

A Guide to Alternative Text

Background

When providing resources to our students we want to ensure that they are accessible to everyone. It is not just the law; it is also the right thing to do. These resources can come in various forms, not just text.

Section 508 states...

A text equivalent for every non-text element shall be provided (e.g., via "alt", long description, or in element content).

What is alternative text?

Alternative text¹ is a descriptive text for any non-text based elements. Non-text elements include: images, graphs, infographics, audio, multimedia, videos and more.

Function of alternative text:

- “It is read by screen readers² in place of images allowing the content and function of the image to be accessible to those with visual or certain cognitive disabilities.
- It is displayed in place of the image in browsers if the image file is not loaded or when the user has chosen not to view images.
- It provides a semantic meaning and description to images, which can be read by search engines or be used to later determine the content of the image from page context alone.” (WebAIM, 2015)

¹Alternative text refers to the text equivalent for any image, not just alt attribute.

²Screen readers are software programs that allow blind or visually impaired users to read the text that is displayed on the computer screen with a speech synthesizer or braille display.

Purpose of Handout

This handout is not intended to be all-inclusive, but is meant as a guide to get you started on your way with alternative text. The information below will provide some guidelines for adding alternative descriptions. In this handout we will go over alternative text for:

- Images
- Audio & Video

Images

When developing alternative text for images it is important to know the context and function of that image. It should make sense in the context of the surrounding text and should not offer meaningless, repetitive, or unnecessary information.

Only the instructor knows the information that the image is supposed to convey (i.e., what students are supposed to learn from the image). An image used in two different subjects may not have the same alternative text to describe it.

Alternative text can be presented in different ways:

- Using the *alt* attribute of the image element
- Within the text adjacent the image or non-text based element
- For longer descriptions a link that references a separate page is used

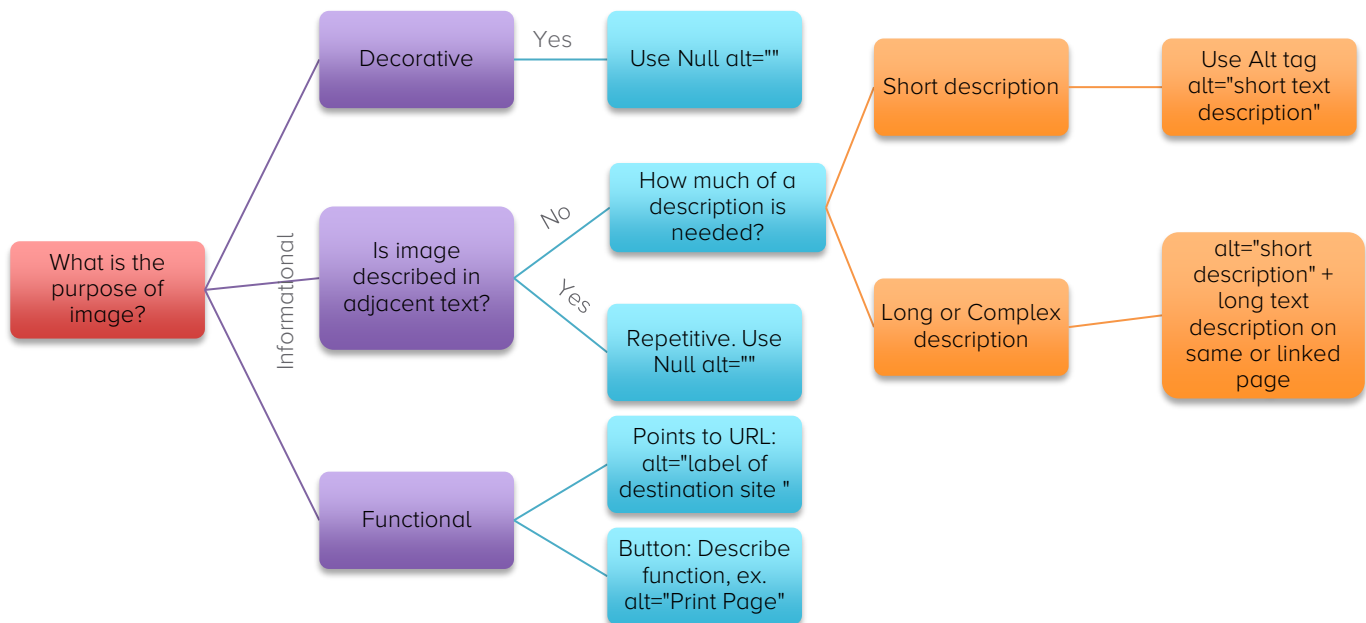
Questions to ask when creating alternative text:

- Why is the image there?
- Who is the intended audience?
- If there is no description what will the viewer miss?

