

UDL FOCUS AREAS



USING THIS TOOL FOR LEARNING WALKS

This tool supports instructional teams and leaders in conducting brief, focused, non-disruptive observations to reflect on the implementation of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). It is designed to promote shared learning and reflection, not teacher evaluation.



Select Focus

Before the learning walks, review the full UDL “look-fors” list. Choose 1–2 key focus areas aligned to current site goals. Communicate the focus to all observers for alignment.



Collect Evidence

Take low-inference notes based solely on what you see and hear. Use the “Tips for Observers” in the tool to help guide your observations.



Talk with Students (optional)

The “Questions for Learners” are optional. If student interviews fit your culture, ask one or two of the questions for each focus area to capture student voice. Otherwise, teachers can use them later for reflection, formative checks, or self-assessment.



Debrief and Plan

Immediately after the walk, gather while the details are still fresh and highlight the bright spots. Notice any patterns that appeared in more than one class, and name opportunities for growth and future professional development. Agree on one action to celebrate what is working and another to extend practice.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Firm grade-level learning objectives are visible to students, guide instruction, clarify success criteria, and empower ownership of learning.

Emerging (1)	Proficient (2)	Shifting to Student-Led (3)
- Learning objectives are visible but may not yet fully align to grade-level standards. - Connections to instruction, activities, and success criteria are limited or unclear.	Learning objectives are visible, clearly aligned to grade-level standards, consistently referenced throughout instruction, and explicitly connected to activities, materials, assessments, and success criteria.	- Teachers and students engage and co-create the learning goal by actively discussing it, defining and annotating any unknown vocabulary into student-friendly language and discussing the “why” of learning. - Students set authentic, personal goals tied to grade-level objectives, choose their own learning pathways, and use clear success criteria to self-assess and track their progress toward mastery.
Tips for Observers - Confirm alignment of posted objectives to grade-level standards. - Listen for teachers connecting activities to objectives. - Listen for an active discussion of the learning goal. - Listen for teachers asking students to self-assess their learning throughout the lesson.		
Questions for learners <i>What are you learning today?</i> <i>How will you know you've mastered it?</i> <i>What does success look like for you in this lesson?</i> <i>Do you have a personal goal for this lesson? If so, what is it? Why did you create it? What do you need to do to achieve it?</i>		

Teacher Name: _____

Grade/Subject: _____

Observer Name: _____

Date of Observation: _____

Observer Rating

Observer Notes (Glows & Grows)

CLASSROOM CULTURE AND BELONGING

The learning environment and lesson design affirm the identity of all students and foster a sense of belonging.

Emerging (1)	Proficient (2)	Shifting to Student-Led (3)
- The teacher engages warmly with students during interactions and intermittently monitors student-to-student interactions. - Positive relationships are modeled but inconsistently reinforced. - Instruction occasionally acknowledges diverse backgrounds or experiences but is not consistently integrated into learning activities.	- The teacher consistently models respectful and inclusive language and behavior during lessons, collaborative work, and transitions. - Classroom expectations are posted visibly, referred to during class, and used for positive redirection and praise. The teacher uses real-time examples to reinforce these expectations and engages students in reflecting on how their actions align with the class norms. - Instruction visibly incorporates prompts, examples, materials, or discussions that affirm diverse backgrounds, cultures, languages, and identities.	- The teacher and all students consistently model respectful and inclusive language and behavior during lessons, collaborative work, and transitions in all interactions. Students initiate and sustain positive, supportive interactions without teacher prompting. - Students actively bring their lived experiences, cultures, and identities into the learning process, enriching discussions, examples, and collective understanding. - Students build knowledge together — expanding on ideas, sharing diverse experiences, asking each other questions, and valuing different perspectives.

Tips for Observers

- Look for teacher modeling and reinforcement of respectful, inclusive communication.
- Observe student-to-student interactions: Are students listening, inviting others to share, and building on each other's ideas?
- Listen for instructional references or prompts affirming students' backgrounds, experiences, or identities.

Questions for learners

- What helps you feel welcome here?*
- Do you need anything else to make you feel welcome here?*
- How do students include and support each other in this class?*

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Observer Notes (Glows & Grows)

EMOTIONAL LITERACY

The learning environment and lesson design support students' self-awareness, self-regulation, and ability to navigate learning with confidence and agency.

