

Alt Text for Images

What Is Alt Text

Alt text, or alternative text, is a written description of an image, chart, graph, or other visual element on a web page or PDF. It makes visual content accessible to people who use assistive technologies like screen readers. When a screen reader encounters alt text, it reads the text aloud so the user can understand the content of the image. Alt text is similar to a caption but is intended to be more descriptive.

Why Do We Need Alt Text

Alt text allows visually impaired people to navigate a web page or PDF. It is vital for those without high-speed internet, those using text-based browsers, and situations where images fail to load or display correctly. It is also required for compliance with the European Accessibility Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act guidelines.

Guidelines for Writing Alt Text

1. **Include the type of image.** Indicate whether the image is a logo, illustration, painting, photograph, graph, map, or cartoon.
2. **Be concise.** Alt text should typically be a short sentence or two, usually no more than 150 characters. It should not repeat the information in the caption. If a longer description is needed, that can be accommodated.
3. **Describe the image clearly and use present tense.** Don't repeat what's already in the text or the caption. Instead, imagine you're reading aloud and describing the image to someone else. Explain what the image shows and why it matters. If needed, describe the image's setting, colors, emotions, or relative sizes. Spell out numbers, contractions, and non-Latin letters. Do not add phrases such as "image of".

Examples of Alt Text

Bad alt text: A graph

Okay alt text: A graph of the global child mortality rate since 1950

Good alt text: A graph of the global child mortality rate from 1950 to 2012, showing a downward trajectory

How Do I Provide Alt Text

Please provide alt text for each of your images in a separate list corresponding to your captions, either in MS Word or on a spreadsheet.

More Resources

[Ask UP - What is alt text?](#)

[Penn State - Accessibility and alt text](#)

[University of South Carolina - Digital Accessibility Examples of Alt text](#)

[University of Michigan - Describing Visual Resources Toolkit](#)

[University of Michigan Press - Sample Textual Descriptions for Illustrative Materials \(PDF\)](#)