Keep in **mind context, context, context, and... context of image!**

- The alternative text for the same image in various sites may differ based upon the context and surroundings of the image itself.
 - Think about it. An image can be used for different subjects to present a different set of information.
- Decorative images that have no informative purpose should have a null alt text (`alt=""`)

Simplified Alternative Text Decision Tree for Images



Images Requiring Short Description

If your image requires a short description, then you will use the alt tag for that image.

Alt Attribute Guidelines from WebAIM

- **Be accurate and equivalent.** What is the image conveying, keep in mind context.
- **Be succinct.** No more than 125 characters or up to 17 words.
- **Is not redundant.** Does not repeat information that is found in the text around the image.
- Do not include the following in your alt description, as screen reading software will already identify it as image:
 - “image of”....
 - “graphic of”...
- If the image is text then the alt-text should (usually) be the same as the text in the image.
- If the image is active (link, button, area) the text alternative is the function of the image

What should I do when..





- There is a background image > Apply a null (Alt=“”)
- There is a signature added to image > Add word ‘signature’ followed by name
- Images are ungrouped/tiled/layered > Group separate images into one if they are logically presented as one. Then apply appropriate Alt text

What to avoid

- Avoid too long or wordy text descriptions
- Filenames and paths in place of alt-text
- Not enough, or too much detail
- Color meaning embedded in alt-text only.

Examples

Visit [WebAIM](#) for more examples.

Decorative	Functional Link	Image that is Text	Short Description
 <p>Image has no function</p>	 <p>Image pointing to UTRGV website</p>		
alt=“”	alt=“The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Home Page”	alt=“The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley”	alt=“Juan Felipe Herrera, on stage reading his poetry to audience of students and educators.”
	Screen reader will read “link to The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Home Page”	Screen reader will read “Image of The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley”	Screen reader will read “Image of Juan Felipe Herrera, on stage reading his...”

Long Description

An image may require a fairly long description to properly describe the content. In this case the recommendation is to:

Alt tag with Short Summary + include link to long text description

Complex Images

Complex images are things like charts, graphs, statistical data, and more used to convey complex information to the learner. They generally need

- What you will need to do:
 - Best solution is to include a thorough description of the complex image in the content of the page, immediately before or after the image.
 - Or provide a link to another webpage with a thorough description of complex image + along with alt tag with short summary
- What to include:
 - Give the purpose and function of the graph, chart within the context of the surrounding information.
 - Include major trends of data points highlighted
 - Include information essential to understanding the image

Note: Color should not be used as the only visual means of conveying information, indicating an action, prompting a response, or distinguishing a visual element.

Graphs

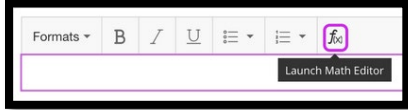
- Create a text alternative that illustrates the main points of the graph, keeping in mind context. Things to include:
 - a. Alt tag: Provide alt tag with short description
 - b. Summary: Provide a summary of the graph including trends and main point of graph (in long description)
 - c. Properly Coded Table: Include table with data points. Make sure to identify headings within table (in long description)
- Not every single aspect of the graph needs to be provided. Only those relevant to the learner.

Infographics

- Create a text alternative that presents the same information that is in the infographic. Things to consider:
 - Purpose: Determine what parts of the infographic need to be explained in text form.
 - Hierarchy: Group the text into logical parts that follow the order presented visually by the infographic.
 - Meaningful images: Ensure that any context provided by visual cues in the infographic is included as alt text if it is pertinent to the information that is being communicated.
- Decide whether you are going to include the text alternative on the same page as the infographic or on a separate page. Provide a link *before* the infographic to the text alternative with meaningful link text such as "[text alternative for \[infographic title\]](#)".
- Before the text alternative, include a heading for the text alternative, such as 'Text alternative'

Math Equations

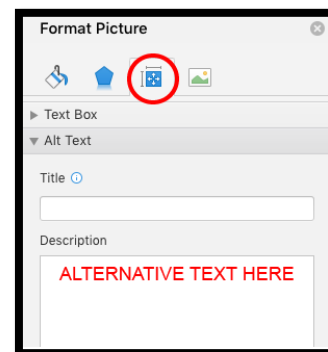
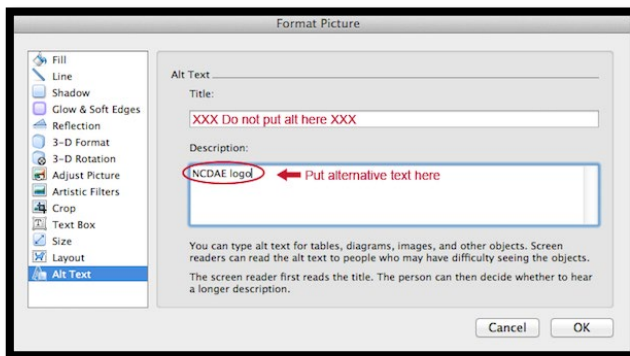
- For MS Word, use the [MathType plugin](#) to create math and science equations, formulas and notations. **Do not use Microsoft's equation editor!**
- If you convert to a PDF or export to a webpage, save the original MS Word source document which Disability Services may ask for.
- In Blackboard, the math editor is written by WIRIS and based on standards like MathML. Once you enter the equation and accept, the correct alt tag is automatically generated.



