Balance Visual, Written, and Auditory Elements

UDL CHECKPOINT 1.3: <u>Offer alternatives for visual information</u>
— Visual representations are not always accessible for every type of learner, which is why balancing the ways in which course information is distributed is essential for learner success.

What is it?

Contemporary education (online and hybrid learning) often relies heavily on visuals (infographics, videos, written information); however, it is important that various modes of conveying course information is used to allow for more inclusive learning. This means providing transcripts and descriptions of visual elements as well as ensuring that all text provided to learners is clear, accessible, and can be converted to text-to-speech. Ultimately, the goal is to create a balance in the ways that information (expectations, lectures, assignment/assessment directions, etc.) is given to ensure optimal accessibility for and understanding by learners.

Why do it?

Many learners have visual disabilities that create confusion and negatively impact their learning, especially when visuals are solely used in the distribution of course material. And even for learners without visual impairments or disabilities, visual information (when conveyed without explanation or clarification) can be misunderstood since visuals can often be interpretive and subjective in nature. Because of this, it is necessary that all course information is offered to learners in a variety of methods (text, audio, video, visual). By doing so, learners have the ability to understand the information more fully, which can improve their performance in a course (ultimately leading to academic success).

How can I apply it?

Here are some ways that you can better balance the ways in which information is given to learners.

- **Provide descriptions for all visuals.** Whether in-person or online, it is important that all visuals (photos, graphics, videos, etc.) have a clarifying description to help learners understand the specifics and purpose of the visual.
- **Utilize auditory cues when transitioning to visual elements.** When using visual elements in lectures (whether in person or in a recorded lecture), it is helpful to offer a brief explanation/introduction to the visual information that learners will encounter. This prompts learners for specific aspects to focus on when shown the visual element.
- **Encourage learners to use text-to-speech software.** Providing access to and explaining the use and benefit of using text-to-speech can help learners to better understand written information.

- **Offer both written and recorded information.** Whether for an on-ground or online course, it is helpful for learners to have access to written information as well as a recorded information (audio and/or video). This includes the syllabus, assignment/assessment directions, and course notes. Doing so allows learners the opportunity to revisit and fully grasp expectations and information.

Summary

While it is easy to think that conveying course information in one manner is sufficient, the reality is that learners understand information in various ways, which is why it is essential to provide learners with information via multiple formats. Visual information alone can be subjective and misunderstood by learners. However, by providing clarification in the form of multiple formats (audio, video, and writing), learners can fully grasp course concepts, which can lead to their success.