

# Intersecting the Adult Learning Theory & Universal Design:

Tuesday for Teachers

January 27th, 2026





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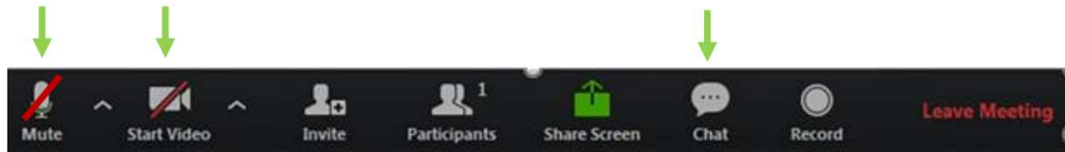
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# Before We Get Started



During the webinar, **please:**

1. Keep your sound and video **muted**. This will limit background noise.
2. Ask questions using the **chat function**.
3. Keep in mind that the session is being **recorded** for future viewing.
- 3 4. The session and all associated materials will be posted on the GED website at

[-https://www.ged.com/educators-admins/professional-development.html-](https://www.ged.com/educators-admins/professional-development.html)

# Purpose

## Understanding Adult Learners, Educators, and Learning Environments

This session explores how Andragogy and Universal Design work together to create more inclusive and effective learning environments for adult learners—connecting the *why* behind learner behavior to the *how* of instructional design

**Andragogy:** Helps educators understand *why* adult learners respond, resist, disengage, or persist in their learning

**Universal Design:** Helps educators design instruction that removes barriers before learners encounter them.

**This pairing supports a shift from reactive instruction to intentional design.**



# Small Instructional Shifts...

...that can have a meaningful learner impact.



Better understand adult learner behaviors through an Andragogical lens



Recognize how instruction influences interest and encouragement



Learn how Universal Design supports adult learning principles



Identify practical, immediately usable strategies for their classrooms using Andragogical techniques in Universal Design

# Pedagogy vs. Andragogy

Andragogy grew out of pedagogical theory, but it challenges and extends it by centering adult learners' experiences, autonomy, and readiness.

**PEDAGOGY:** The art & science of teaching profession of students.

- The teacher is the central figure, and the emphasis is often on the teacher's role in deciding what, how, and when learning occurs for students.
- Traditional K-12 setting.
- The teacher acts more as an expert, bestowing students knowledge, skill, and structure.



# Pedagogy vs. Andragogy

## Principles of Pedagogy

- Knowledge is objective & external.
- Learning is a process of transmission from teacher to student.
- Teachers are the givers of knowledge.
- Learning happens in the mind.
- Students are extrinsically motivated.
- What students know doesn't always influence new learning.



# Pedagogy vs. Andragogy

**ANDRAGOGY:** The adult learner approach to education

- The methods and techniques of how adults learn, engage, and persist.
- The learner's experiences, self-direction, and focus on problem-solving are central to the education process.
- The instructor acts as a facilitator, encouraging collaboration, mutual respect, and openness with learners.
- The learner is the central figure.



# Andragogy in Adult Education

Adult educators are not just teaching content—they are:

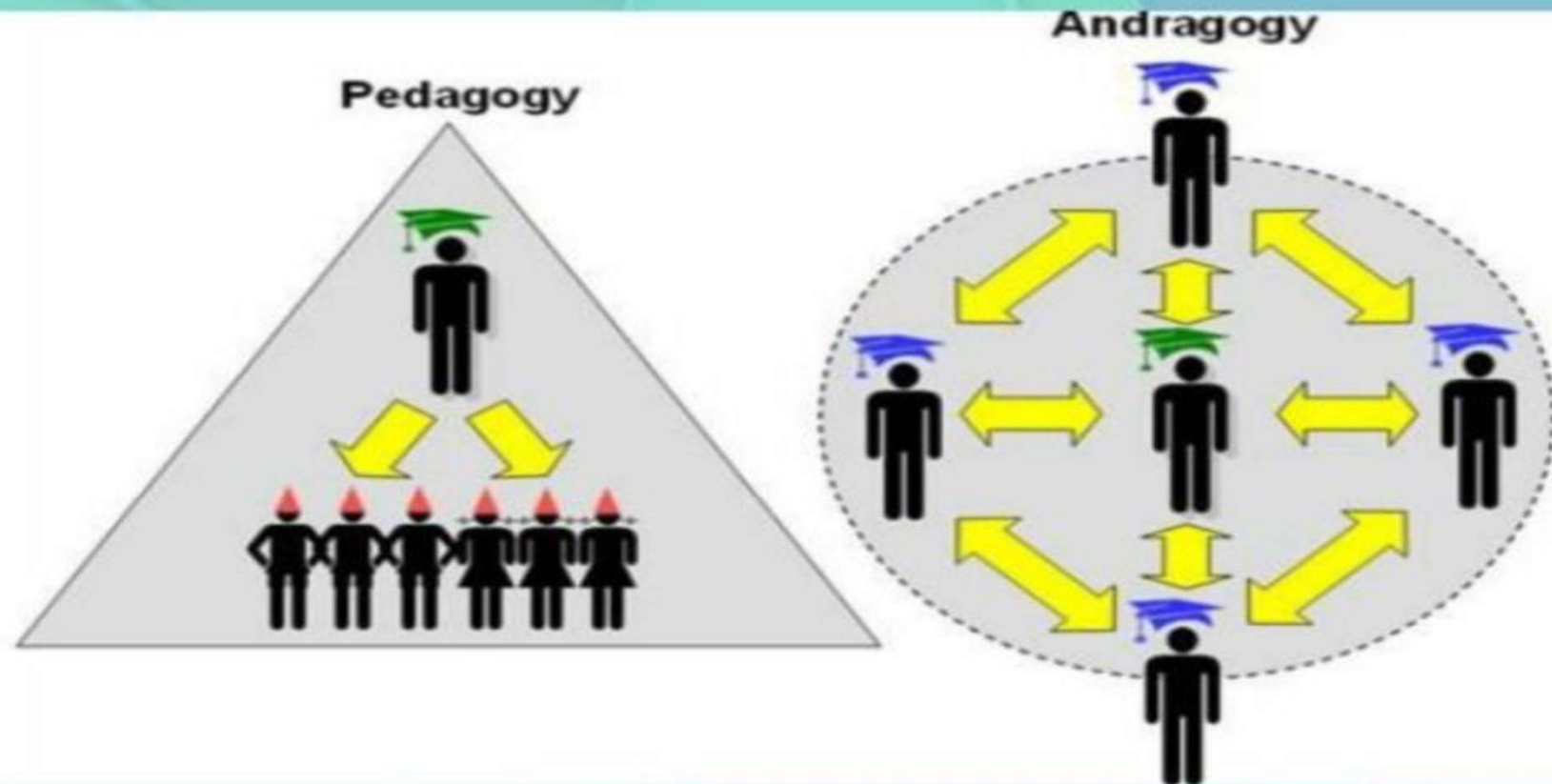
- Supporting learner confidence
- Influencing persistence and engagement
- Shaping how adults see themselves as learners

Every interaction communicates something about:

- Learners' capability
- Learners' value
- Learners' chances of success



# Pedagogy vs. Andragogy



# Semantics in Adult Education

## Language shapes how adults experience learning.

In an andragogical mindset, the term *student* is often associated with K–12 environments, where learning is typically teacher-directed and compliance-based.

The term *learner*, reflects adult education contexts—such as GED programs, workforce training, higher education, and professional learning—where autonomy, experience, and self-direction are central.

