understanding by design

understanding by design is a powerful framework that has transformed the way educators approach curriculum planning and instructional design. Developed by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe, this method emphasizes the importance of starting with the end in mind—focusing on desired learning outcomes before planning lessons and classroom activities. The understanding by design model, often referred to as backward design, ensures that educators create meaningful learning experiences aligned with clear goals and standards. In this article, you will discover the core principles of understanding by design, its three stages, practical strategies for implementation, and the benefits it offers to teachers and students alike. By exploring key concepts, real-world applications, and best practices, you'll gain a comprehensive understanding of how this framework can elevate educational outcomes. Whether you are a teacher, curriculum developer, or administrator, this guide provides valuable insights to help you apply understanding by design in your educational context.

- What is Understanding by Design?
- The Three Stages of Understanding by Design
- Key Principles and Concepts
- Benefits of the Understanding by Design Framework
- Implementing Understanding by Design in the Classroom
- Common Challenges and Solutions
- Best Practices for Effective Curriculum Design
- Conclusion

What is Understanding by Design?

Understanding by design, often abbreviated as UbD, is a research-based framework for curriculum planning that prioritizes the outcomes of learning. Instead of beginning with textbook chapters or activities, educators using UbD start by identifying what students should understand and be able to do at the end of a unit or course. The framework encourages a focus on deep understanding, transfer of knowledge, and authentic assessment, rather than rote memorization or superficial coverage of content. UbD is widely used across grade levels and subject areas, making it a versatile tool for educators seeking to create purposeful and coherent educational experiences.

The approach is grounded in the belief that learners benefit most when instruction is intentionally aligned with clear and meaningful goals. By setting explicit learning targets and designing assessments to measure student understanding, educators can ensure that all aspects of the curriculum work together to support student achievement.

The Three Stages of Understanding by Design

At the core of understanding by design are three distinct stages that guide the curriculum planning process. These stages help educators move from broad learning goals to specific instructional activities, ensuring alignment and coherence throughout the learning experience.

Stage 1: Identify Desired Results

The first stage of UbD involves clarifying what students should know, understand, and be able to do by the end of a unit or course. Educators examine standards, learning objectives, and essential questions to determine the most important outcomes for student learning. This stage requires careful consideration of big ideas and enduring understandings that have lasting value beyond the classroom.

- Define learning goals aligned with standards
- Develop essential questions to guide inquiry
- Identify knowledge and skills students need to master

Stage 2: Determine Acceptable Evidence

In the second stage, educators plan how they will measure whether students have achieved the desired results. This involves designing assessments that go beyond simple recall and require students to demonstrate their understanding in meaningful ways. Authentic assessments, such as projects, performances, and portfolios, are often used to gauge students' ability to apply their learning in new contexts.

- Create performance tasks and rubrics
- Include formative and summative assessments
- Ensure assessments align with learning goals

Stage 3: Plan Learning Experiences and Instruction

The final stage involves developing instructional activities, lessons, and resources that will help students achieve the learning goals. Educators select teaching methods and materials that support diverse learners and actively engage students in the learning process. This stage emphasizes coherence, relevance, and opportunities for student reflection and self-assessment.

- Design engaging and relevant learning activities
- Differentiate instruction to meet diverse needs
- Incorporate opportunities for feedback and reflection

Key Principles and Concepts

Understanding by design is guided by several key principles that distinguish it from traditional curriculum planning. These concepts are essential for educators aiming to create meaningful and effective learning experiences.

Backward Design

Backward design is the foundational concept of UbD. Instead of planning lessons first and assessments later, educators identify the desired outcomes and work backwards to develop assessments and instructional activities. This approach ensures alignment and keeps the focus on what matters most—student understanding and transfer of learning.

Essential Questions

Essential questions are open-ended, thought-provoking inquiries that guide student learning and encourage deeper exploration of key concepts. They help students make connections, think critically, and engage with the curriculum in meaningful ways.

Enduring Understandings

Enduring understandings are the core ideas and principles that have lasting value beyond the classroom. These are the big ideas students should retain long after the specific details fade, shaping their thinking and application of knowledge in real-world contexts.

Benefits of the Understanding by Design Framework

The understanding by design framework offers a wide range of benefits for both teachers and students. By focusing on outcomes and alignment, UbD helps create more effective and engaging learning environments.

