

Author Guide to Writing Alt Text

v1.2¹

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What is Alt Text?

Alt Text (alternative text) is a short piece of text that can be attached to your figures or images to convey to readers the nature or contents of the image. It is typically used by systems such as pronouncing screen readers to make the object accessible to people that cannot read or see the object due to a visual impairment or print disability.

¹ Change Log

27 Sept 2019: Version 1.0 Original Writing

21 April 2020: Version 1.1

16 June 2020: Version 1.2

Why is Alt Text so important?

Alt Text is a key principle of accessible publishing. A digital “accessible” text is one that provides equal opportunity to all readers, including those with visual or print impairments. Taylor & Francis is committed to the supply of accessible content, ensuring as many readers as possible have access to the content we publish.

What are the benefits of authors supplying Alt Text?

We recognize that many of our authors and editors would like to maintain control of the content within the books we publish. To accomplish the goal of creating equal access to all materials, Taylor & Francis may, in future, seek to outsource the writing of Alt Text descriptions where it is not supplied with a final manuscript. The outsourced authors responsible for producing this Alt Text will be Subject Matter Experts (SME) within their fields. However, Taylor & Francis offers the opportunity for authors to write and submit their own Alt Text, therefore maintaining control of the content and context used within their publications.

The benefits to author submission of Alt Text include:

- Working with Taylor & Francis in providing equal access and opportunity to users with visual impairments or print disabilities;
- Greater author control of the Alt Text used to describe visual or graphical items, over the writing of an out-sourced Subject Matter Expert;
- Immediate production of an accessible title;
- Increased compliance with institutional customer requirements, such as universities who will not adopt textbooks or titles that are inaccessible;
- Compliance for all United States government-funded works – [Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act](#) requires “Federal agencies to make their electronic and information technology (EIT) accessible to people with disabilities” and this “applies to all Federal agencies when they develop, procure, maintain, or use electronic and information technology. Under Section 508, agencies must give disabled employees and members of the public access to information comparable to the access available to others.” This is usually interpreted to include works (such as books and journal articles) that have been written by US Government employees, or those funded by a US Government agency.

How do I write Alt Text?

Alt Text is rarely a rote description of the image. Instead it should convey the context and purpose of an image.

Alt Text is not the same as a caption, which typically provides information supplementing or not already in the visual element itself.

For example, in a hypothetical chapter on inspirational photography, the figure caption for the below image may read:

Figure 1: Example of an inspirational image

Without visual context, this caption does not tell the reader anything about what the image contains.

The Alt Text for this image may read:

Two hands holding the word 'Hope' up against a sunny sky.



Successful Alt Text descriptions describe key elements and meaning in a way a non-impaired user can understand. Unsuccessful Alt Text describes images in a way that is confusing or does not convey the educational goal of the content.

Alt Text for a visual element can vary depending on how it is used. For example, the same image of New York City may be used within an architecture book and a book on photography. In the first case, the Alt Text may describe the construction elements and design of a skyscraper. In the latter, the Alt Text may discuss the angle of the sun reflecting off windows or the people walking by, or even what makes the photo “good” or “bad” from a photographer’s standpoint.

Ask yourself:

- Why is this visual element here?
- What information does it present?
- What is its purpose?
- If the image were removed, how would I describe it to convey the same information and/or purpose?

Alt Text should be as objective as possible. Successful Alt Text follows some general rules. It is:

- **Concise.** Using a screen reader is time-consuming and unnecessarily long descriptions can create a burden on the user. Alt Text should strive to be under 100 words and generally 25 to 30 words long.
- **Targeted.** Descriptions should reflect the context and intent of the image, matching the focus of the text, chapter, and title. The Alt Text may have different descriptions depending on its purpose in a work.
- **Unique.** Do not repeat descriptions or text already provided in the caption or the surrounding text. When images are completely described by their caption or surrounding text, consider identifying them as decorative images.
- **Clear.** Spell out all contractions, numbers, and non-Latin letters and present the information in a logical and consistent order.
- **Simple.** Screen reading software does not read formatting in Alt Text, so do not use formatting, such as bullet points, in Alt Text descriptions.
- **Singular.** Screen reading software indicates the Alt Text is a replacement for an image, so do not use redundant phrases such as “Image of...” or “Graphic of...”.
- **Consistent.** Use the same level and style of language used within the main body of text.
- **Inclusive.** Alt Text should not contain additional information a sighted person (a customer not using a screen-reader) would miss.
- **Complete.** Conclude your Alt Text with a full stop/period (this allows for a pause in the screen reader, before it continues onto the next body of text).