Using *learner* acknowledges adults as active participants in their own learning rather than passive recipients of instruction.

# Semantics in Adult Education

Language shapes how adults experience learning.

## The Parallel

Adult learners were once students.

For some, the term *student* may carry associations with:

- Past academic failure
- Shame or embarrassment
- Lack of voice or control
- Being labeled, tracked, or underestimated



Because of these experiences, language that echoes K–12 schooling can unintentionally trigger resistance, disengagement, or self-doubt—even when instruction is well-intentioned.

# Principles of Adult Learning Theory



## Experience

Adults bring rich life and learning experiences that shape how they think, learn, and apply new knowledge. These experiences influence both how adults engage with learning and how they build, adapt, and strengthen skills over time.



## Self-Concept

Adults generally see themselves as independent, self-directing learners. They value having choice, voice, and control over how they engage in learning and how they move through the learning process.

# Principles of Adult Learning Theory



## Readiness to Learn

Adults' readiness to learn is closely tied to their social roles and life circumstances, which change over time. Adults tend to learn best when they are psychologically and emotionally ready and when learning connects to immediate needs or responsibilities.



## Problem-Centered Orientation

Adults are problem-centered rather than content-centered. They are most motivated to learn when instruction is clearly connected to real-life challenges, goals, or tasks. Learning is valued for its applicability, not for mastering content in isolation.

# Principles of Adult Learning Theory



## Intrinsic Motivation

Adults are primarily driven by internal motivation. Independence, life experience, evolving social roles, and successful problem-solving build confidence and initiative, increasing willingness to learn and persist through challenges.



## The Need to Know

Adults need to understand **why** they are learning something and **how** it will be used. When learning is connected to current or near-future academic, professional, or personal situations, adults are more likely to engage and invest in developing new skills.

# ALT Classroom Application: Experience

Life experience shapes identity, perspective, and learning preferences. Adult learners use their life experiences to shape learning and set goals. However, these experiences can also create hurdles, like reinforcing wrong ideas or resisting new ones.

By tapping into and valuing their existing knowledge, educators can make learning more relevant, connect new concepts to what learners already know, and create a more interactive and meaningful learning experience.

Adult learners can bring:

- Prior school failure
- Trauma or negative academic experiences
- Shame and fear of judgment
- Resilience and lived knowledge
- Self-directed environment
- Experienced-focused learning

# ALT Classroom Application: Experience

- Behavior is often a response to history, not attitude
- Resistance often signals self-protection, not defiance
- One-size-fits-all instruction often overlooks lived realities
- Mutual Empathy-Learner and Educator

“I didn’t think about it that way. That makes sense based on what you learned.” -negative/empathy

“That’s clever, can you teach me how you did it.”  
-positive/validation

-Sample Lesson Plan: Overcoming Negative Experiences with Fractions-

-Sample Lesson Plan: Building on Positive Experience with Fractions-

-If the principle of “Experience” is not utilized-



# ALT Classroom Application: Self-Concept

As people age, they become more independent and self-directed. Adult learners want to take ownership of their learning journey. It can be easy to make assumptions about what learners might need—especially from the position of leadership.

Adult educators should consider giving learners the freedom to make their own choices in their learning journey, whether by allowing them to choose their learning paths or how they receive their information.

Adult learners need autonomy & respect:

- Adults need dignity, agency, and voice
- Adults resist being treated like children

# ALT Classroom Application: Self-Concept

- Tone matters as much as content
- Choice increases buy-in and ownership
- Compliance-driven instruction can erode trust
- Adults need dignity and choice

Adults resist being treated like children

- Reframe “resistance.”

“There’s more than one way- show me yours.”

“Let’s compare methods.”

-Sample Lesson Plan: Empowering Learners through Self-Concept-

-If the “Self-Concept” principle is not utilized-



# ALT Classroom Application: Readiness

Adults tend to learn best when they are psychologically and emotionally ready to engage with the material. If the learning content matches their current needs, they are more likely to be receptive.

Adults are ready to learn something when they need or want to know it, not necessarily when an instructor wants them to.

Adult learners need to learn when they are ready:

- Adults engage when learning feels immediately relevant
- Timing matters as much as intention

# ALT Classroom Application: Readiness

- “Not ready yet” is meaningful information  
  
Pacing and sequencing matter
- Learners engage more deeply when the *why* is clear
- Address pacing and frustration compassionately

“Sure, let’s try it now, or as a warmup tomorrow!”

“Let’s see which parts are doable right now.”

-Sample Lesson Plan: Balancing Structure w/Learner Readiness-

-If the "Readiness" principle is not utilized-



# ALT Classroom Application: Problem-Centered

## “Solving-focus & Contextual-application”

Starts with the **problem itself** and uses that as the context for learning.

Focuses on learning through **real-life issues** that are directly relevant to adult learners.

*Problem-Solving Focus:* makes learning about finding solutions to actual issues.

**Contextual Application:** emphasizes the application of skills to solve specific problems rather than just acquiring the knowledge itself.

Adults Learners are problem-centered, not content-centered::

- “How does this help me right now?”
- “Will this solve a real problem in my life?”

# ALT Classroom Application: Problem-Centered

- Frame lessons around real-world problems
- Connect skills to authentic learner goals
- Avoid teaching content in isolation
- Bridge instruction to real life.

“Let me show you how you can use this with your kids!”

“Here’s where this one can show up in real life.”

-Sample Lesson Plan: Learning the Quadratic Equation Through Budgeting-

-If the "Problem-Oriented" principle is not utilized-



# ALT Classroom Application: Intrinsic Motivation

Adults are often motivated by a desire for personal growth, whether to gain knowledge, develop new skills, or simply improve in areas that matter to them

Many adult learners find motivation in the satisfaction of achieving a challenging goal or mastering a new skill. Recognizing and celebrating small wins throughout the learning process can encourage this, as adults value the reward of seeing their progress.

By centering on intrinsic motivation, educators can help adult learners connect learning to their personal satisfaction and growth, making the journey not only productive but also

Adults learners are motivated by:

- Confidence
- Momentum
- Hope

Fear, pressure, and shame reduce persistence.

# ALT Classroom Application: Intrinsic Motivation

- Educators influence motivation through:
  - Language
  - Pacing
  - Empathy

“I disagree...”

“Notice what you just figured out?”

-Sample Lesson Plan: Mastering Basic Algebra for Personal Growth-

-If the "Intrinsic Motivation" principle is not used-



## ALT Classroom Application: The Need to Know

The purpose and process must be clear to adult learners to address their need to understand the reason behind what they're learning and the method they'll use. It centers on:

**Purpose:** Adults are more likely to engage if they understand why a concept is important and how it applies to their real-world needs or goals.

**Process:** Breaking down the "how" in a way that feels transparent and manageable helps learners see each step they

- Adults need to understand **why** they are learning something and **how** it will be used.
- When learning is connected to current or near-future academic, professional, or personal situations, adults are more likely to engage and invest in developing new skills.