Promotes deeper understanding and transfer of knowledge

- Aligns curriculum, assessment, and instruction
- Encourages critical thinking and problem-solving
- Supports differentiated instruction and diverse learners
- Improves clarity and coherence in curriculum planning
- Enhances student motivation and engagement
- Facilitates meaningful assessment and feedback

Implementing Understanding by Design in the Classroom

Successful implementation of understanding by design requires thoughtful planning and collaboration. Educators can apply the UbD framework to develop individual lessons, units, or entire courses, ensuring alignment with school or district standards.

Steps for Applying UbD

The following steps can guide educators in implementing understanding by design:

- 1. Review curriculum standards and learning goals
- 2. Develop essential questions and enduring understandings
- 3. Design authentic assessments and rubrics
- 4. Plan instructional activities and learning experiences
- 5. Differentiate instruction to meet student needs
- 6. Gather evidence of student learning and adjust instruction as needed

Collaboration and Professional Development

Collaborative planning among teachers, curriculum specialists, and administrators is key to successful UbD implementation. Professional development opportunities, such as workshops and coaching, can help educators deepen their understanding of the framework and refine their practice.

Common Challenges and Solutions

While understanding by design offers significant advantages, educators may face challenges when adopting the framework. Recognizing these obstacles and implementing effective solutions can lead to more successful outcomes.

Time Constraints

Planning curriculum using the UbD framework can be time-consuming, especially in the early stages. Schools can address this challenge by providing dedicated planning time and supporting collaborative teams.

Balancing Depth and Coverage

Focusing on deep understanding may require covering fewer topics in greater depth. Educators should prioritize essential content and use essential questions to guide decisions about what to include.

Assessment Design

Creating authentic assessments that truly measure understanding can be complex. Teachers can use rubrics, exemplars, and peer collaboration to improve assessment quality and alignment.

Best Practices for Effective Curriculum Design

To maximize the impact of understanding by design, educators should follow best practices that support student learning and instructional excellence.

- Start with clear learning goals and outcomes
- Use essential questions to frame each unit
- Design assessments that require application and transfer of knowledge
- Incorporate opportunities for student choice and voice
- Regularly reflect on and revise curriculum based on student evidence
- Engage in ongoing professional learning and collaboration

Conclusion

Understanding by design offers a research-based, student-centered approach to curriculum planning that prioritizes meaningful learning outcomes and authentic assessment. By applying the principles of backward design, educators can create coherent, engaging, and effective learning experiences that support student success in diverse educational settings. Embracing the UbD framework helps ensure that teaching and learning are purposeful, aligned, and focused on what truly matters—deep understanding and lifelong learning.

Q: What is understanding by design in education?

A: Understanding by design is a curriculum planning framework that starts with identifying desired learning outcomes and works backward to develop assessments and instructional activities. It focuses on achieving deep understanding and transfer of knowledge rather than rote memorization.

Q: Who developed the understanding by design framework?

A: Understanding by design was developed by educators Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe to guide effective curriculum development and instructional planning.

Q: What are the three stages of understanding by design?

A: The three stages of understanding by design are: (1) identifying desired results, (2) determining acceptable evidence, and (3) planning learning experiences and instruction.

Q: How does understanding by design differ from traditional curriculum planning?

A: Unlike traditional planning, which often begins with activities or textbooks, understanding by design starts with the end goals and designs backward to ensure that all instructional elements are aligned with desired learning outcomes.

Q: Why are essential questions important in understanding by design?

A: Essential questions guide inquiry, stimulate critical thinking, and help students connect learning to broader concepts and real-world applications.

Q: How can teachers implement understanding by design in their classrooms?

A: Teachers can implement UbD by identifying clear learning objectives, creating authentic assessments, designing aligned lessons, differentiating instruction, and reflecting on student evidence

to improve practice.

Q: What are enduring understandings in the context of understanding by design?

A: Enduring understandings are the core ideas students should retain long-term, shaping their thinking and application of knowledge beyond the classroom.

Q: What are some benefits of using understanding by design?

A: Benefits include deeper student understanding, better alignment of curriculum and assessment, increased student engagement, and improved instructional clarity.

Q: What challenges might educators face with understanding by design?

