Glossary for A.C.S. Universal Design for Learning Workshop

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Glossary for A.C.S. Universal Design for Learning Workshop 1
- Accessibility 1
- Accommodation 1
- Equality 1
- Equity 1
- Executive Function 1
- Inclusion 2
- Intersectionality 2
- Learning Difference/Disability 2
- Neurodivergence 2
- Neurodivergent 2
- Neurodiversity 3
- Neurological Differences 3
- Neurotypical 3
- Scaffolding 3
- Universal Design 3
- Universal Design for Learning 4

Accessibility

"The quality of being able to be used by everyone, including people who have a disability" (Cambridge Dictionary)

Accommodation

An ADA accommodation (known legally as a reasonable accommodation) is a change or adjustment to a job, work environment, application process, or public space that allows a qualified person with a disability to participate equally. (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission)

Equality

"The right of different groups of people to have a similar social position and receive the same treatment" (Cambridge Dictionary)

Equity

“Equity is defined as “the state, quality or ideal of being just, impartial and fair.” The concept of equity is synonymous with fairness and justice. It is helpful to think of equity as not simply a desired state of affairs or a lofty value. To achieve and sustain equity, it needs to be thought of as a structural and systemic concept.” (aefc.org)

Executive Function

"Executive function refers to skills that you use to manage everyday tasks like making plans, solving problems and adapting to new situations. The three main skills are working memory, cognitive flexibility and inhibition control." (Cleveland Clinic)

Inclusion

" Inclusion is the action or state of including or of being included within a group or structure. More than simply diversity and numerical representation, inclusion involves authentic and empowered participation and a true sense of belonging.” (aefc.org)

Intersectionality

“The complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups.

Kimberlé Crenshaw introduced the theory of intersectionality, the idea that when it comes to thinking about how inequalities persist, categories like gender, race, and class are best understood as overlapping and mutually constitutive rather than isolated and distinct. - Adia Harvey Wingfield” (Merriam Webster)

The Urgency of Intersectionality – TED Talk

Learning Difference/Disability

Learning disabilities are differences in a person's brain that can affect how well they read, write, speak, do math, and handle other similar tasks. Different groups may define "learning disability" differently, often depending on the focus of the organization. (NIH)

Neurodivergence

Unique brain style, deviates from neurotypical (Definition from D.U. Clinical Psychology Faculty – Dr. Judah Serrano, 2026). Neurodivergence impacts how we think, learn, feel, behave, and interact.

Neurodivergent

Person with a non-neurotypical neurotype (Definition from D.U. Clinical Psychology Faculty – Dr. Judah Serrano, 2026)

"Having or relating to a disorder or condition (such as autism spectrum disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, dyslexia, or obsessive-compulsive disorder) that impacts the way the brain processes information: exhibiting or characteristic of variations in typical neurological development." (Merriam Webster)

Because our brains are wired differently, neurodivergent people might have heightened sensitivities, challenges with self-regulation, or difficulties in traditional learning environments. Our systems, spaces, events, work, etc. were not designed with the neurodivergent brain in mind.

Neurodiversity

A **population** that has varying neurotypes.* Origin similar to biodiversity, acknowledging that no two brains are alike and that everyone is part of neurodiversity. (Baumer and Frueh, 2021)

*There are specific neurodivergent brains that are generally our focus when we talk about neurodiversity.

Neurological Differences

(e.g., Autism, ADHD, IDD, Learning Disorders) are explained by normal, natural variation in human genes/expressions (Definition from D.U. Clinical Psychology Faculty – Dr. Judah Serrano, 2026)

Neurotypical

From Cleveland Clinic: “Neurotypical” is a nonmedical term that describes people whose brains develop and work like most people’s brains do. Neurotypical people make up most of the world’s population — about 80% to 85%.

Neurotypical people generally have brains that operate at about the same level across different types of skills. Some of the skill areas include things like memory, math, and written or spoken language.

There’s nothing right or wrong about being neurotypical or neurodivergent. Neither one is good, bad or better than the other. Being one or the other is just a trait, like your hair color or complexion.

Scaffolding

Scaffolding in education is a temporary teaching strategy where an instructor provides tailored support to help students learn new concepts, and then gradually removes ("fades") that support as the students gain independence. (Discovery Education)

Universal Design

Universal Design (UD) 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.

“Universal design is design that is usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design.” –Ron Mace (The UD Project)

Universal Design for Learning

The Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Framework is an inclusive model for teaching that centers the needs of students with disabilities, with the overall goal of creating a learning environment that is accessible by all students without the need for accommodations.

From CAST

“UDL is a framework to improve and optimize teaching and learning based on what we know about the human brain. Each brain is made of billions of interconnected neurons that form unique pathways. Like fingerprints, no two brains are alike.

Educators face daily challenges in planning for diverse learners. However, learner variability is predictable, and we’ve developed prompts and principles to support educators – the CAST UDL Guidelines.

The CAST UDL Guidelines help educators address the diversity in learning in three main categories:

1. Engagement (the why of learning): recruiting interest, sustaining effort and persistence, and self-regulation.
2. Representation (the what of learning): perception, language and symbols, and comprehension.
3. Action & Expression (the how of learning): physical action, expression and communication, and executive function."