Non-Alt Text items:

- **Decorative.** Taylor & Francis discourages the inclusion of purely decorative imagery, but if inclusion has been agreed in advance with the Editor/EA, then these are permissible. Images used only for decorative purposes, such as decorative chapter opening images and icons or placeholder images in templates do not require Alt Text. These are marked as “descriptive” in the eBook so screen readers skip over them.
- **Long Descriptions.** Long descriptions are in-depth descriptions of an image beyond what Alt Text can provide. Long descriptions are rare, but some STEM titles may require them. These descriptions are added in addition to Alt Text and generally follow the same rules, but they may be any length and can be formatted with lists and tables to clearly organize complicated information or data (this is particularly relevant on STEM topics).
- **Caption Sufficient.** The content provides a clear caption that describes the essential content and context of the image, rendering further Alt Text unsuitable.

How do I submit Alt Text for my title?

To facilitate an efficient review and processing, please submit all Alt Text and Long Descriptions in a separate Microsoft Word file (one file for the entire book) to the manuscript. Each Alt Text item should be prefixed with the figure number. Any long descriptions should follow the Alt Text entry with the prefix [long description]. Any images which are decorative only or caption sufficient should list “decorative” as the Alt Text. When figure numbers are not used, use the image file name when listing Alt Text or Long Descriptions.

Example Alt Text submission

Figure 1.8 Three construction workers in New York sitting on a steel beam having lunch.

Figure 3.8 Influence of the pH value of the source solution on crystallite sizes.

[alt] A line chart showing crystallite sizes on the y-axis increasing as pH value increases on the x-axis, peaking at forty-five nanometers in size at ten point zero pH.

[long description] A line chart showing how pH value affects the source solution on crystallite sizes. The x-axis shows increasing pH value from 7.0 to 10.5, increasing in units of 0.5. The y-axis shows Crystallite size in nanometers, from 0 to 60, increasing in units of 10. The line chart is steady between pH levels 7.0 to 9.0, with Crystallite size at an average of 12 nanometers. The chart shows a sharp increase between pH levels 9.0 and 10.5, spiking to 45 nanometers.

Figure 4.0 “decorative”

Alt Text examples

Please note: the image examples below contain the Alt Text examples within them.

Example 1



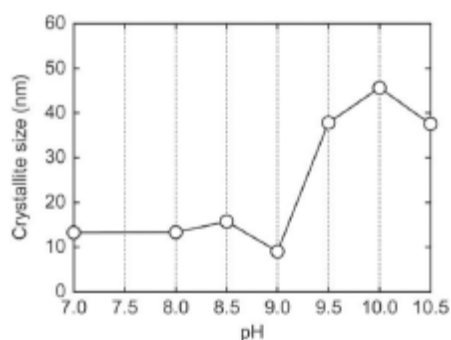
Caption:

Grandma's Rule "First, do what I want you to do, and then you may do what you want to do." According to the Promack principle, by making preferred activities contingent on learning and positive behaviour, teachers can greatly increase both.

Alt Text for photograph [20 words]:

Three smiling young children in a classroom, with an iguana perched on one child's forearm as another child feeds it.

Example 2



Caption:

Influence of the pH value of the source solution on crystallite sizes.

