

Designing for All





A ramp is one feature of universal design.

What Is Universal Design?

The products we use and places like buildings and playgrounds aren't just built; they are designed. To design something is to think about it and create it according to a plan.

Some people might not pay attention to how things are designed. However, some people have physical disabilities. Perhaps they're sick, have been in an accident, or have been hurt in war. For people with disabilities, things like stairs, or even one step, can be an obstruction. However, if products and places are designed carefully, life becomes easier for us all. That's where universal design comes in.

Universal design is the creation of products and environments that can easily be used by everyone. An example of universal design is a ramp at the entrance to a building. The ramp can be used by people who have no problem with stairs and by people for whom steps might be an obstruction. That's just one way universal design helps everyone.

Key Notes:

What is universal design?



Older homes can use universal design too.

At Home

When we think about making places accessible to people with disabilities, we often think of places like office buildings, restaurants, and hotels. However, homes can also be made accessible.

Some people believe that homes should be built so that they're accessible to everyone. One way to build an accessible house is to have no steps at the main entrance. Another way is to build wide doorways that allow people who use wheelchairs to easily get into every room.

Houses that have already been built can easily be made accessible, too. One way to make a house accessible is to install special faucets and to put switches in accessible places. These changes can help people who don't have much strength or who can't reach far to turn on lights. Another way to increase accessibility is to install grab bars in places like bathrooms. People can hold grab bars while they get in and out of a bathtub or shower.

Key Notes:

How can universal design be used in homes?



These students read Braille, using their sense of touch.

In School and at Work

Schools and work settings should be accessible to everyone so that all people, including those with disabilities, can attend school or work at almost any job. In fact, a law called the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 says that people with disabilities have the same rights to employment as everyone else.

Schools can do several things to help students with disabilities. In addition to ramps for students in wheelchairs, schools can install lifts that raise and lower wheelchairs. For students who have trouble seeing, schools can get books with large print or books in Braille.

Offices can do similar things. They can provide reading material in Braille. They can provide computers that present information in both audio and visual forms. For workers who have hearing disabilities, offices can provide telephones with audio controls that can make sounds louder. In addition, offices can provide telephone systems for deaf people that use flashing lights instead of ring tones.

Key Notes:

How can design help people with disabilities in school and at work?



Technology Helps

Modern technology is making universal design easier to achieve and more common. Voice-activated phones help people who can't reach a telephone. This includes people who can't move because of a disability and doctors who can't move because they are performing an operation. One common example of universal design that helps everyone is TV and radio remote control

Modern technology is also creating new things that help people with disabilities. Voice-activated lights let people turn lights on and off from across a room. Voice-activated computers let people operate computers by talking to them. Special warning systems summon help for people who can't move because they're hurt.

In addition, some "smart homes" have many machines that can be operated by remote control. Remote controls can operate a home's temperature, lights, and entertainment equipment. It can also summon help if people are sick or hurt. Technology like this helps us all, and that's what universal design is all about.

Key Notes:

How can technology help people with and without disabilities?

Voice-activated
controls help people
and machines do tasks.

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