A: Common challenges include time constraints, balancing depth and coverage, and designing authentic assessments. Support and collaboration can help address these issues.

Q: Can understanding by design be applied to any subject or grade level?

A: Yes, understanding by design is a flexible framework that can be adapted to any subject area or grade level, making it widely applicable in diverse educational settings.

Understanding By Design

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Understanding by Design: A Framework for Powerful Learning Experiences

Introduction:

Are you tired of lesson planning that feels like a chaotic scramble? Do you dream of creating

engaging learning experiences that genuinely stick with your students? Then you need to understand Understanding by Design (UbD), a powerful backwards-design framework that empowers educators to craft intentional and effective curricula. This comprehensive guide will explore the core principles of UbD, walk you through its three stages, provide practical examples, and equip you with the tools to transform your teaching. Let's dive into how you can design learning experiences that truly resonate.

What is Understanding by Design (UbD)?

Understanding by Design, developed by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe, is a curriculum framework that prioritizes student understanding over mere content coverage. Instead of starting with activities and assessments, UbD encourages educators to begin with the desired learning outcomes – what students should truly understand – and then work backward to design the most effective learning experiences to achieve those outcomes. This "backward design" approach ensures that every lesson, activity, and assessment directly contributes to the overarching learning goals.

The Three Stages of Understanding by Design:

UbD unfolds in three interconnected stages:

1. Identifying Desired Results (Stage 1):

This initial stage focuses on defining what you want your students to understand, know, and be able to do at the conclusion of the unit or course. This goes beyond simply listing facts; it requires identifying the essential understandings, key knowledge, and crucial skills that students need to master. This stage involves:

Defining Enduring Understandings: These are broad, transferable understandings that students will carry with them long after the unit is over. They are usually phrased as generalizations or insightful conclusions. For example, in a history unit on the American Revolution, an enduring understanding might be: "Major social, political, and economic forces shape historical events and their consequences."

Identifying Essential Questions: These are thought-provoking questions that frame the unit and guide student inquiry. They are open-ended, debatable, and lead to deeper exploration. For the American Revolution unit, an essential question might be: "To what extent were the causes of the American Revolution primarily political or economic?"

Determining Knowledge and Skills: This outlines the specific facts, concepts, and skills students need to acquire to achieve the enduring understandings. In this case, it might include knowledge of key figures, events, and documents, as well as skills like analyzing primary sources and constructing historical arguments.

2. Determining Acceptable Evidence (Stage 2):

This stage focuses on how you will assess student understanding. It's crucial to design assessments that directly measure the enduring understandings, essential questions, and knowledge/skills identified in Stage 1. This might involve:

Performance Tasks: These are complex, authentic tasks that require students to apply their knowledge and skills to solve real-world problems or create meaningful products. Examples include research papers, presentations, debates, and projects.

Other Evidence: This includes quizzes, tests, homework assignments, class discussions, and observations. These assessments should be varied and provide multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate their understanding.

The key is to align assessments with the desired learning outcomes. Assessments shouldn't just measure rote memorization; they should assess students' ability to apply their knowledge, analyze information, and solve problems.

3. Planning Learning Experiences and Instruction (Stage 3):

This final stage focuses on designing engaging and effective learning experiences that lead students toward achieving the desired results. This involves:

Sequencing Learning Activities: Organize lessons and activities to build upon each other, creating a logical progression toward the enduring understandings.

Selecting Instructional Strategies: Choose teaching methods that actively engage students and facilitate deep learning, such as project-based learning, inquiry-based learning, collaborative learning, and differentiated instruction.

Utilizing Resources: Identify appropriate resources, including textbooks, technology, guest speakers, and field trips.

The focus in this stage is on creating a rich learning environment that actively involves students in the learning process.

Benefits of Understanding by Design:

UbD offers numerous benefits, including:

Increased Student Engagement: By focusing on relevant and meaningful learning experiences, UbD increases student motivation and participation.

Improved Learning Outcomes: The structured approach ensures that instruction is purposeful and effective, leading to improved student achievement.

Enhanced Teacher Effectiveness: UbD provides a framework for intentional planning, making teaching more efficient and impactful.

Greater Alignment: By aligning goals, assessments, and activities, UbD ensures that all aspects of the curriculum work together to promote student learning.

