom.

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