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USW Universal Design for Learning

For asynchronous content and general use of the virtual learning environment.

“UDL is a framework to guide the design of learning environments that are accessible and challenging for all. When environments are intentionally designed to reduce barriers, all learners can engage in rigorous, meaningful learning.” (CAST, 2021)

These UDL guides have been adapted by the CELT team and Disability Service to outline how the principles of universal design for learning (UDL) can be applied in different teaching and learning situations in order to help make learning accessible to as many students as possible.

There are 3 guides, this guide focusses on asynchronous learning situations and the design of your Blackboard module/course organisation. The two other guides cover text based resources, and for synchronous activities.

The guides do not set out how to design the learning activities/resources themselves. You should still refer to DEAL and other USW guidance and policies for more information about requirements for teaching, learning and assessment.

All university employees have legal responsibilities around different areas of accessibility and inclusion. The following information is provided for guidance only. More detailed information and guides for inclusive practice can be found on the following sites:

* CAST – [Learn more about the UDL framework.](https://www.cast.org/impact/universal-design-for-learning-udl)
* CELT - [Inclusive practice webpage](https://celt.southwales.ac.uk/developing/inclusive-practice/).
* CELT - [Accessibility and technology webpage](https://celt.southwales.ac.uk/tel/inclusive-tech/).
* [Disability Service – Inclusive practice guidance for staff](https://universityofsouthwales.sharepoint.com/sites/Student_Services/SitePages/en-GB/disability-support.aspx) (internal only).
* [Disability Service website](https://disability.southwales.ac.uk/).
* [USW DEAL site](https://universityofsouthwales.sharepoint.com/sites/USWDEAL/SitePages/en-GB/Learning-Teaching-and-Quality.aspx).
* [UK Accessibility Regulations](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/accessibility-requirements-for-public-sector-websites-and-apps#:~:text=The%20accessibility%20regulations%20came%20into,accessibility%20statement%20on%20your%20website.).
* [DEAL and the UK Accessibility Regulations](https://southwales.cloud.panopto.eu/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=f84957f5-c688-4f33-90e4-ac0200ec9e6f) [video 6m52s].
* [USW Strategic Equality Plan](https://hr.southwales.ac.uk/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/strategic-equality-plan/).
* [USW Module/Course Baseline Expectations](https://universityofsouthwales.sharepoint.com/sites/USWDEAL/Shared%20Documents/Forms/AllItems.aspx?id=%2Fsites%2FUSWDEAL%2FShared%20Documents%2FVirtual%5FLearning%5FEnvironment%5FCourse%5FOrganisation%5F%5FModules2020%2Epdf&parent=%2Fsites%2FUSWDEAL%2FShared%20Documents).

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# Planning for consistency across all course modules in Blackboard:

* Create a standard module layout across all the modules in a course to ensure students know where to find specific material (i.e., navigation menu, folder structure, where videos are put).
* Be consistent in use of language across a course e.g., all modules use the same name for folder where assignment submissions and information are located.
* Ensure all modules/course organisations meet the [USW Module/Course Baseline Expectations](http://celt.southwales.ac.uk/policy).

# Colour considerations when using Blackboard:

* Do not change the colours of the Blackboard layout (i.e., buttons/menus/background). Users can alter their own scheme if needed but colourful backgrounds can make reading and navigation difficult.
* Use minimal amounts of different coloured text. Lime green, red, yellow, and pale colours are particularly hard to read on screen.

# Organising your Blackboard modules for ease of use:

* Provide clear links in the navigation menu to key tools that will be used in the module.
* Ensure learning materials are organised into folders which are labelled appropriately and clearly to avoid confusion for students. This could be by week/topic/theme as appropriate but try to be consistent across modules of a course.
* Embed videos (i.e., recordings of seminar, asynchronous content) where possible instead of just using URLs.
* Provide some context for any files, videos, and links to which you are directing students. This can be as simple as a descriptive wording for hyperlinked text (e.g., recording of week 2 lecture) or it may be appropriate to provide additional information about whether an item is required or additional reading/viewing, concepts to consider, links to previous learning, etc.
  + See UDL guide for text items for more information on descriptive URLs.
* Provide clear information about the times/dates/locations for any synchronous sessions. If appropriate include links to the relevant tool or to maps/findaroom service.

# Checking that your files and resources are accessible:

* Check and improve the accessibility of your course materials using Blackboard Ally.
* Provide opportunities for, and invite, general feedback on any accessibility needs around the VLE, videos, captions, files, etc.

# Considerations when designing asynchronous learning activities:

## Clear communication

* Ensure that all learners can access the communication channels to be used. Wherever possible the university’s tools should be used to facilitate any interactive elements/group work (collaborate, teams, blackboard discussion forums, etc). Any alternatives should be checked with a learning technologist first and must be accessible and acceptable for all learners.
* Set clear expectations about the level of language to be used (i.e., formal academic, informal, social) and any specific behaviour requirements (i.e., replying via comments, editing other entries, etc).
* Offer clear tasks (specify student roles) and outcomes. This can help students understand when and why to make a contribution.

## Signposting of information

* When using interactive tools such as blogs, forums, wikis, etc, make sure to provide links to both the tool itself (consider adding frequently used tools to the module navigation menu) and guides on how to use.
* Provide information on what to do in case of problems such as what to do if group work goes wrong outside the classroom, how/where to ask for help or more information.

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