

[**https://universaldesign.org/definition**](https://universaldesign.org/definition)

**What is Universal Design?**

“Universal design is design that’s usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design.”

**–Ron Mace** *(an architect with polio who coined the term in the 1980s)*

**Part 1: “Design that’s usable by all people…”**

The biggest challenge of designing for “all people” is making sure that it’s functional for people with any type of impairment of the body or mind while ensuring that the design is useful for everyone.

Universal design is for everyone, despite confusion about it only being for people with disabilities. Thing is, universal design wouldn’t be needed if disability wasn’t part of being human.

**Part 2: “to the greatest extent possible…”**

Something universally designed will work for as many people as possible. Age and ability aside, UD will be functional for anyone, regardless of if he or she has…

1. difficulty interpreting or processing information.
2. a susceptibility to fainting, dizziness, or seizures.
3. a speech impediment.
4. difficulty processing sensory input.
5. blindness (loss of sight).
6. low vision (limited sight).
7. deafness (loss of hearing).
8. a hearing impairment.
9. a mental health impairment.
10. a need for caregiver assistance.
11. difficulty moving the neck or head.
12. limited stamina.
13. difficulty sitting.
14. limited coordination.
15. limited sensation.
16. limited balance.
17. loss of upper extremity motor control.
18. loss of lower extremity motor control.
19. difficulty reaching, lifting, or carrying items.
20. difficulty bending, kneeling, etc.
21. a reliance on walking aids or mobility devices.
22. difficulty manipulating items.
23. chemical sensitivities.
24. an extreme height or weight.

**Part 3: “without the need for adaptation or specialized design.”**

Adaptation is a process in which an individual has to change the way he or she typically interacts with something.

Specialized design is for a specific demographic or need.

Universal design is inclusive to any generation that someone belongs to or to a health condition that someone may have.

Thus, design that’s usable by all people.

**Important note:**

Some people have significant functional needs that require specialized design.

If universal design is the foundation, adding specialized features as-needed is much easier and more cost-effective than if a design is fully specialized.