

Lesson 1 A Better Life for Everybody

Universal Design for Everyone

Did you know that one out of every ten people in the world is left-handed? They face challenges in a society designed for right-handed individuals. It is inconvenient for them to use some right-handed products such as scissors, cameras, and computer mice. The world we live in is designed to be an environment suitable for what is considered "normal" for the majority of people, and it is filled with objects that are easy for them to use. Thus, those who do not belong to that category have no choice but to live with discomfort. In other words, a minority of people with physical differences, such as the left-handed, the disabled, and the elderly, either endure inconvenience or deliberately seek objects designed especially for them, which are often difficult to find.

Is it impossible to build an environment where everyone can use products and facilities conveniently and without limitations? It was Ronald Mace who sought the answer to this question. He contracted polio at the age of nine and spent the rest of his life in a wheelchair. When studying architecture at university, he struggled to access some campus facilities due to inaccessible building designs. This experience later inspired him to invent the term universal design, which refers to design for all.

As an architect and product designer, he pursued a world in which all products and environments were designed to be artistic and usable to the greatest extent possible by everyone, regardless of their age, size, disability, nationality, or language.

According to the principles of universal design, the design must be able to be used equitably, flexibly, simply, and intuitively by a wide variety of people. In addition, it should be cognitively accessible and minimize users' physical efforts. Finally, it requires the providing of sufficient space for all users while reducing potential hazards and adverse consequences from accidental or unintended actions. A key feature of universal design is that this is not a special requirement only for the benefit of a minority of the population. If an environment is accessible, usable, convenient, and a pleasure to use, everyone in the community benefits.

How has universal design been incorporated into modern architecture? One of the most representative examples of universal design being used to improve accessibility is the ramps installed in front of buildings. Ramps, not stairs, are necessary for people with disabilities who use wheelchairs, and they are also beneficial for parents pushing strollers and the elderly.

Another example is automatic doors. They are invaluable for those who rely on assistive devices such as wheelchairs and crutches. They also provide convenience for adults who have their hands full and children who are not tall enough to open the doors themselves. A further example is tactile paving. These textured surfaces, often found on sidewalks, steps, and crosswalks, assist visually impaired individuals by guiding them through urban spaces.

Universal design is not only applied in modern architecture but also extends to transportation systems. For instance, buses have been designed with a floor closer to ground level to ease access for all passengers. Handles of various lengths are provided, another method by which universal design is implemented to accommodate passengers' different heights. Subway maps have also been designed for color-blind individuals to clearly distinguish between subway lines by adjusting the color and the brightness and by varying the thickness of lines that have similar colors. Additionally, the use of pictograms can be seen frequently. Signs indicating the locations of subway or train stations assist international travelers who may not be familiar with the local language. Likewise, road signs indicating school zones, speed limits, and directions for turns and stops aid drivers in recognizing important information more easily.

While universal design has been utilized in architecture and transportation systems for some time, a newer application is in the fashion industry. Clothing designed with universal design integrates stretchable and breathable materials, enhancing comfort and mobility. Other features include the use of magnets and Velcro in place of buttons, making it easier to put on and take off clothing. It also incorporates traits like stretchy waistbands and adjustable sleeves to allow individuals with disabilities to dress independently. This type of clothing is also beneficial for pregnant women, older adults who may experience mobility issues, and individuals with temporary injuries or medical conditions. Overall, universal design clothing promotes increased comfort, convenience, independence, and improved mobility and flexibility for wearers of all abilities.

You may find it surprising that universal design can be found in more parts of society than you thought. However, enough has not been done to accommodate everyone yet. Universal design should be implemented more extensively to promote full participation in the community for a wider range of people. It is time to build more equitable environments that are accessible to everyone. So are you on board to create a universally designed world for all?

1과 Further Reading

Inclusive Language for Equality and Diversity

Have you heard, "Hello, guys; let's get started," at the beginning of a meeting? Could that make some feel less included? Inclusive language is a respectful way of communication by selecting words that avoid bias, prejudice, and discrimination. Saying, "Hello, everyone," instead of, "Hello, guys," demonstrates inclusivity, reduces potential barriers, and enhances everyone's sense of belonging.

Inclusive language promotes equality, respect, and diversity, inviting all people to participate in society. For example, replacing conventional terms with racial implications like "blacklist" and "whitelist" with neutral alternatives such as "deny list" and "allow list" enhances inclusivity. Similarly, using gender-neutral terms like "parent" and "guardian" instead of "mom" and "dad" helps break down biases and acknowledges diverse family structures. Moreover, it is crucial to be aware of everyday phrases that could be considered insensitive toward individuals with medical conditions. For instance, using "missed opportunity" instead of "blind spot" or "ridiculous" rather than "crazy" demonstrates more thoughtful communication.

As society becomes more inclusive, so must our language. It is essential to stay updated and to use appropriate language for our times. By being mindful of the words we use, we can create a more welcoming environment for everyone.