# ALT Classroom Application: The Need to Know

- Explain the *why* before the *what*
  - Connect learning to real-life goals
- Make steps visible and manageable
  - Model thinking and process aloud
- Address pacing and frustration compassionately

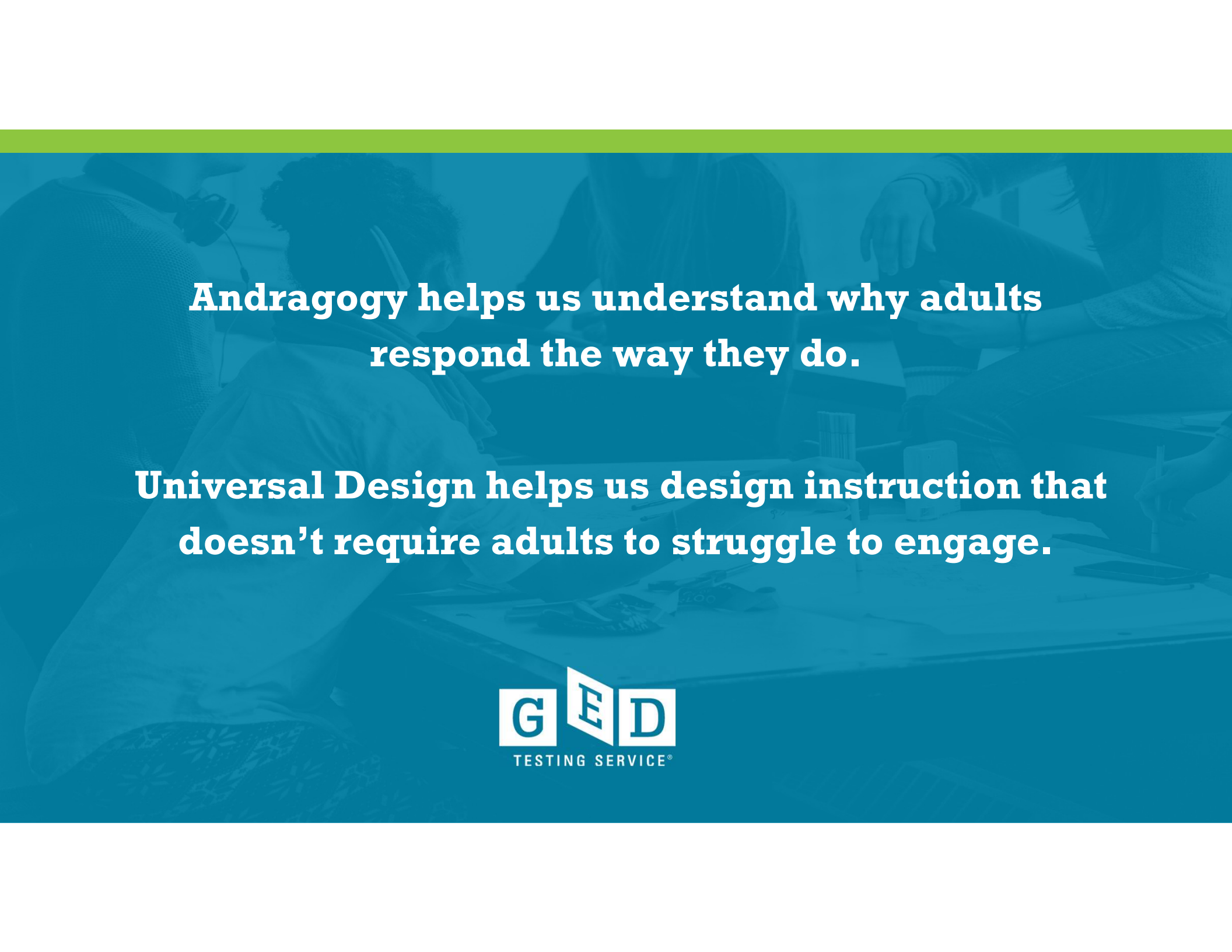
“Here’s what we’re working towards.”

“Here’s why this matters.”

-Sample Lesson Plan: Emphasizing Purpose & Process through Percents-

-If the "why & how" principle is not used-





**Andragogy helps us understand why adults  
respond the way they do.**

**Universal Design helps us design instruction that  
doesn't require adults to struggle to engage.**

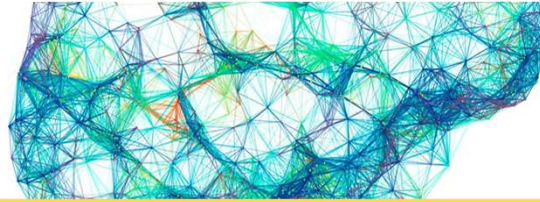


# What is UDL?

*UDL is a framework that provides multiple means of engagement, representation, and action/expression to accommodate diverse learners.*

*\*UDL in adult education is especially important because there are GED learners who may have varied backgrounds and learning needs in your classroom.*

# Principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL)



Based on Neuroscience



Multiple Means of Engagement



Multiple Means of Representation



Multiple Means of Expression/Action

# Insights from Cognitive Neuroscience & Learning Sciences, and Variability of Learners

## Key Brain Network 1: Recognition

These are responsible for perceiving and processing information from the environment, allowing learners to understand and interpret content.

## Key Brain Network 2: Strategic

These facilitate planning and organizing skills and procedures, enabling learners to set goals and devise strategies to achieve them.

## Key Brain Network 3: Affective

These influence motivation and engagement, impacting how learners connect with the material and participate in the learning process.

# The Purpose of UDL

**“The ultimate purpose of UDL is not simply to help learners master a specific body of knowledge, but to master learning itself.”**

**David Rose, CAST's Co-Founder & Chief Education Officer, Emeritus**

**Aim today:** To inspire teachers to create engaging and inclusive learning environments that allow learners to excel.

- **UDL is based on principles that empower everyone to have agency over their own learning.**
- **UDL allows educators and learners to:**
  - 1. Set clear goals**
  - 2. Anticipate environmental barriers**
  - 3. Create meaningful options, and**
  - 4. Fully embrace human variability.**

# Multiple Means of Engagement

## Purpose: To motivate and engage learners.

### Strategy 1:

Choice and autonomy. Enhance learners engagement and personal investment in learning. Choices in how learners learn and demonstrate understanding.

### Strategy 2:

Social Interaction. Encouragement of collaborative learning experiences that build community and interpersonal skills.

### Strategy 4:

Cultural Relevance. Greater recognition of the importance of cultural backgrounds and experiences in motivating learners.

### Strategy 3:

Provide feedback that is constructive and encourages growth.

## Example for Multiple Means of Engagement:

Use real-life scenarios to motivate learners. For instance, discuss budgeting in basic math.



# Multiple Means of Representation (ACCESS)

**Purpose:** To present information in various

## **Strategy 1:**

Use multiple formats (visual, auditory, and kinesthetic) to present content and to cater to different learning preferences.

## **Strategy 2:**

Highlight critical features and concepts.

## **Strategy 4:**

Real-World Contexts. Authentic materials and real-life applications to help learners connect the academic to their everyday experiences.

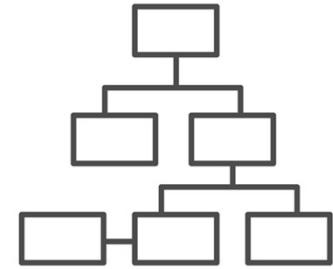
## **Strategy 3:**

Scaffolding Tools. Introduction of tools that help break down complex information into manageable chunks, supporting diverse learners in understanding content.

## **Strategy 5:**

Provide supports like graphic organizers and visual aids.

## Example of Multiple Means of Representation:



Use visual aids like charts or infographics to explain reading comprehension strategies.

Show a graphic organizer to help with understanding story structure.

