Considering Multilingual Learners in Online Instructional Design

- **Use plain language** without ‘dumbing down’ the concepts. The goal is to boost understanding and retention. Clear, direct and simple is best; reduce embellishing language if possible.

- **Help students put new material in context related to other course material and your instructional or course goals.** Consider using infographics or visuals to support concept explanations. Can you provide a concept map showing connecting ideas? Can students develop one (in groups)?

- **Provide readings, videos and any other support material in advance (of the lecture, lab or tutorial).** This will help students prepare in advance. They can pre-learn any new language or concepts.

- **Post one or two guiding (or general discussion) questions in Canvas in advance of your lecture (or tutorial) and ask students to respond (could you make it part of their participation mark?)** This helps students focus on key concepts. Reading other’s responses allows students more processing time, to look up new words and better assess their own understanding. Instructors can quickly see if more clarification or review is needed.

- **Consider pre-recording smaller chunks of a lecture.** This that allow students opportunities to synthesise, summarize, re-state and reflect on the material. This also allows students to preview, pause, repeat, and control the recordings themselves.

- **Slow down your pace of delivery during online lectures and recordings.** Consciously speak a little more slowly and clearly. Include pauses after each idea or thought to allow for natural breaks. This is important for students who are also struggling with online learning fatigue.

- **Provide choices and multiple pathways for students that use multilingualism as a key to open doors to content, rather than a barrier.** Ask students to seek out global and multilingual perspectives on specific topics. (e.g. How is the media in (Iran, India, Philippines) covering climate change?)

- **Be explicit (and clear) about assignment objectives and instructions, and about how the online space is organized in general.** Where possible, consider dividing longer sentences into shorter ones so students can focus on meaning. Can instructions be simplified without simplifying the concepts? This helps students focus their learning on the task and concepts not the instructions.

- **Consider breaking up large amounts of text into smaller chunks, and increase the amount of white space** to allow for more time to absorb and synthesize. This reduces distractions and helps focus the reader on key concepts and language.
If you are recording comments over slides, there is an option to **turn on captions/subtitles in PowerPoint:**

![PowerPoint screenshot](image)

Google Slides also does this in Presentation mode. (In presentation mode, click on the ‘CC captions’ option on the bottom tool bar.)

- **Ask students to turn on ‘closed captioning’ on when viewing media** such as YouTube videos. That way students can be both reading and hearing about key concepts and new terms.

- **Provide opportunities for students to reinforce and extend their learning by providing additional targeted resources** such as further reading, short videos, and so on. This provides a chance for recycling key language and concepts while providing richer examples and connections.

- **Check in with students to ask them what are the most challenging aspects of online learning and what is helping them.** Use this to inform how your class will best meet your course and assessments objectives.

- **Try to consider assignments and instructions from the perspective of someone outside your discipline.**

  **Think about making the implicit explicit.**

  Consider: *Submit a response to x...*
  - Do your students know what a response is?
  - Do they know the expected format? Do they know the expected length?
  - Can you provide a model or sample?
  - Can any complex language be unpacked without losing meaning?

  For example, consider whether vocabulary can be replaced with higher frequency words. Are you making any references requiring specific cultural knowledge? Or using culturally specific idioms?
Consider this SLIDE mnemonic* for online presentation accessibility:

- **Slide** titles that are descriptive and unique
- **L**inks that are meaningful
- **I**mages that are clear and have text descriptions
- **D**esign that is perceivable and predictable
- **E**mpathy-driven design

* From The National Centre on Accessible Educational Materials

Resources and further reading:

- Teaching Multilingual Users Online
- Universal Design – Best Practices for Online Development
- Live Lecture and Recording Tips
- Applying Universal Design for Learning in Online Courses: Pedagogical and Practical Considerations