

# Identify barriers and supports

A suggestion for implementing the strategy  
'Design considerations in NCEA assessments'  
from the Guide: [Universal Design for Learning](#)

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## **Includes:**

- Barriers that create unproductive struggle
- What gets in the way for ākonga?
- Identify and minimise barriers in your subject
- Recognising barriers in our learning design
- Useful resources

Inclusive Education

From

Guide: [Universal Design for Learning](#)

Strategy: [Design considerations in NCEA assessments](#)

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Date

09 September 2025

Link

[inclusive.tki.org.nz/guides/universal-design-for-learning/identify-barriers-and-supports](https://inclusive.tki.org.nz/guides/universal-design-for-learning/identify-barriers-and-supports)

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## Barriers that create unproductive struggle

Nicole Tucker-Smith  
identifying and  
minimising barriers  
that cause  
unproductive struggle  
for learners.






Video hosted on Youtube <http://youtu.be/NxjS2bQsz-M>

Closed Captions

# What gets in the way for ākonga?

## Common barriers across learning areas

A UDL approach intentionally anticipates, identifies and addresses barriers up front to ensure learning environments are equitable and free from discrimination and bias.

Engagement: Supporting motivation, interest, identity and self regulation. 	
<b>What barriers to engagement might ākonga experience in the design of my lesson?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The teacher makes all the decisions about what we study.</li><li>• There is no opportunity to connect my language, culture, identity and experience to the learning.</li><li>• The teacher just talks about boys and girls, I don't fit.</li><li>• It's so noisy in here I can't think.</li><li>• I'm scared to ask for help.</li><li>• This doesn't relate to my life, when will I ever need to know this.</li></ul>	<b>Supporting Examples</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ask students about their interests, strengths and needs. Use this to guide lesson design.</li><li>• Connect learning to culture and identify</li><li>• Create opportunities for students to use their first language</li><li>• Offer headphones and provide flexibility on where students can work.</li><li>• Offer multiple ways for students to seek support.</li><li>• Make authentic links to why the learning is valuable.</li></ul>
Representation: Supporting access to information, creating flexible content and building understanding. 	
<b>What barriers to accessing and understanding information might ākonga experience in the way I communicate and present information (instructions, content and materials)?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I can't hear the video and there are no captions.</li><li>• The teacher is using a whole bunch of words I don't understand.</li><li>• I can't relate to any of the examples or stories the teacher provides to support my understanding.</li><li>• Often instructions for assignments or assessment require heaps of reading.</li></ul>	<b>Supporting Examples</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Select videos with accurate captions, turned on.</li><li>• Provide multiple opportunities to support new vocab and concept building.</li><li>• Model using glossaries in multiple media.</li><li>• Ensure analogies and stories are relevant and connect to students' experiences and their cultures, languages and identities.</li><li>• Present instructions succinctly using text, image and video.</li></ul>
Action and expression: Supporting access to learning materials, personal organisation, expressing thinking and learning. 	
<b>What barriers to participating and demonstrating learning might ākonga experience in the design of my lesson?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I feel held back by having to read when I understand the concepts.</li><li>• The teachers can't read my writing</li><li>• What I'm supposed to be doing.</li><li>• How do I get started?</li><li>• All the resources are online and we have no wifi at home.</li><li>• We are given options for how to present our learning but no support on how to make the best choice to demonstrate my strengths and knowledge.</li><li>• Am on the right track with this assessment?</li></ul>	<b>Supporting Examples</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Model the effective use of digital tools e.g. text-to-speech, online research, illustrated glossaries.</li><li>• Provide access to keyboards.</li><li>• Provide sentence starters, graphic organisers, planners</li><li>• Ensure students have equitable access to the tools they need to be successful.</li><li>• Discuss with students the pros and cons of presentation options, and how to make the best choice.</li><li>• Ask students what check-in options will be useful, provide a range of options e.g. check point template.</li></ul>

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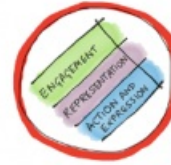
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## **Identify and minimise barriers in your subject**

## Identifying common barriers in your subject area?



A UDL approach intentionally anticipates, identifies and addresses barriers up front to ensure learning environments are equitable and free from discrimination and bias.

<b>Engagement</b> Supporting motivation, interest, identity and self regulation.		
<b>What barriers to engagement might ākongā experience in the design of my lesson?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interest in topic</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<b>Supports:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Option for learners to identify own topic</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	
<b>Representation</b> Supporting access to information, creating flexible content and building understanding.		
<b>What barriers to accessing and understanding information might ākongā experience in the way I communicate and present information (instructions, content and materials)?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Text heavy content</li> </ul>	<b>Supports:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Model and offer text-to-speech options</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	
<b>Action and expression</b> Supporting access to learning materials, personal organisation, expressing thinking and learning.		
<b>What barriers to participating and demonstrating learning might ākongā experience in the design of my lesson?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• End of term quiz online</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<b>Supports:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporate a variety of assessment formats</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	

Source:

[Universal Design for Learning: Theory and practice](http://udltheorypractice.cast.org/reading?3&loc=intro.xml_11969952)

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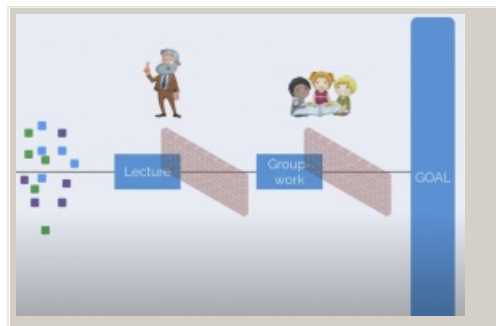
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# Recognising barriers in our learning design

A key focus of UDL is identifying barriers to learning hidden in the learning environments.



Video hosted on Youtube [http://youtu.be/\\_-bA63EGTw8](http://youtu.be/_-bA63EGTw8)

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## Useful resources



### Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Read time: 3 min

UDL explained from a NZ perspective. The Thinking Cycle and supporting tools for planning and teaching are included.

[Visit website](#)



### Planning with Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Read time: 3 min

A series of downloadable templates that help you to use UDL when you plan your teaching and assessments.

Publisher: Ministry of Education NZ

[Visit website](#)

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