Emerging (1)	Proficient (2)	Shifting to Student-Led (3)
- Classroom routines and learning activities introduce strategies that promote emotional awareness and regulation (e.g., opportunities to reset focus, encouragement of self-monitoring, supportive check-ins). - The teacher occasionally prompts students to refocus, reset, or adjust strategies during learning.	- The teacher consistently embeds strategies that support students in recognizing and managing their emotional states (e.g., offering choices for task pacing, encouraging breaks, prompting self-advocacy for learning needs). - Students use classroom tools or routines (e.g., brain breaks, calming corners, pacing choices) to strengthen their focus, perseverance, and well-being.	- Students independently monitor their emotional needs and use strategies to stay focused and engaged. - Students advocate for adjustments when needed (e.g., requesting breaks, adjusting tasks, using self-monitoring tools). - Students actively support peers by encouraging persistence, suggesting strategies, and reinforcing a positive, collaborative learning environment.

Tips for Observers

- Look for routines or classroom norms that normalize self-monitoring and emotional management (e.g., flexible seating, calming corner, learning strategy selection).
- Listen for teacher and student language that acknowledges emotional needs as part of the learning process (e.g., "If you feel stuck, what is another strategy you might try?")
- Observe whether students adjust their own strategies, request support, or take initiative without teacher prompting.

Questions for learners

- What strategies help you stay focused when learning gets challenging?*
- What choices can you make if you're feeling frustrated or overwhelmed?*

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COLLABORATION & COLLECTIVE LEARNING

The learning environment promotes purposeful collaboration that grows from teacher-guided exchanges to student-driven inquiry and synthesis (Depth of Knowledge (DOK) 1 → 4).

Emerging (1)	Proficient (2)	Shifting to Student-Led (3)
- Students are provided with occasional opportunities to work together (e.g., cooperative groups, think-pair-share), although tasks are often focused on recall or basic comprehension (DOK 1). - Collaboration is encouraged, but not consistently structured or supported with clear expectations.	- Collaborative opportunities are intentionally structured using scaffolds, such as sentence stems, group norms, and protocols, to move learners toward explanatory "how/why" thinking (DOK 2). - Students work with diverse partners and are supported in building collaborative skills.	- Students work with diverse partners to build collaborative skills and, with minimal teacher prompting, independently organize groups, establish shared norms, and apply collaborative structures to tackle multi-step analysis and reasoning (DOK 3). - During discussions and collaborations, students actively listen, question, and integrate diverse cultural, social, and personal perspectives to co-create authentic products or solutions that require synthesis and transfer (DOK 4).
Tips for Observers - Look for group norms, roles, sentence stems, or structured protocols during collaborative activities. - Observe how students interact: Are they listening, building on ideas, respectfully disagreeing, solving problems together?		
Questions for learners <i>How do you and your group make sure everyone is included?</i> <i>What strategies do you use when your group has different ideas?</i>		

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SELF-REFLECTION

The learning environment and lesson design provide opportunities for students to reflect on their choices, their progress, and their learning outcomes.

Emerging (1)	Proficient (2)	Shifting to Student-Led (3)
- Students are occasionally prompted to reflect on their work or choices, but structures and tools to support reflection are limited. - Reflection tends to be general and not clearly connected to learning goals or success criteria.	- Students regularly engage in structured self-reflection using tools such as rubrics, exemplars, goal-setting prompts, or progress trackers. - Reflection is clearly connected to learning objectives and success criteria, and students use feedback from teachers or peers to assess their progress and refine their strategies.	- Students independently engage in meaningful self-reflection. They use tools to assess their progress, incorporate feedback from teachers and peers, connect reflections to learning goals, and set or adjust personal strategies for improvement. - Reflection extends to analyzing academic, behavioral, and personal growth over time.
Tips for Observers - Look for the use of rubrics, checklists, or prompts that support structured self-reflection. - Listen for students articulating how they made choices, responded to feedback, or what they would do differently based on their progress toward the learning goal.		
Questions for learners <i>How do you know how well you're doing?</i> <i>What are you going to work on next? Why?</i> <i>What strategies did you use today? Did they work? Why or why not? If not, what other strategies could be tried?</i>		

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Observer Notes (Glows & Grows)

FLEXIBLE METHODS AND MATERIALS

The learning environment and lesson design provide students with flexible options for accessing information and processing ideas to support meaningful learning.

