

Universal design

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Jump to: [navigation](#), [search](#)

Universal design is a relatively new [paradigm](#) that emerged from "[barrier-free](#)" or "[accessible design](#)" and "[assistive technology](#)".^[1] Barrier free design and assistive technology provide a level of accessibility for people with [disabilities](#) but they also often result in separate and stigmatizing solutions, for example, a [ramp](#) that leads to a different entry to a building than a main [stairway](#). Universal design strives to be a broad-spectrum solution that helps everyone, not just people with disabilities. Moreover, it recognizes the importance of how things look. For example, while built up handles are a way to make utensils more usable for people with gripping limitations, some companies introduced larger, easy to grip and attractive handles as feature of mass produced utensils. They appeal to a wide range of consumers.

As life expectancy rises and modern medicine has increased the survival rate of those with significant injuries, illnesses and birth defects, there is a growing interest in universal design. There are many industries in which universal design is having strong market penetration but there are many others in which it has not yet been adopted to any great extent.

Universal design is a part of everyday living and is all around us. The "[undo](#)" command in most software products is a good example. [Color-contrast](#) dish ware with steep sides that assist those with visual problems as well as those with dexterity problems are another. Additional examples include cabinets with pull-out shelves, kitchen counters at several heights to accommodate different tasks and postures and low-floor buses that kneel and are equipped with ramps rather than lifts.