Conclusion:

Understanding by Design is not just a methodology; it's a philosophy of teaching that emphasizes deep understanding over superficial knowledge. By working backward from desired outcomes, educators can create powerful learning experiences that truly resonate with students and lead to

lasting learning. Embrace the UbD framework, and watch your teaching transform into a more purposeful, engaging, and effective endeavor.

FAQs:

- 1. Is UbD suitable for all subjects and grade levels? Yes, UbD's principles are adaptable and can be applied across all subjects and grade levels, from elementary school to higher education.
- 2. How much time does it take to plan using UbD? Initially, it might take longer than traditional lesson planning, but the long-term benefits in terms of student learning and teacher efficiency outweigh the initial investment.
- 3. Can I use UbD for individual lessons or only for entire units? While UbD is most effective for larger units, its principles can also be applied to individual lessons to ensure they align with broader learning goals.
- 4. What if my students don't achieve the desired understandings? UbD encourages reflection and adjustment. Analyze assessment data to identify areas for improvement and modify instruction accordingly.
- 5. Where can I find more resources on Understanding by Design? The books "Understanding by Design" and "Assessment for Learning" by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe are excellent resources, along with numerous online articles and workshops.

understanding by design: Understanding by Design Grant P. Wiggins, Jay McTighe, 2005 What is understanding and how does it differ from knowledge? How can we determine the big ideas worth understanding? Why is understanding an important teaching goal, and how do we know when students have attained it? How can we create a rigorous and engaging curriculum that focuses on understanding and leads to improved student performance in today's high-stakes, standards-based environment? Authors Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe answer these and many other questions in this second edition of Understanding by Design. Drawing on feedback from thousands of educators around the world who have used the UbD framework since its introduction in 1998, the authors have greatly revised and expanded their original work to guide educators across the K-16 spectrum in the design of curriculum, assessment, and instruction. With an improved UbD Template at its core, the book explains the rationale of backward design and explores in greater depth the meaning of such key ideas as essential questions and transfer tasks. Readers will learn why the familiar coverageand activity-based approaches to curriculum design fall short, and how a focus on the six facets of understanding can enrich student learning. With an expanded array of practical strategies, tools, and examples from all subject areas, the book demonstrates how the research-based principles of Understanding by Design apply to district frameworks as well as to individual units of curriculum. Combining provocative ideas, thoughtful analysis, and tested approaches, this new edition of Understanding by Design offers teacher-designers a clear path to the creation of curriculum that ensures better learning and a more stimulating experience for students and teachers alike.

understanding by design: The Understanding by Design Guide to Creating High-Quality Units Grant Wiggins, Jay McTighe, 2011-03-11 The Understanding by Design Guide to Creating High-Quality Units offers instructional modules on the basic concepts and elements of Understanding by Design (UbD), the backward design approach used by thousands of educators to create curriculum units and assessments that focus on developing students' understanding of important ideas. The eight modules are organized around the UbD Template Version 2.0 and feature

components similar to what is typically provided in a UbD design workshop, including—* Discussion and explanation of key ideas in the module; * Guiding exercises, worksheets, and design tips; * Examples of unit designs; * Review criteria with prompts for self-assessment; and * A list of resources for further information. This guide is intended for K-16 educators—either individuals or groups—who may have received some training in UbD and want to continue their work independently; those who've read Understanding by Design and want to design curriculum units but have no access to formal training; graduate and undergraduate students in university curriculum courses; and school and district administrators, curriculum directors, and others who facilitate UbD work with staff. Users can go through the modules in sequence or skip around, depending on their previous experience with UbD and their preferred curriculum design style or approach. Unit creation, planning, and adaptation are easier than ever with the accompanying downloadable resources, including the UbD template set up as a fillable PDF form, additional worksheets, examples, and FAQs about the module topics that speak to UbD novices and veterans alike.