# Multiple Means of Action & Expression (Different)

## Purpose: To allow learners to express their learning.

### Strategy 1:

Encourage various methods for students to demonstrate their learning (e.g., projects, presentations, or written assignments).

### Strategy 4:

Varied Assessment Methods. Incorporated varied assessment formats that allow learners to express their understanding in ways that suit them best (projects, presentations or digital portfolios).

### Strategy 2:

Tools and Assistive Technologies. Provide tools and resources that assist in task completion (e.g., calculators, speech to text). Learners leverage technology for their learning needs.

### Strategy 5:

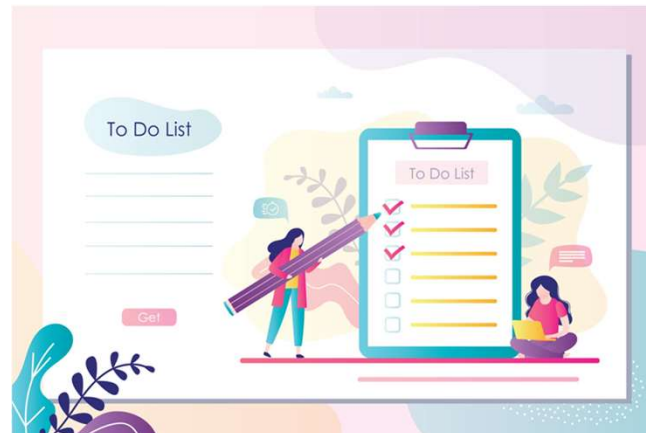
Feedback Mechanisms. Emphasis on formative feedback that guides learners in their progress, promoting a growth mindset.

### Strategy 3:

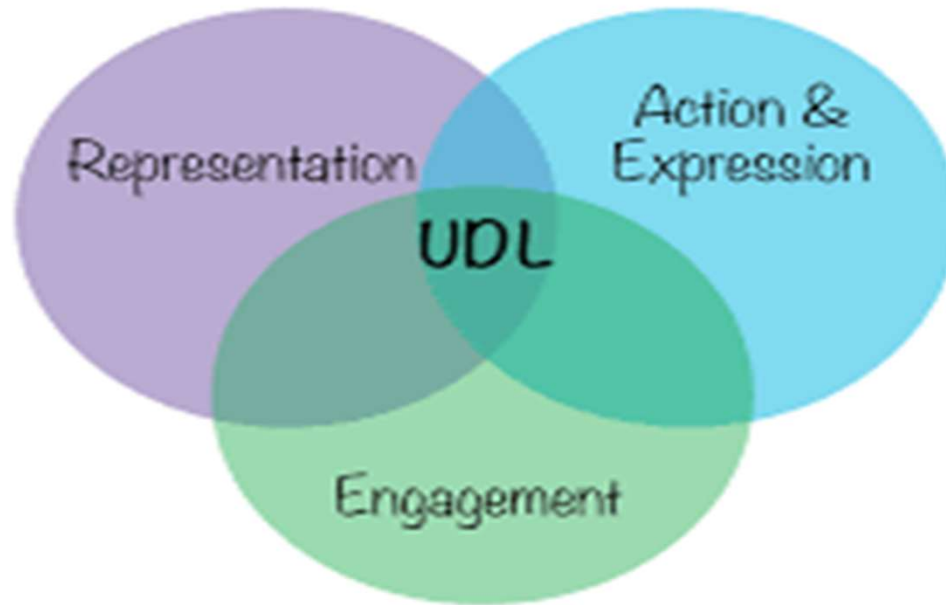
Allow for self-regulation and goal setting.

## Example for Multiple Means of Action & Expression:

Learners demonstrate their own budget or create one as a hands-on activity, or present the budget as an oral presentation.

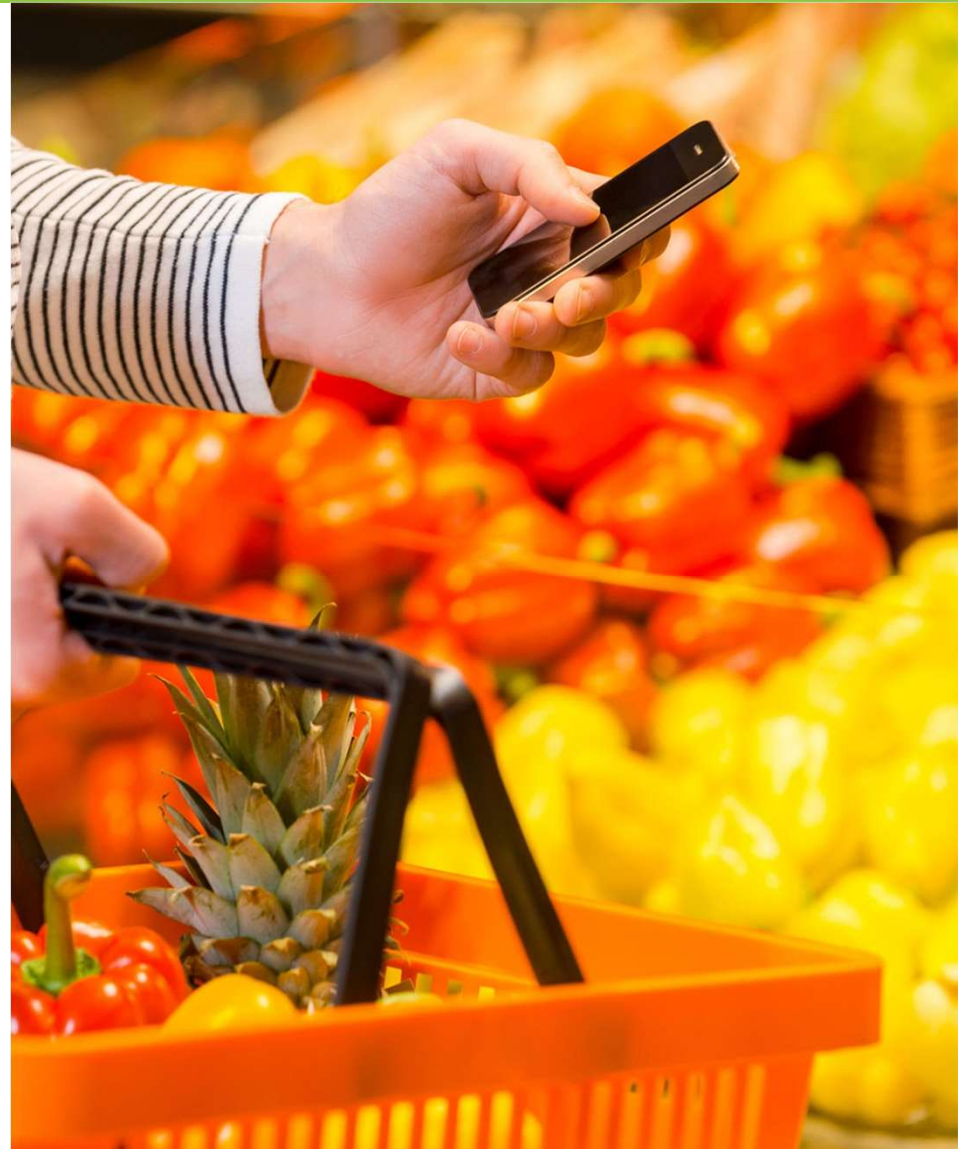


# Representation, Action & Expression, and Engagement = UDL



# Application in Basic Math Engagement

Introduce math problems related to daily life (e.g., calculate discounts while shopping).



