



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 Literacy**

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**

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!

- Use interesting visuals
- Use different media formats
- Tell stories. Storytelling is a great way to hook your audience, even when the information you are presenting is dry.

**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.

- Caption videos and consider video transcripts
- Use multiple ways to present information
- Vary your presentation style
- Ask questions. Engaging your audience by giving opportunities to reflect on the topic can increase retention up to 90%. Reading alone has a retention rate of only 30%!



**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.

- Large easy to read fonts
  - Use sans serif fonts
  - 12 point font is considered the standard minimum for all publications; 14 point font is preferred when format or space allows.
  - Powerpoint slides – minimum 24 point font, aim for larger
- Keep sentences short and concise
  - Bullet point lists
- Use high color contrast
- Do not use color as the only way to convey information
- Use white space
- Use plain language
  - Don't eliminate needed terminology, rather, explain it

Can you read  
me?  
Can you read  
me?

**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.

- User Testing
  - Get feedback from Special Olympics athletes and other self-advocates
  - Gather formal and informal feedback
- Readability check:
  - <https://app.readable.com/text/>
- Accessibility check
  - Use the WebAIM Color Contrast Checker:

- <https://webaim.org/resources/contrastchecker/>
- Use WebAIM website resources to check accessibility
- <https://webaim.org/resources/>

## References

- [https://humancentereddesign.org/adp/profiles/1\\_mace.php](https://humancentereddesign.org/adp/profiles/1_mace.php)
- Edward Steinfeld & Jordana L. Maisel (2012). Universal Design: Creating Inclusive Environments
- Eisenbaum, Elaine & Mullis, Lindsey. (2018). Learning Community Webinar. <http://aucd.adobeconnect.com/p7jyi6m646pe/>
- Story, Molly Follette; Mueller, James L.; Mace, Ronald L. "The Universal Design File: Designing for People of All Ages and Abilities. Revised Edition." North Carolina State Univ., Raleigh. Center for Universal Design. SPONS AGENCY National Inst. on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (ED/OSERS), Washington, DC.

*Developed in collaboration with the University of Kentucky Human Development Institute.*