# BLOG POST: UDL and MOVING ONLINE

Borders are being closed, people are stocking up and staying at home, and universities are moving classes online. Everyone has questions. Most students and instructors feel a sense of urgency, some a sense of resignation, and some are in a nervous holding pattern. However you slice it, things are changing and whether you feel you have a good grasp of how to anticipate next stages or not, we’re all vigilant.

Let’s pause for a moment and think carefully of what it means to “move classes online.” The biggest changes are around communication, content, and assessment.

**Communication:** How am I going to communicate these changes to students? Should I ask for feedback? How? What if I am under an avalanche of questions that I can’t answer quickly enough? Should I set up some way to help students feel connected to each other and to me since moving online can be alienating? How?

**Content:** Should the content change? Or should the way it is being conveyed change? Should I still expect to meet all the learning outcomes in my course? Some? Students still have outstanding work and an exam to write – how can I manage that?

**Assessment:** How will students submit work to me for grading? How should I watch and grade presentations? How will students submit a portfolio project that’s only halfway complete? Can I change the way that I weight tests, exams, and assignments? What about online exams and academic integrity?

Many of these questions will be answered tactically through excellent resources posted in [Keep Teaching](https://www.kpu.ca/keepteaching) including a flowchart (link) for decision making, suggestions for academic integrity (link) and final exam alternatives (link).

We can also zoom out and use **Universal Design for Learning** to apply design thinking principles to make sense of it all. More than ever, we have to be mindful of variability, both for ourselves and for our students. We can think about engagement, we can think about how we’re representing information, and how we’re going to get students to show what they’ve learned. We can commit to offering limited choice, and we can commit to getting to get feedback with the aim of testing our decisions and having the impact we want. We can also take steps to preserve the way students feel attached to us and to each other because working together will keep us together and will make the work make sense.

Below is a list of concrete steps grounded in principles of UDL that you can take to support communication, content, and assessment decisions.

1. **Check on Tech**. Do students have access to technology? What kind? Is email a better option? Moodle? How reliable is their internet connection? This is an important **UDL step** – design for variability in technology and offer choice for engagement. *You will know what to do based on the feedback that you get.*
2. **Appraise Learning Outcomes**. Evaluate how you can create fewer assignments that address more learning outcomes through multiple, ungraded, process steps. Often you won’t have the option of changing learning outcomes so try to **simplify** the number of assignments while designing for **depth**.
3. **Represent Content in Two Ways**: Invite students to learn by pairing video, audio, writing, storyboards, drawing, prose, formal discussion responses, informal discussions, e-books, and storytelling tools. Take the opportunity to demonstrate flexibility in representing information and give students choice on what else they can connect their learning with, either within the course, or with other courses.
4. **Attendance by Participation**: Have students participate via feedback on the development and execution of their assignments/projects. This can include reflections, compiling a list of meaningful concepts, voice-over recordings, evolving next steps of a larger project, or conducting a vocabulary or concept study.
5. **Connect, connect, connect**: Remember that students who particularly like f2f classes like them because they like being with, seeing, talking to, generating ideas with, listening with, and learning from other humans. It’s all the non-verbal communication, the bustle coming into class, the overheard conversations, sharing confused looks and smiles, the “being in it together”ness that is missing virtually. In as many cases as possible, create opportunities for texting, chatting, sharing thoughts about visual images together, consensus-finding, and using emojis and memes to keep the uniquely human in the teaching.
6. **Discussions** are essential. Encourage students not to feel pressured to speak only in academic language. Invite and model colloquial, friendly, casual language (although always respectful) and to connect with each other by talking about experiences both inside and outside the class environment. If you’re grading discussions for content, consider giving students a choice over which messages or emails they would like graded so that they engage deeply with discussion that isn’t assessment-driven.

Connect, consolidate, work deeply, be patient with yourself, each other, and technology. At the very least, this is a fast and sudden change for everybody. Try to remember that in crisis we are presented with an opportunity to experiment and feel our connectedness to our work and to each other. Change will happen as baby steps in an avalanche. Always, and more than before, reach out. Reach to me, to Teaching and Learning, to trusted peers.

Hold fast to effort and tighten optimism. Good things will follow.