# Application in Reading Comprehension Engagement

Use texts relevant to learners' interests  
(e.g., articles on current events, stories  
related to their lives, etc.).



# Representation in Basic Math

Use manipulatives (realia, like blocks or counters) to visualize addition and subtraction.



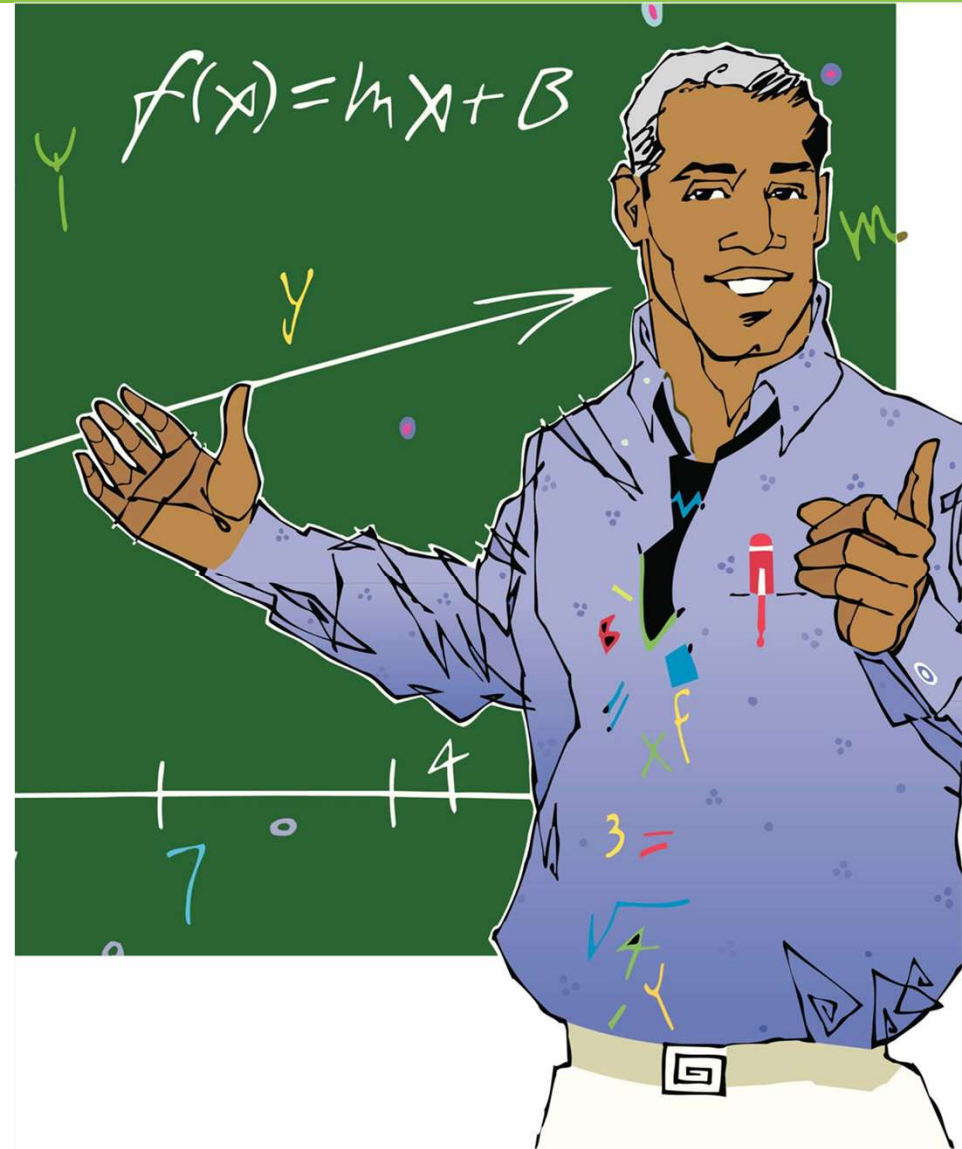
# Representation in Reading

Provide audio versions of texts or use video summaries to cater to different learning styles (chunk if needed).



# Action/Expression in Math

Encourage learners to explain their problem-solving process verbally or through a math journal.



# Action/Expression in Reading

Use discussion groups or role-plays to allow students to express their understanding of the material.



# Key Takeaways...

UDL aims to make learning accessible and effective for all students/learners by providing flexibility in how information is presented and how students express their knowledge.

The emphasis on engagement, representation, and expression helps cater to individual learning differences, making education more inclusive.

# Key Takeaways...

## Engagement

- Centering, affirming, and sustaining learners' interests and identities
- Emphasizing the role of belonging in teaching and learning
- Promoting the role of joy and play for learners and educators alike
- Cultivating empathy and repairing harm with restorative practices

## Representation

- Authentically representing a diversity of identities, perspectives, and narrative as they relate to learners
- Considering perceptions of people, cultures, and languages
- Valuing multiple ways of knowing and making meaning

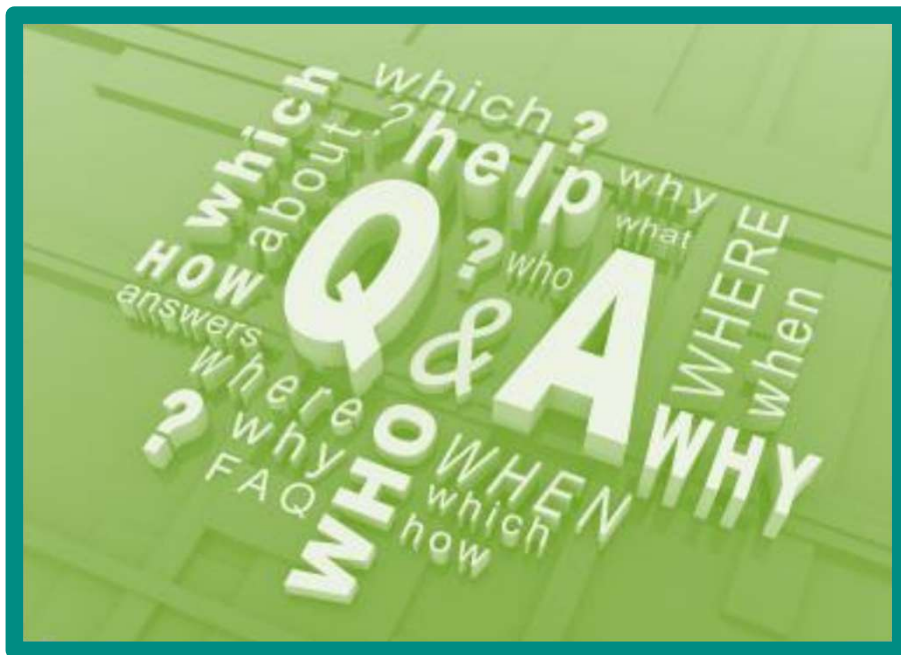
## Action and Expression

- Honoring and valuing a wide variety of forms of communication
- Centering and valuing forms of expression that have been overlooked or ignored by addressing biases
- Challenging exclusionary practices to build more accessible, inclusive spaces and systems

# Resources

- Bracken, S., & Novak, K. (Eds.). (2019). *Transforming Higher Education Through Universal Design for Learning: An International Perspective* (1st ed.). Routledge.
- East Carolina University. (2017). Lead Tutor progress report. Author: Greenville, North Carolina.
- Fovet, F. (Ed.). (2021). [Handbook of Research on Applying Universal Design for Learning Across Disciplines: Concepts, Case Studies, and Practical Implementation](#). IGI Global.
- <https://udlguidelines.cast.org/more/about-guidelines-3-0/>

