

Through the Lens of Universal Design for Learning

The activities in this publication are career development “warm-ups” for youth. Certainly, they may be used as the basis for planning lessons focusing on more extensive career and workforce development pursuits. The directions and extension activities have been specifically designed and created through a lens of universal design for learning. According to CAST (previously known as the Center for Applied Special Technology), universal design for learning is: a framework for designing educational environments that enable all learners to gain knowledge, skills, and enthusiasm for learning. This is accomplished by simultaneously reducing barriers to the curriculum while providing rich supports for learning.

As most youth development professionals recognize, young people come to pre-employment and employment training programs with a very wide variety of skills, talents, interests, and needs. For many youth, the typical classroom curriculum - which includes goals, instructional methods, classroom materials, and assessments - is cluttered with barriers and roadblocks, providing little support or opportunities to succeed for a wide range of learners. Rather than make extraordinary adjustments for particular students, universal design for learning lessens this conundrum.

As you work through these activities, consider incorporating some of the following strategies, which support universal design for learning:

- Seek opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning through multiple modalities (e.g., written, oral, graphic representations, and multi-media representations).
- Encourage the use of technology to enhance learning (access to multi-media materials) and performance (e.g., spell check and word prediction software).
- Include opportunities for students to complete “do-overs” based on your feedback.
- Provide instructions describing the components or steps for completion for activities. You might consider having printed copies of directions, audio-taped instructions, and pictures. If you have access to a computer or laptop, instructions can be both seen and heard on the computer. Most computers today come equipped with accessibility software and are often pre-packaged with a magnifier, on-screen keyboard, narrator functions, and high contrast options.
- Encourage students to play an active role and present their own thoughts and opinions throughout the activities.
- Provide feedback to individual students in multiple forms (for example, face-to-face, email, online chat, telephone, etc.).
- Include opportunities for students to collaborate.
- Provide opportunities for students to contact you to ask questions.
- Promote a strengths-based learning process.

Regardless of any barrier to employment (including, but not limited to disability) the activities in this publication, coupled with the strategies and spirit of universal design for learning (and a sprinkle of creativity), are intended to help all youth prepare for career and personal success through the development of soft skills.