understanding by design: Using Understanding by Design in the Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Classroom Amy J. Heineke, Jay McTighe, 2018-07-11 How can today's teachers, whose classrooms are more culturally and linguistically diverse than ever before, ensure that their students achieve at high levels? How can they design units and lessons that support English learners in language development and content learning—simultaneously? Authors Amy Heineke and Jay McTighe provide the answers by adding a lens on language to the widely used Understanding by Design® framework (UbD® framework) for curriculum design, which emphasizes teaching for understanding, not rote memorization. Readers will learn the components of the UbD framework; the fundamentals of language and language development; how to use diversity as a valuable resource for instruction by gathering information about students' background knowledge from home, community, and school; how to design units and lessons that integrate language development with content learning in the form of essential knowledge and skills; and how to assess in ways that enable language learners to reveal their academic knowledge. Student profiles, real-life classroom scenarios, and sample units and lessons provide compelling examples of how teachers in all grade levels and content areas use the UbD framework in their culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms. Combining these practical examples with findings from an extensive research base, the authors deliver a useful and authoritative guide for reaching the overarching goal: ensuring that all students have equitable access to high-quality curriculum and instruction.

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understanding by design: Integrating Differentiated Instruction and Understanding by Design Carol Ann Tomlinson, Jay McTighe, 2006-01-15 Teachers struggle every day to bring quality instruction to their students. Beset by lists of content standards and accompanying high-stakes accountability tests, many educators sense that both teaching and learning have been redirected in

ways that are potentially impoverishing for those who teach and those who learn. Educators need a model that acknowledges the centrality of standards but also ensures that students truly understand content and can apply it in meaningful ways. For many educators, Understanding by Design addresses that need. Simultaneously, teachers find it increasingly difficult to ignore the diversity of the learners who populate their classrooms. Few teachers find their work effective or satisfying when they simply serve up a curriculum—even an elegant one—to students with no regard for their varied learning needs. For many educators, Differentiated Instruction offers a framework for addressing learner variance as a critical component of instructional planning. In this book the two models converge, providing readers fresh perspectives on two of the greatest contemporary challenges for educators: crafting powerful curriculum in a standards-dominated era and ensuring academic success for the full spectrum of learners. Each model strengthens the other. Understanding by Design is predominantly a curriculum design model that focuses on what we teach. Differentiated Instruction focuses on whom we teach, where we teach, and how we teach. Carol Ann Tomlinson and Jay McTighe show you how to use the principles of backward design and differentiation together to craft lesson plans that will teach essential knowledge and skills for the full spectrum of learners. Connecting content and kids in meaningful ways is what teachers strive to do every day. In tandem, UbD and DI help educators meet that goal by providing structures, tools, and guidance for developing curriculum and instruction that bring to students the best of what we know about effective teaching and learning.

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understanding by design: The Fundamentals of Understanding by Design (Quick Reference Guide) Jay McTighe, 2020-08-05 Millions of teachers worldwide use the Understanding by Design® (UbD) curriculum planning framework to create units of instruction that develop and deepen student learning. This quick reference guide from UbD co-creator Jay McTighe covers UbD's key tenets and three-stage backward design process and introduces the framework's design templates and quality standards. It also explains key vocabulary and explores essential aspects of unit construction, including* Focusing instruction and assessment on big ideas and essential questions;* Creating authentic performance tasks that reveal evidence of understanding; and* Designing meaningful learning events that help students acquire targeted knowledge and skills, understand important ideas, and be prepared to transfer those understandings to meet new challenges in and beyond the classroom. Featuring FAQs, indicators of success, and links to additional resources, The Fundamentals of Understanding by Design is for anyone looking to get started with UbD and for current users seeking a handy resource to keep their design work on track. 8.5 x 11 3-panel foldout guide (6 pages), laminated for extra durability and 3-hole-punched for binder storage.