# Reflections, Questions & Contacts



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# Learner Insights

*GED & Me Mobile App, January 2026*



# Android version of GED & Me launched December 2025

GED & Me™

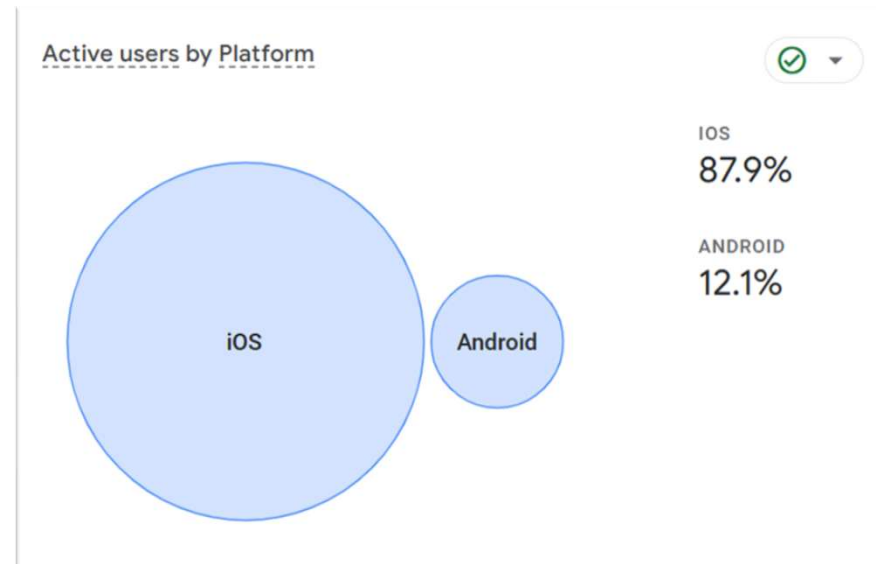
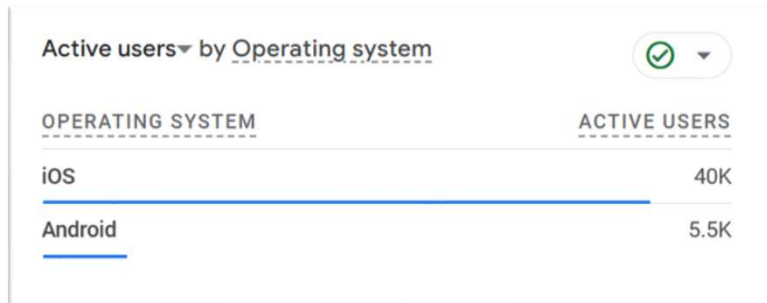
The Official GED® Mobile  
App

DOWNLOAD THE APP

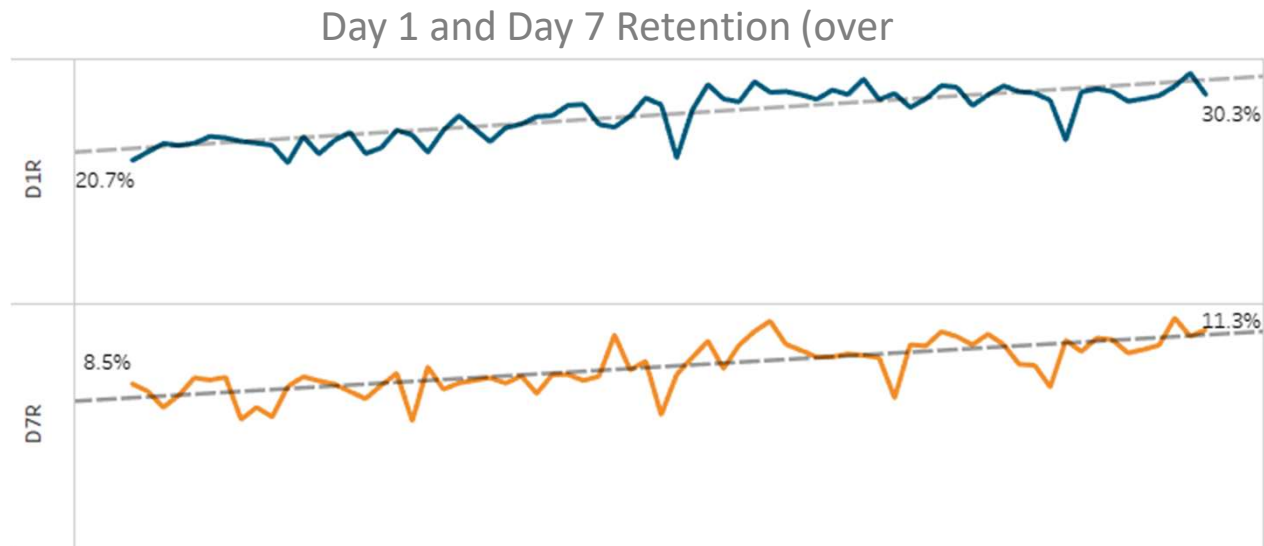
Now available in the App Store and on Google Play.



Dec 26, 2025 – Jan 23, 2026



# Continuing to See Retention Trending Upward



Typical day 1 retention rates for educational apps: **13-14%**

Typical day 7 retention rates for educational apps: **8-10%**

## Retention Metrics

Day 1 Retention

Day 7 Retention

July 2024

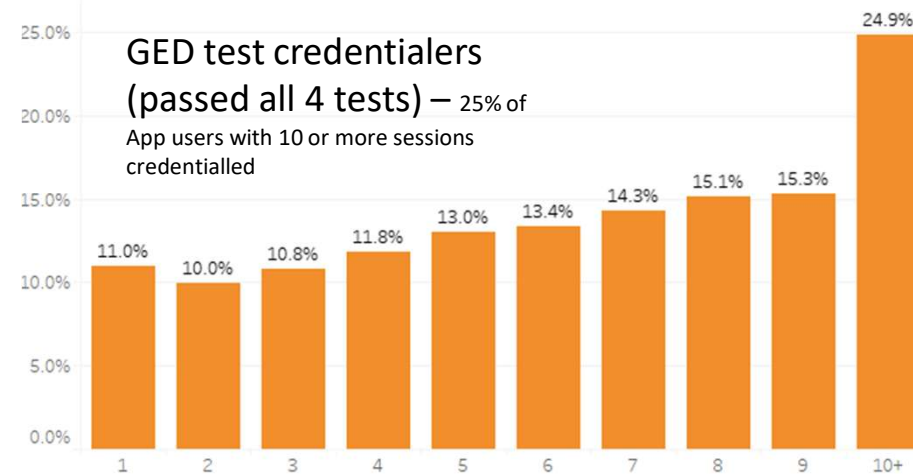
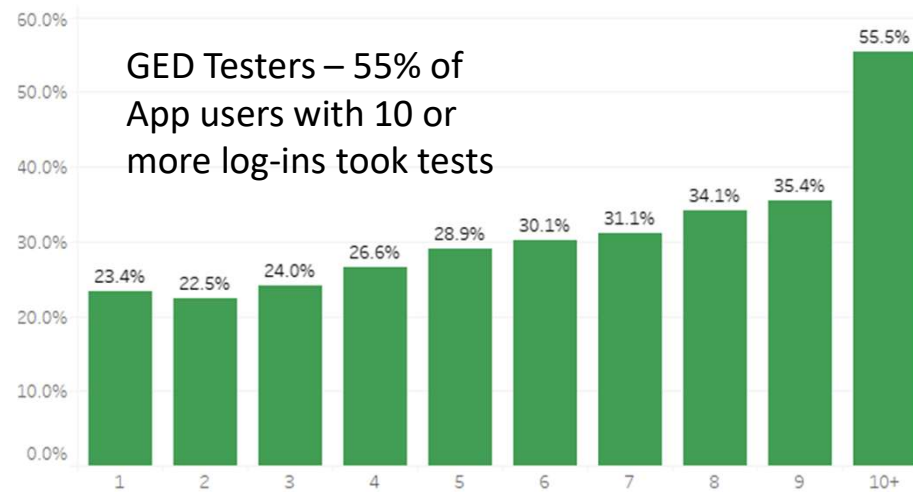
21% →

