

# Universal Design for Conference Presentations

(Modified from the Centre for Excellence in Universal Design)

Universal Design is the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability. An environment (or any building, product, or service in that environment) should be designed to meet the needs of all people who wish to use it. This is not a special requirement, for the benefit of only a minority of the population. It is a fundamental condition of good design. If an environment is accessible, usable, convenient and a pleasure to use, everyone benefits. By considering the diverse needs and abilities of all throughout the design process, universal design creates products, services and environments that meet peoples' needs. Simply put, universal design is good design (Centre for Excellence in Universal Design, 2014).

Universal design often results in features that are used by a variety of people, not just those with disabilities. For example, curb cuts that are created for those in wheelchairs, are often used by those with strollers, children on wheels, and for rolling carts.

## 7 Principles of Universal Design

1) **Principle 1: Equitable Use**

The design is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities.

2) **Principle 2: Flexibility in Use**

The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.

3) **Principle 3: Simple and Intuitive Use**

Use of the design is easy to understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level.

4) **Principle 4: Perceptible Information**

The design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user's sensory abilities.

5) **Principle 5: Tolerance for Error**

The design minimizes hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions.

6) **Principle 6: Low Physical Effort**

The design can be used efficiently and comfortably and with a minimum of fatigue.

7) **Principle 7: Size and Space for Approach and Use**

Appropriate size and space is provided for approach, reach, manipulation, and use regardless of user's body size, posture, or mobility.

## What does this mean for you as a presenter?

- Think about how you design visual aids to be used during your presentation. Will you be using videos? If so, are they captioned?
- To be more inclusive and accessible to everyone, we encourage presenters to self-describe at the beginning of their sessions. Giving a description of yourself for the benefit of visually impaired or blind people is a good practice. For more information about self-descriptions and how to give one, go to <https://vocaleyes.co.uk/services/resources/self-description-for-inclusive-meetings/>.
- Consider the language used as a presenter. Words like “everyone,” “y’all,” and “folks” are more inclusive than something like “Ladies and gentlemen.” Gender-neutral language avoids perpetuating gender stereotypes and eliminates assumptions about gender identity based on appearances. Phrases like “drop-in advising” are more inclusive than “walk-in advising,” and using words like “crazy,” “dumb,” or “lame” reinforce stereotypes related to mental health conditions and physical disability.
- Upload materials to the NACADA website before your presentation. Having these materials available ahead of time allows participants to have them ready in ways that are beneficial to them (printed out, electronically), and to use them in ways they find helpful (following along with slides).
  - Along with this, think about your design of slides. If you intend to provide notes pages from PowerPoint, consider how large the text is on the slide itself; is it a useful tool, or is it illegible when it is reproduced in small format?
  - Having your materials uploaded to the NACADA space earlier also allows you to minimize paper waste; some participants will choose to participate and interact with materials electronically.
  - Having materials available before your presentation also allows participants who might have sight barriers to the presentation. This could be as simple as a tall participant sitting in the front row, unintentionally obscuring the view of a shorter person behind them.
- Use the wireless microphones provided by NACADA.
  - Choosing not to use a microphone is directly harmful to participants. Asking participants if they can hear you, and using that response to say a mic is not needed requires a person with a hearing impairment to disclose this to you in order to get an accommodation. Similarly, asking those who might have challenges hearing you to move closer to the front may require them to disclose other identities. For example, a person with a hearing impairment might feel forced to disclose that they need the ability to exit the room quickly due to restroom needs.
  - Microphones can be awkward to use. It is important to keep the microphone close to your mouth so that it can pick up and amplify your voice. Holding a microphone 3 feet away from your mouth defeats the purpose.
  - Along with this, when participants ask questions, if you are unable to get them a microphone to ask the question, please repeat the question into the microphone so that others in the room can know what has been asked.

- If you use devices like pair/square/share in your presentation – are these necessary? Could they potentially be problematic for someone who has challenges with sensory processing, or for someone with a hearing impairment? If you do choose to use these techniques, it is important to repeat answers so that others in the room can hear what has been said.
- Does your presentation require physical participation? If so, is it necessary? If it is, how could someone who is unable to physically participate get similar information?