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understanding by design: Equity by Design Mirko Chardin, Katie Novak, 2020-07-20 Our calling is to drop our egos, commit to removing barriers, and treat our learners with the unequivocal respect and dignity they deserve. --Mirko Chardin and Katie Novak When it comes to the hard work of reconstructing our schools into places where every student has the opportunity to succeed, Mirko Chardin and Katie Novak are absolutely convinced that teachers should serve as our primary architects. And by teachers they mean legions of teachers working in close collaboration. After all, it's teachers who design students' learning experiences, who build student relationships . . . who ultimately have the power to change the trajectory of our students' lives. Equity by Design is intended to serve as a blueprint for teachers to alter the all-too-predictable outcomes for our historically under-served students. A first of its kind resource, the book makes the critical link between social justice and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) so that we can equip students (and teachers, too) with the will, skill, and collective capacity to enact positive change. Inside you'll find: Concrete strategies for designing and delivering a culturally responsive, sustainable, and equitable framework for all students Rich examples, case studies, and implementation spotlights of educators, students (including Parkland survivors), and programs that have embraced a social justice imperative Evidence-based application of best practices for UDL to create more inclusive and equitable classrooms A flexible format to facilitate use with individual teachers, teacher teams, and as the basis for whole-school implementation Every student, Mirko and Katie insist, deserves the opportunity to be successful regardless of their zip code, the color of their skin, the language they speak, their sexual and/or gender identity, and whether or not they have a disability. Consider Equity by Design a critical first step forward in providing that all-important opportunity. Also From Corwin: Hammond/Culturally Responsive Teaching & the Brain: 9781483308012 Moore/The Guide for White Women Who Teach Black Boys: 9781506351681 France/Reclaiming Professional Learning: 9781544360669

understanding by design: Assessment and Student Success in a Differentiated Classroom Carol A. Tomlinson, Tonya R. Moon, 2013 Carol Ann Tomlinson and Tonya R. Moon take an in-depth look at assessment and show how differentiation can improve the process in all grade levels and subject areas. After discussing differentiation in general, the authors focus on how differentiation applies to various forms of assessment-pre-assessment, formative assessment, and summative assessment--and to grading and report cards. Readers learn how differentiation can --Capture student interest and increase motivation --Clarify teachers' understanding about what is most important to teach -- Enhance students' and teachers' belief in student learning capacity; and --Help teachers understand their students' individual similarities and differences so they can reach more students, more effectively Throughout, Tomlinson and Moon emphasize the importance of maintaining a consistent focus on the essential knowledge, understandings, and skills that all students must acquire, no matter what their starting point. Detailed scenarios illustrate how assessment differentiation can occur in three realms (student readiness, interest, and learning style or preference) and how it can improve assessment validity and reliability and decrease errors and teacher bias. Grounded in research and the authors' teaching experience, Assessment and Student Success in a Differentiated Classroom outlines a common-sense approach that is both thoughtful and practical, and that empowers teachers and students to discover, strive for, and achieve their true potential. This is PDF Format E-book: ISBN 978-1-4166-1773-0

understanding by design: Understanding by Design Guide to Advanced Concepts in Creating and Reviewing Units Grant Wiggins, Jay McTighe, 2012-03-16 The Understanding by

Design Guide to Advanced Concepts in Creating and Reviewing Units offers instructional modules on how to refine units created using Understanding by Design (UbD) and how to effectively review the units using self-assessment and peer review, along with observation and supervision. The Guide builds upon its companion and predecessor, The Understanding by Design Guide to Creating High-Quality Units, and like the earlier volume, it presents the following components for each module: * Narrative discussion of key ideas in the module * Exercises, worksheets, and design tips * Examples of unit designs * Review criteria for self- and peer assessment * References for further information UbD is based on a backward design approach and is used by thousands of educators to create curriculum units and assessments that focus on developing students' understanding of essential ideas and helping students attain important skills. The Guide is intended for use by individuals or groups in K-16 education (teachers, school and district administrators, curriculum directors, graduate and undergraduate students in curriculum, and others) who want to further develop their skill in UbD. Users can work through the modules in order or pick and choose, depending on their interests and needs. Additional resources, including worksheets, examples, and FAQs, are available as downloadable forms (including fillable UbD templates that can be saved electronically), making it easy for UbD practitioners to advance their understanding and their ability to create curriculum that leads to deep, meaningful learning.

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at all grade levels and in all content areas Includes easy-to-implement classroom strategies The book also comes with a DVD of video clips featuring Visible Thinking in practice in different classrooms.

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and it surveys such applications as natural language processing, speech recognition, computer vision, online recommendation systems, bioinformatics, and videogames. Finally, the book offers research perspectives, covering such theoretical topics as linear factor models, autoencoders, representation learning, structured probabilistic models, Monte Carlo methods, the partition function, approximate inference, and deep generative models. Deep Learning can be used by undergraduate or graduate students planning careers in either industry or research, and by software engineers who want to begin using deep learning in their products or platforms. A website offers supplementary material for both readers and instructors.

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