Nov 2025

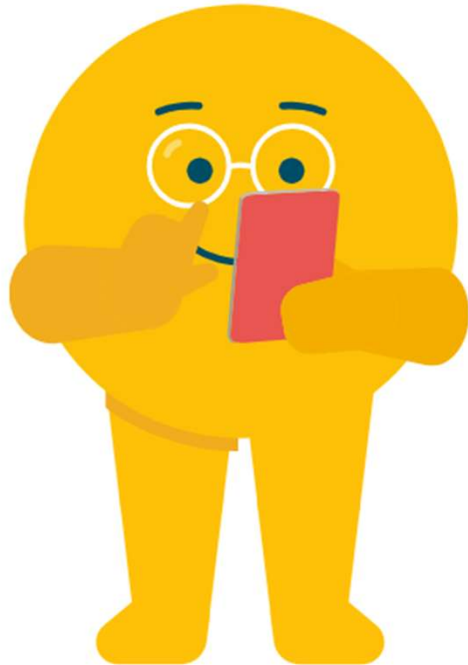
31%

8.5% → 11.3%

# More App Sessions Correlate with Increased Testing & Credentialing

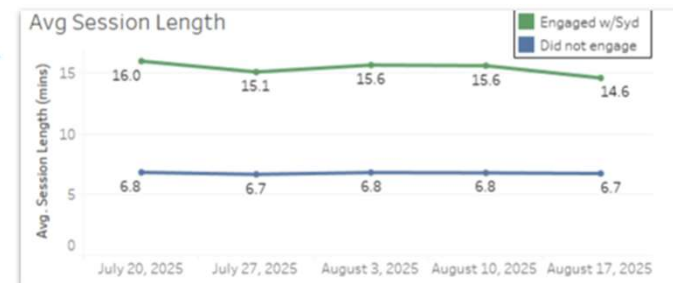


# Syd, the AI Math Tutor used by more than 12,000 learners; AI Tutor for Science coming soon!



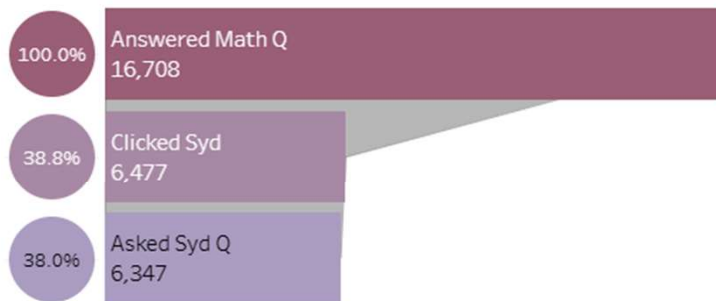
- Average of **6.2 questions** asked to Syd per session.
- Learners who use Syd spend up to **~2.4x more time** on the app than non-Syd learners.
  - Average session length of **15.3 minutes** when engaging with Syd vs. 6.7 minutes when NOT engaging with Syd.
  - Up from average 5.7 mins/session back in Q1 '25.

GED & Me Mobile App: nearly 300,000 downloads; 171,000 users, and 25% of users taking tests within a median of 28 days\*

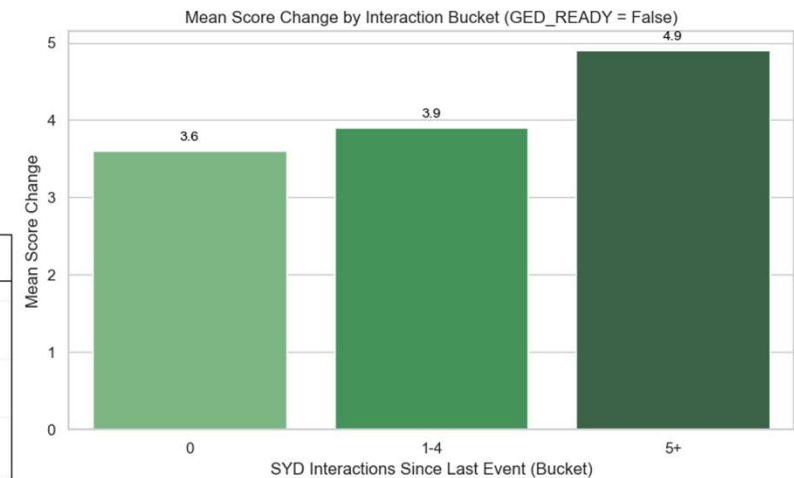
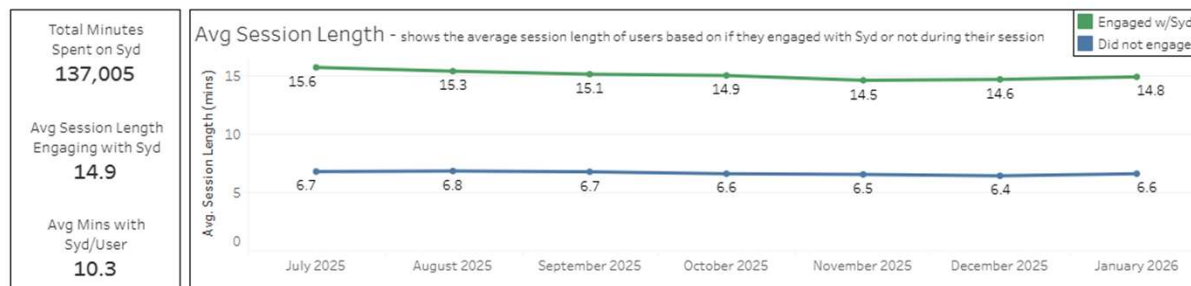