Emerging (1)	Proficient (2)	Shifting to Student-Led (3)
- Students are occasionally offered supports or options for how they access content or engage with learning activities (e.g., choice of texts, text-to-speech, closed captions, translation tools) - Opportunities to personalize learning are limited or mainly teacher-directed.	- Students are regularly provided with flexible pathways for accessing information (e.g., varied text types, listen/read options, manipulatives, and accessible technology tools) and for processing and making meaning of new concepts. - Students are encouraged to select approaches, tools, and resources that support their learning needs, preferences, and strategies.	- Students independently select, combine, and adapt methods, materials, and accessible technology tools such as manipulatives, audio supports, or digital organizers to access and process new learning. - Students demonstrate ownership over how they engage with instruction through self-differentiated learning, choosing flexible strategies and materials that best support their understanding, growth, and engagement.

Tips for Observers

- Observe the variety of methods and materials offered to support different ways of accessing and processing learning.
- Look for classroom structures that allow students to choose tools or strategies for engaging with new content.

Questions for learners

- What options do you have for how you engage with today's lesson?*
- How did those help you learn?*
- How do you decide what strategies help you learn best?*
- What worked for you today? Didn't work? Why?*
- What support do you need to further your learning?*

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FLEXIBLE ASSESSMENTS

The learning environment and lesson design provide flexible, accessible pathways for students to demonstrate their learning through formative or summative assessments, with clear alignment to grade-level content and method standards. Flexibility in assessment maintains construct relevance and upholds rigorous expectations.

Emerging (1)	Proficient (2)	Shifting to Student-Led (3)
- Students complete assessments, but options for how they demonstrate learning are limited. - Assessment tasks may not align with the knowledge or skills required by the standard. - Formative assessments, if present, are inconsistently used to guide feedback or to group students for targeted support.	- Assessment tasks are clearly aligned with grade-level content and method standards and are accompanied by clear rubrics or checklists that outline success criteria. - Students are provided flexible, construct-relevant options for demonstrating understanding. Flexibility reflects the type of standard: content standards allow choice in products, while method standards scaffold the process (e.g., typing vs. writing an argument). - Teachers use formative assessments to provide actionable feedback, adjust instruction in real-time, and flexibly group students for targeted support.	- Students help co-design or select assessment formats and use the same clear, standards-aligned rubrics or checklists to self-evaluate their work. - Students actively use formative feedback to self-assess and monitor their progress toward standards (i.e., rubrics, charts, portfolios), refine their learning strategies, and set personal goals for growth as they demonstrate knowledge and skills. - Teachers and students analyze formative assessments together to identify needs and generate feedback. Teachers respond with flexible small-group instruction to meet those needs.

Tips for Observers

- Review assessment tasks to ensure clear alignment with grade-level standards (both content and method).
- Observe whether students are offered or create flexible, construct-relevant options for demonstrating learning.
- Listen to how teachers use formative data to adjust instruction, provide feedback, and group students for targeted support or reteaching.

Questions for learners

- What choices do you have for showing what you know?*
- How do you know if you're making progress?*

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STUDENT VOICE

Students are active participants in the learning environment, sharing their thinking, questions, feedback, and ideas during the lesson.

Emerging (1)	Proficient (2)	Shifting to Student-Led (3)
- Student talk is primarily limited to answering teacher-posed questions. - Most of the talk and decision-making during the lesson is teacher-driven. - Students are not yet invited to share how the learning is going for them or reflect on what they're learning, which limits opportunities for agency and self-awareness.	- Student talk outweighs teacher talk. - Students regularly share their thinking, explain what they are learning, and ask questions during the lesson. - Students are invited to reflect aloud on their progress and suggest strategies or approaches that support their learning.	- Students drive much of the learning conversation by posing questions, explaining strategies, suggesting adjustments, and giving feedback about what is supporting or hindering their progress. - Students' contributions shape the flow of the learning experience in real time.

Tips for Observers

- Listen for the ratio of student-to-teacher talk — students should be doing much of the thinking aloud.
- Listen for students explaining what they are learning, why it matters, and how they are progressing.
- Observe whether students are making suggestions about strategies, pacing, or support.

Questions for learners

- If you needed something different to help you learn in this class, how would you let the teacher know?*
- What ideas or feedback have you shared that helped improve the way you learn in this class?*

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