

Universal Design Principles Checklist

clever • skilled • creative

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The concept of Universal Design was developed by people who worked on designing equipment and environments for people with a disability. They saw that it was more beneficial and cost-efficient to make original designs accessible, rather than adapt things later. They believed that these inclusive original designs would in fact benefit many people.

The principles of Universal Design can be applied to learning materials and communications so that more people can use them, and most people can use them more easily.

This checklist is a tool for vocational education and training providers for assessing materials and communications and enhancing accessibility for everyone.

1. Accessible text documents

a) Plan the design of the document:

• use sans serif fonts like Arial or Verdana	<input type="checkbox"/>
• use a font size at least as big as 12 point	<input type="checkbox"/>
• use bold to emphasise important points, rather than italics, underline or all capitals	<input type="checkbox"/>
• use left justification	<input type="checkbox"/>
• allow plenty of white space	<input type="checkbox"/>
• give adequate margins (at least 25mm)	<input type="checkbox"/>
• set line spacing at 25% greater than the text	<input type="checkbox"/>
• allow ample space on forms	<input type="checkbox"/>
• leave space between paragraphs	<input type="checkbox"/>
• use good contrast	<input type="checkbox"/>

• use headers when creating tables	<input type="checkbox"/>
• avoid breaking words at the end of a line.	<input type="checkbox"/>

For printed documents:

• avoid shading with poor contrast and glossy paper	<input type="checkbox"/>
• use light coloured paper.	<input type="checkbox"/>

For electronic documents:

• include alternative text for graphics.	<input type="checkbox"/>
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b) Write for your reader:

• identify your audience and the purpose of your document	<input type="checkbox"/>
• use question and answer format to engage your reader	<input type="checkbox"/>
• use 'you' and other pronouns to speak directly to your readers	<input type="checkbox"/>
• use 'I' in headings to pose readers' questions, e.g. 'How do I appeal an assessment decision?'	<input type="checkbox"/>
• use 'we' to refer to your organisation	<input type="checkbox"/>
• use the active voice	<input type="checkbox"/>
• use non-discriminatory language.	<input type="checkbox"/>

c) Write clearly:

• use bulleted lists instead of long paragraphs	<input type="checkbox"/>
• use short sentences	<input type="checkbox"/>
• use the simplest tense that you can	<input type="checkbox"/>
• omit superfluous words, e.g. change 'despite the fact' to 'although'	<input type="checkbox"/>

• use 'must' to convey requirements (rather than 'should' or 'shall')	<input type="checkbox"/>
• avoid ambiguous placement of words, e.g. 'If you are determined to be eligible, you can receive ...'	<input type="checkbox"/>
• avoid words and constructions that can confuse (e.g. jargon and acronyms)	<input type="checkbox"/>
• think about how to use contractions, e.g. 'don't' instead of 'do not' (Contractions soften the tone and make documents easier to read; the two word form is more emphatic and formal)	<input type="checkbox"/>
• change nominalisations to verbs, e.g. 'We made an application' to 'We applied'	<input type="checkbox"/>
• bring abstractions down to earth with examples or diagrams.	<input type="checkbox"/>

d) Structure the document clearly:

• use a table of contents to help make the structure clear	<input type="checkbox"/>
• use 'styles' (e.g. Microsoft Word headings, body text, bullet lists)	<input type="checkbox"/>
• format headings by varying size, font and allowing space before and after	<input type="checkbox"/>
• choose headings carefully and make sure they are informative	<input type="checkbox"/>
• write short sections	<input type="checkbox"/>
• include only one issue in each paragraph	<input type="checkbox"/>
• use vertical lists.	<input type="checkbox"/>

e) Edit your document:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">enlarge the document to make editing easier	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">a fresh pair of eyes often picks up the 'obvious' problems that those who have worked with the document miss	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">if possible, put the draft aside for a while and then come back to it later with a fresh approach.	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. Accessible visual presentations

a) Organise the content:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">keep the content on each screen brief. Use key words and brief, concise phrases. Avoid complete sentences	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">present one idea per visual	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">limit text to six to eight lines per page	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">avoid jargon, acronyms and too many long words	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">use short, simple sentences.	<input type="checkbox"/>

b) Take care with colour, contrast, and shading:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">use high contrast between the text and background and/or visuals	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">avoid printing text over patterned backgrounds.	<input type="checkbox"/>

c) Format screens for the best access:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">use a larger font size (20 – 24 point) so it can be easily read from the back of the room	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">avoid elaborate fonts (sans serif is preferred)	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">avoid italics	<input type="checkbox"/>

• minimise the use of capital letters; avoid the use of all capital letters	<input type="checkbox"/>
• allow adequate line spacing	<input type="checkbox"/>
• avoid splitting words at the ends of lines.	<input type="checkbox"/>

d) Graphics require special consideration:

• use illustrations that are large enough to be seen clearly. Avoid complex graphs and tables	<input type="checkbox"/>
• the visual presentation may need to be provided to learners in another format. If graphics convey key information, provide an 'alternative text' option.	<input type="checkbox"/>

e) Presenting visuals:

• use good transitions between points to keep your audience focused on where you are in the presentation	<input type="checkbox"/>
• emphasise key points or illustrate themes, but don't rely heavily on the screen/slide to convey the message	<input type="checkbox"/>
• read/cover all screen/slide information; never assume everyone can read it	<input type="checkbox"/>
• be specific when describing diagrams (e.g. tight, left, top, bottom, corner). Avoid terms such as 'over here' or 'over there'	<input type="checkbox"/>
• try to keep to your presentation if materials have already been distributed. If you vary from the material, mention that fact so those using alternative formats of the materials don't get lost	<input type="checkbox"/>
• allow enough time to read each visual before talking about it	<input type="checkbox"/>
• be prepared to provide presentation information in alternative formats, such as large print and audio	<input type="checkbox"/>
• test visuals on the surface that will be used during the presentation. Sometimes colours and contrasts are fine on a computer screen but are difficult to read when projected.	<input type="checkbox"/>

3. Accessible oral presentations

a) Delivering oral presentations:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• use body language and facial expressions but accompany them with an oral equivalent if any attendee is vision impaired	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• do not substitute body language for words to convey a message	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• speak clearly and at an even pace, using clear intonation and emphasising keywords	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• do not speak too slowly or exaggerate lip movements	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• do not hold the microphone too close to your mouth or hide your mouth with your hands	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• do not breathe heavily into the microphone	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• do not shout	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• be aware that some letters or sounds may be harder to hear or distinguish for people who are hard of hearing (e.g. the letters f and s, and the sound sh)	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• use a range of other communication techniques.	<input type="checkbox"/>

This material is adapted from:

- Regional Disability Liaison Officer research program, Department of Education, Science and Training 2001/2002
- A Best Practice Approach to Flexible and Inclusive Teaching: Applying the Universal Design Framework 2003, Australian Flexible Learning Framework, Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training and state governments.
- Universal Design – Creating accessible learning resources – Department of Education, Training and the Arts 2007.