# Users engaging with Syd are seeing longer session lengths and larger score increase

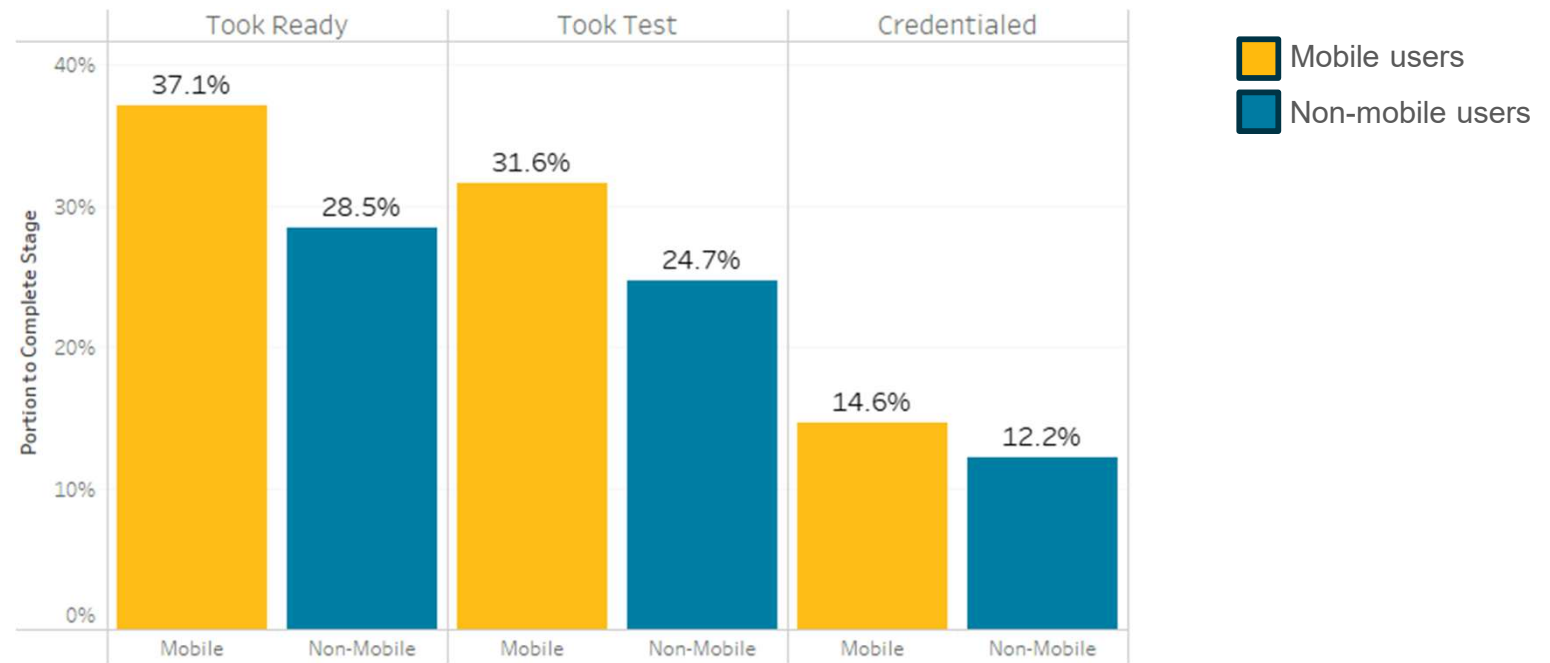
Feature Adoption Funnel



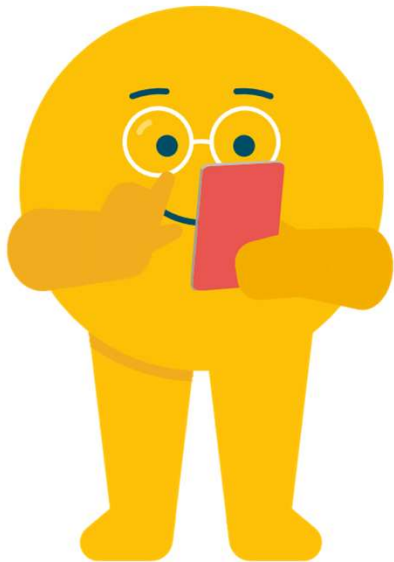
\*Early data suggests learners engaging with Syd gain a higher average score increase from Test -> next Test



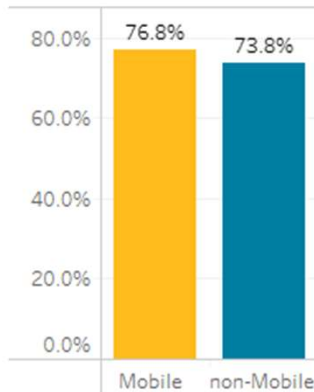
## Mobile App users are taking Readys, GED Tests, and Credentialing at higher rates than non-mobile users



# Mobile App users have higher “first test” pass rate across all subjects (+3% average)

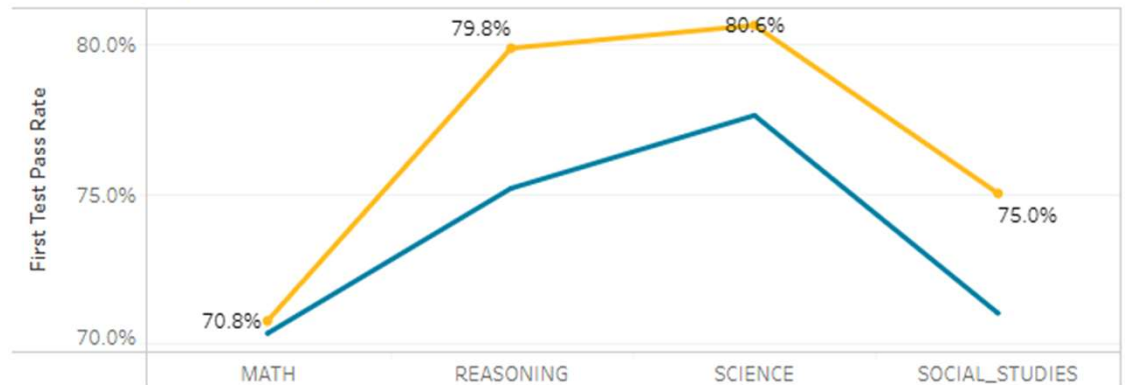


Pass Rate: First Test



First Test: Pass Rate by Subject

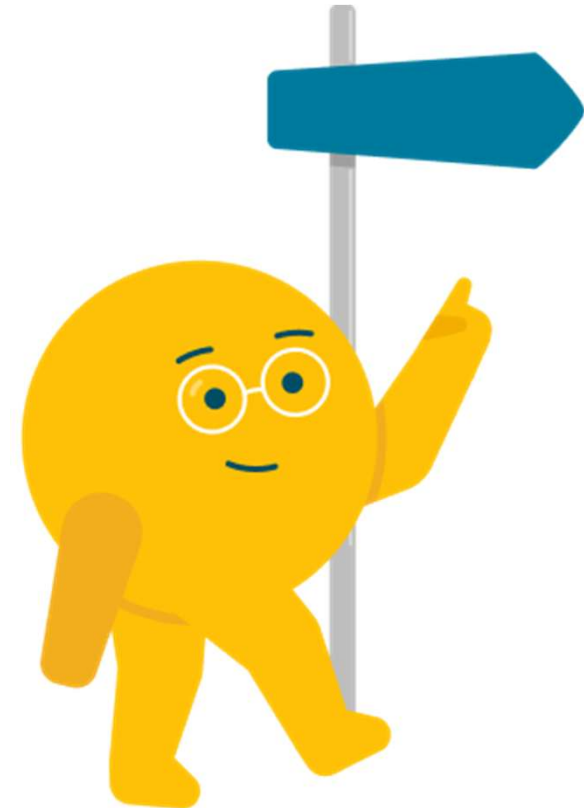
Pass rate by subject comparing only first tests taken per user



# Roadmap for GED & Me this year

## Coming Soon!

- Accessibility features
- Video links
- In-app purchases
- Syd AI Tutor for Science
- More content/practice
- Web App





**See You Next Year!**  
**Atlanta 2026**

July 29-31 | Atlanta Marriott Marquis



# Thank You!

Communicate with GED Testing Service®  
[help@ged.com](mailto:help@ged.com)

