

Prepare for externally assessed standards

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

Includes:

Support for success

Develop skills needed for externals

Build familiarity with support tools and SACs

Managing assessment anxiety

Useful resources

Inclusive Education

From

Guide: [Universal Design for Learning](#)

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

Suggestion: [Prepare for externally assessed standards](#)

Date

09 July 2026

Link

inclusive.tki.org.nz/guides/universal-design-for-learning/prepare-for-externally-assessed-standards

Support for success

A key focus of UDL is identifying universal supports that can help ākongā succeed.

Universal supports that can prepare ākongā for success:

- ✓ Discuss the external with ākongā, and ask them to share the things they are feeling anxious about – don't allow these things to remain a mystery.
- ✓ Create a learning environment that reduces risk by giving ākongā the chance to practice for the external assessment in a safe space.
- ✓ Where possible, practice the test type.
- ✓ Gain familiarity and confidence with the external assessment structures and tools.
- ✓ Practice highlighting key words and ideas on tests.
- ✓ Show examples of correct and completed tests to serve as a model.

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Develop skills needed for externals

Intentionally supporting action and expression is an integral part of a UDL approach.

Create space and time for students to think about the skills they might need as they prepare for external assessments. Build time to develop these skills into your learning programme.

Topics for discussion might include:

- ✓ how to break down a question
- ✓ how to be sure I answer the question
- ✓ how to manage my time in an external assessment
- ✓ strategies for when I get stuck
- ✓ how to manage my nerves
- ✓ how to decipher what I am being asked to do.

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Build familiarity with support tools and SACs

Ensure ākonga are comfortable with the supports on offer including SAC entitlements.

Provide multiple practice opportunities.

- ✓ Run through the [digital exams device check](#) to ensure the setup is working and you can troubleshoot any problems in plenty of time.
- ✓ Use the [digital exam preparation for students](#) to get familiar with the platform and structure of the exams. This reduces anxiety and helps the learner focus on the task rather than the tool.
- ✓ Familiarise ākonga with the online supports within the online exam. Key features to identify include enlarging the font, using the notes functionality, and using text-to-speech.
- ✓ Practise tests frequently, mark tests together, review errors and work out strategies to reduce them – Use the [Sample common assessment activity](#) or [Find past digital exams](#).
- ✓ [Special Assessment Conditions](#) are an extra kete of support that students can apply for if the design of the assessment does not allow them to participate equitably alongside their peers.

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Managing assessment anxiety

Consider making these supports universally accessible to all ākonga.

- ✓ Give ākonga multiple chances to practice newly learned skills in a safe place before using them in an external assessment.
- ✓ Plan learning so that ākonga have opportunities to display mastery and experience success. Help them identify their strengths and replace the language of self-doubt with the language of success.
- ✓ Talk with ākonga about their stress triggers, discuss how to recognise and deactivate them.
- ✓ Encourage ākonga to look ahead and anticipate the problems they might encounter in the exam. Work through scenarios and identify solutions with ākonga.
- ✓ Talk with ākonga and identify what supports help them. Ensure they have these available in exams.
- ✓ Provide options such as a padlet or an anonymous box where ākonga can post questions or ask for help without identifying themselves.

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Useful resources



External exams

This page on the NZQA website explains the rules and instructions for external exams, answers common questions, and links to useful information about preparing for digital exams.

Publisher: New Zealand Qualifications Authority

[Visit website](#)



Using Universal Design for Learning to design standards-based lessons

Read time: 38 min

This research article presents a process that teachers can use as they develop standards-based lesson plans. By “unwrapping” academic standards and applying UDL during the lesson planning process, teachers can identify clear goals aligned with an academic standard and develop flexible methods, assessments, and materials that address the needs and preferences of varied learners.

Publisher: SAGE Publications

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