

# Fact Sheet: Universal Design



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People with intellectual disabilities (ID) encounter barriers in trying to access health programs and services, leading to significant health disparities. Barriers may be physical or rooted in communication approaches and can impact a person's ability to be integrated in society. Universal Design (UD) is an approach organizations use to help achieve inclusion and create inclusive practices. UD benefits not only to our communities but also businesses and organizations; if products or services are barrier free, more people can access services or buy products and, ultimately, organizations can better serve their communities.

## What is Universal Design?

The concept of Universal Design was first introduced in the field of architecture by Robert Mace, founder of the Center for Universal Design. The purpose of UD is to create environments that can be used by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without need for adaptation. It is important to note that UD and accessibility are not synonymous. For example, a building with one wheelchair ramp in the back of the building is technically accessible, but it is not universal. This is because it forces people with disabilities to use the back entrance, therefore isolating and excluding them. UD is intended to ensure that people with disabilities, including those with ID, are not excluded from daily activities and that their needs are integrated in the design of all products and buildings and communications. Curb cuts are an example of UD: curb cuts make sidewalks accessible for people in wheelchairs, but also benefit people with strollers and bikes, and the elderly.

## Universal Design and Health Communication

UD also applies to communication. Poorly presented information or communication can quickly become a barrier to accessing health promotion programs or services. It is important to make sure that any type of communication we produce, whether it is in the shape of fliers, intake forms, notices and update, or instructions, is provided in an accessible manner so that people at all levels of communication abilities – whether they have ID or are a non-native speaker - are able to access it.

## Tips to Ensure Universal Design in Your Communications:

Elaine Eisenbaum, PhD and Lindsey Mullis, MS from the University of Kentucky Human Development Institute, crafted the following acronym to remember the principles of Universal Design.

## “J-U-S-T UD IT.”

**J: Jazz it Up** – Ensure that your communication and presentations are engaging and interesting. No one likes to be bored!

**U: Use Multiple Methods** – Different methods help maximize your reach to the audience and allow more people to understand and participate. Written text, audio, pictures, video, touch, interactive activities are all great options to share your message.

**S: Simplify** – Removing jargon, using concise and simple wording, and using large easy-to-read font that is spaced out allows more people to understand your message.

**T: Test it out** – Ask for feedback. Don’t assume that your method is reaching everyone, instead ask your audience how your presentation or product was received and then adapt accordingly.

### Example of UD

The below exemplifies the principles of UD: simple, strong contact, includes written text and pictures. This clearly gets the message across.



## References

- [https://humancentereddesign.org/adp/profiles/1\\_mace.php](https://humancentereddesign.org/adp/profiles/1_mace.php)
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- Eisenbaum, Elaine & Mullis, Lindsey. (2018). Learning Community Webinar. <http://aucd.adobeconnect.com/p7jyi6m646pe/>
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