

Universal Design

Universal design describes a concept or philosophy that, when applied to assessments, provides all students with equal opportunities to demonstrate what they have learned. The purpose of universally designed assessments is to provide access for the greatest number of students during assessment, and to minimize the need for individualized design or accommodations. Universal design acknowledges differences among individuals, and that for accurate assessment to occur, a range of methods and materials are needed to measure learning. Universal design builds flexibility into assessments at the development stage, which enables flexible adjustments for a broad range of students. All students are intended to benefit from assessments that are universally designed, including students who are gifted and talented; ELs; students with physical, cognitive, and/or sensory disabilities; students with emotional or language/learning disabilities; students with more than one of these characteristics; students with unique linguistics needs; other underperforming students; and students without disabilities.

Assessments contain accessible, non-biased items.

Guided by universal design, assessment writers minimize the number of accommodations necessary after the assessment is developed but acknowledge that the need for accommodations cannot be removed entirely, and therefore the assessment must be designed to meet specific access needs of students.