How to insert Alt text for images in:

Microsoft Word or PowerPoint

1. Right-click on the image and select Format Picture. A dialog box will appear.
2. Select the Alt Text option in the sidebar. Enter the appropriate alternative text in the Description field, NOT the Title field.



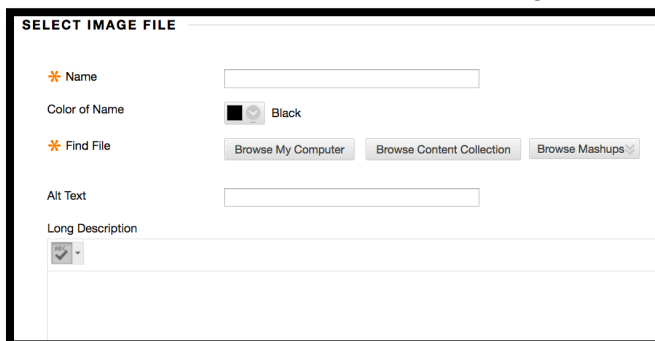
OR

Instructions and images will vary dependent of Microsoft Version used.


Blackboard

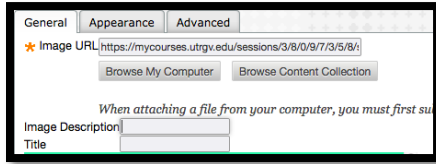
You will find the *Alt* Text box in various places in Blackboard depending on what tool is used and where you are adding the image.

1. Using Create Image under Build Content
 - a. Alt Text field box provided as well as Long Description

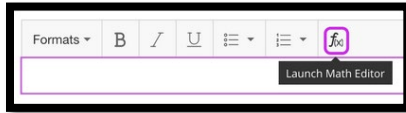


2. Using Item under Build Content

- a. Select Insert Image  in editor
- b. In the General Tab, enter alt text under Image Description



3. Using the Math Editor function in Blackboard. This tool will automatically provide the alternative text of what you enter.



Multimedia, Audio & Video

Audio-Only

- Provide a text transcript equivalent for all audio content in an accessible format.
- Word for Word transcript.

Video with audio:

- Provide a transcript of the video presentation and captioning.
- Make sure transcript includes descriptions of visual aspects that may not be explained vocally. For example, simply stating that a chart appears may not be equivalent to describing the trend and axes of the chart if it's not included in the audio.
- Audio descriptions are required if the normal audio narrative fails to describe all important visual information clearly.
- Video files should be embedded or displayed in a player that can be accessed by a screen reader via keyboard commands.

Audio & Video Running Live

Captions must be provided for all live audio and video multimedia content. Synchronized captions, such as the display of text for audio at the same time it is spoken, are important so people who cannot hear or who are hard of hearing will be able to participate and derive the full meaning of the content.

Need help Building your transcript?

Below are some suggested solutions in generating your transcripts:

- The best option is to create a script prior to recording and follow the script when recording the presentation. The script then serves as a transcript.
- Upload videos to YouTube and grab the transcript generated there. Adjustments will need to be made for accuracy and grammar.
- Dragon Naturally Speaking*
 - Dragon Naturally Speaking is a speech recognition software that can generate a transcript of both live and recorded sessions.
- Mac & PC Built In Speech Recognition:
 - Mac Dictation: Will allow you to use your voice to enter text

- To activate choose Apple menu () > System Preferences, click Keyboard, then click Dictation
- Will require you to edit for accuracy.
- PC Speech Recognition:
 - Open Speech Recognition by clicking the Start button, clicking All Programs, clicking Accessories, clicking Ease of Access, and then clicking Windows Speech Recognition.
 - Will require you to edit for accuracy.

*Advantage of Dragon Naturally Speaking is that you can train the program to your pronunciation. It also allows you to create several profiles for different users.

Resources

Bond, L. (2017, February 20). How to Create Closed Captioning & Transcribe Videos In-House. Retrieved from <http://www.3playmedia.com/2015/07/06/everything-you-need-to-know-to-transcribe-video-create-closed-captions/>

Coombs, N. (2010) Making Online Teaching Accessible: Inclusive Course Design for Students with Disabilities. Jossey-Bass: San Francisco CA

Diagram Center (n.d.) Retrieved from <http://diagramcenter.org/>

SSA Gov (July 2011). Social Security Administration Guide: Alternate text for images. Retrieved From https://www.ssa.gov/accessibility/files/SSA_Alternative_Text_Guide.pdf

WebAim (n.d.). Alternative Text. Retrieved from <http://webaim.org/techniques/alttext>