

Image Descriptions, Alt-Text and Video Captions

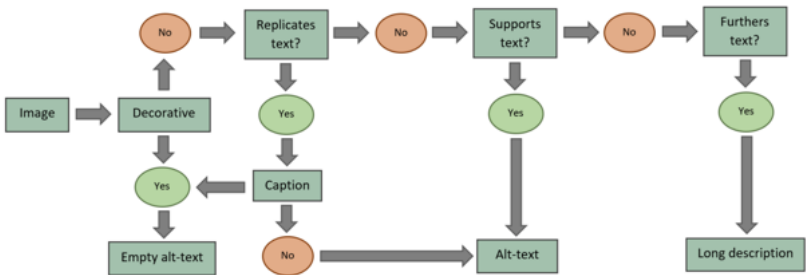


1 What is alt-text?

‘Alt-text’ provides a text-based alternative for figures in digital products. Users of our digital products who are visually impaired can use a screen reader to access the words and numbers in the content, but screen readers cannot interpret the images. When a screen reader comes to an image, it reads the alt-text when this is available.

Please consider submitting image descriptions to use as alt-text for each image in your work to increase accessibility of the digital product. As the author, you are best placed to describe the images in the context of the discussion.

2 When to provide alt-text



Alt text is most important when it supports, but does not replicate, text. If it furthers the text, a long description is better.

3 How to write good image descriptions

The length of the image description depends on the context and detail of the image, and how detailed the captions are.

The alt-text should be a clear description of the image and not evaluate or interpret the image: this would be done in the figure caption and main text. The alt-text should not repeat the caption, it should describe the image in the context of the surrounding text.

The description is heard, not seen. One tip is to imagine describing the image to someone over the phone.

If the image is purely decorative it should have no alt-text – please indicate ‘alt-text not necessary’ in your listing.

Tips on writing good image descriptions:

- Keep sentence structure simple for the sake of clarity. Be careful of punctuation, keeping sentences and punctuation simple.
- For charts, graphs, and diagrams, include the type of diagram if helpful. For example, ‘A bar chart depicts...’ or ‘A flowchart of...’
- It might be useful to ask yourself the following questions:
 - What is the context of the image?
 - How does the image fit in with the text?
 - What is the focus of the image?
 - What, where, and why? What is happening in the image, where is this happening, and why?
 - Are there any surrounding elements and objects that are relevant and key to the understanding of the image?
- If there is a lot of text or data in the figure, consider how you will structure this information to convey all-important context. It might be useful to include bullet points.
- Consider trying out a screen reader to see how your alt-text would sound. Apple does a free one for desktop computers and phones, and there are others available that can be downloaded for free.

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How to submit your alt-text captions

The descriptions should be provided in a separate Word file as part of the final submission.

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What to bear in mind

Alt-text guidelines	
Guidelines	Comment
If an image is decorative, set the tag to null.	If an image serves no purpose at all, then do not describe it – this will allow the user to access and review content more efficiently. Be careful, though, not to exclude context images.
Limit alt-text to a maximum of 150 characters, where possible.	Image descriptions should be succinct and provide only the information required to provide context (if the image is a context image) or for the task to be completed.
Do not use characters or symbols that cannot be read by screen readers.	Please see Appendix 1 for a list of characters and symbols that cannot be read by screen readers.
Avoid tautology – you do not need to start your tag with “an image of ...” or “a picture of...”	Screen readers announce images to their users, so there is no need to repeat this in the tag, unless the figure is a graph or diagram.
Ensure that spelling in tags is correct.	Screen readers are typically less forgiving of typographical errors than the human eye – there is less scope to process and comprehend the error.
Write descriptions using simple sentences – don’t use subclauses or parenthetical statements.	The punctuation marks used for parenthetical statements (brackets and dashes, for example) can result in interruption or ambiguity.
Do not write words in capital letters.	If a word is comprised of upper case letters then screen readers will read each capital letter separately, as if it were an acronym.

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Samples

**Lithograph (half-tone example)**

Alt-text: A black and white lithograph of two young blind people. Oliver Caswell stands to the left of Laura Bridgman. Both Oliver and Laura are standing facing forwards, with their heads inclined towards each other. Oliver's eyes are closed. Laura wears dark glasses. They are holding a book, Laura's right hand is guiding Oliver's right hand over the book, his index finger touching the embossed letters on the paper. The print is inscribed with Oliver Caswell and Laura Bridgman's signatures.

Figure Caption: W. Sharp after A. Fisher, Oliver Caswell and Laura Bridgman, lithograph (1844). Wellcome Library, London (ref).

V0015876). Copyrighted work available under Creative Commons Attribution only licence CC BY 4.0

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

More samples

Including diagrams, technical graphs, etc.:

<https://www.textboxdigital.com/textgallery>

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Appendix

Video Captions

Videos should be accessible so that all users can access their content. To increase the accessibility of your video, please consider including captions. Descriptive captions and a transcript of dialogue or narration describe the audio content of videos to those with a hearing impairment, and improve comprehension of the content.

Most video editors have captioning capabilities but there are also free captioning tools available online, for example

<https://www.kapwing.com/subtitles>

Character and symbol guide for screen

Symbol names	Symbols	Comments
You can use these symbols: they are treated consistently and they are safe to use		
Ampersand, at symbol, forward slash, major currency symbols, percentage sign	& @ / £ € ¥ \$ %	These symbols are always safe to use.
You can use these symbols: they are not treated consistently, but they are safe to use		
Period, comma, colon, semicolon, question mark, exclamation mark	. , ; ? !	These symbols could be read aloud, or they could be indicated by a pause. The latter treatment means their purpose may not always be explicit.

Symbol names	Symbols	Comments
These symbols are treated inconsistently and they may cause ambiguity		
Brackets, quotation marks, dashes, ellipses	() [] “” ’ -- ...	These symbols could be read aloud, or they could be indicated by a pause. The latter treatment means their purpose may not always be explicit.
Symbols and characters which are not read by screen readers and which cannot be used		
Plus, minus, multiplication, divide, equals, asterisk	+ - ÷ × = *	These symbols cannot be used.

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