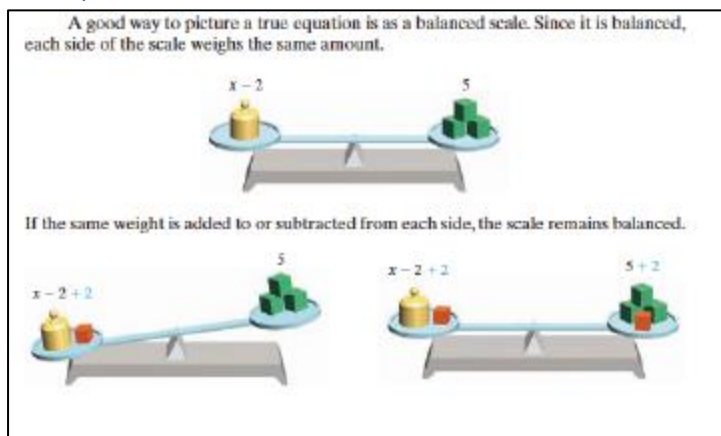
Alt Text for Graphical Figure [28 words]:

A line chart showing crystallite sizes on the y-axis increasing as pH value increases on the x-axis, peaking at forty-five nanometers in size at ten point zero pH.

Long Description:

A line chart showing how pH value affects the source solution on crystallite sizes. The x-axis shows increasing pH value from 7.0 to 10.5, increasing in units of 0.5. The y-axis shows Crystallite size in nanometers, from 0 to 60, increasing in units of 10. The line chart is steady between pH levels 7.0 to 9.0, with Crystallite size at an average of 12 nanometers. The chart shows a sharp increase between pH levels 9.0 and 10.5, spiking to 45 nanometers.

Example 3



Alt Text for illustration [23 words]:

Three balance scales, with different combinations of weights represented by numerical equations, showing the effects of adding or subtracting weights from each side.

Long Description for illustration [153 words]:

Three separate balance scales, with different combinations of three types of weights: gold cylinders, green cubes, and red cubes. An equation is shown over each side of each scale.

The first scale shows a gold cylinder labelled x minus two on the left side, and three green cubes labelled with the number five on the right side. The scale is shown equally balanced.

The second scale shows a gold cylinder and a red cube labelled x minus two plus two on the left side, and three green cubes labelled with the number five on the right side. The scale is shown unbalanced, with the cylinder and red cube side in a lower position.

The third scale shows a gold cylinder and a red cube labelled x minus two plus two on the left side, and three green cubes and one red cube labelled five plus two on the right side. The scale is shown equally balanced.

Example 4



Alt Text for Cartoon including text [63 words]:

A three-panel cartoon strip shows two adolescent boys walking. One boy says, “It’s funny, but girls are a lot more interesting this year than they were last year.” The other boy responds, “They’re more interesting to me too.” The second panel shows the two boys walking in silence. In the final panel, the first boy says, “I wonder what they did to themselves.”

Note: An alternative solution here, to help shorten your Alt Text, would be to specify the text from the cartoon in the main body of text.

Example 5

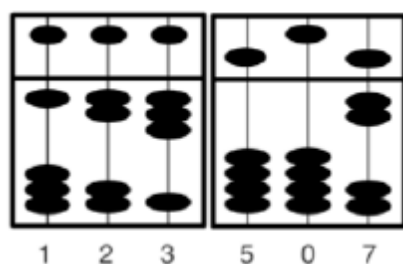


Caption: Lockheed U-2 Dragon Lady reconnaissance aircraft with a turbojet engine.

Alt Text Response:

This image is adequately described in the caption and its surrounding text, so is marked decorative, requiring no alt text.

Example 6

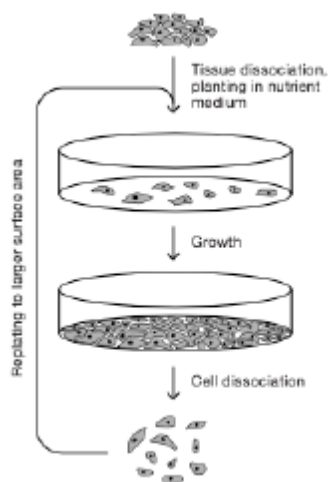


Caption: The decimal numbers 123 (left) and 507 (right), expressed by a base-5 abacus. The four lower stones represent units 0–4, and the upper stones represent chunks of 5. Lower stones are moved up to process units; and sliding an upper stone down means processing chunks of 5 units each. The number 7 is represented by one 5 and two 1’s, e.g., $(5 + 2)$.

Alt Text for Illustration [13 words]:

Two, three-column abacus, showing the numbers one hundred twenty-three and five hundred seven.

Example 7



Caption: Anchorage dependency and contact inhibition in cultured normal diploid cells.

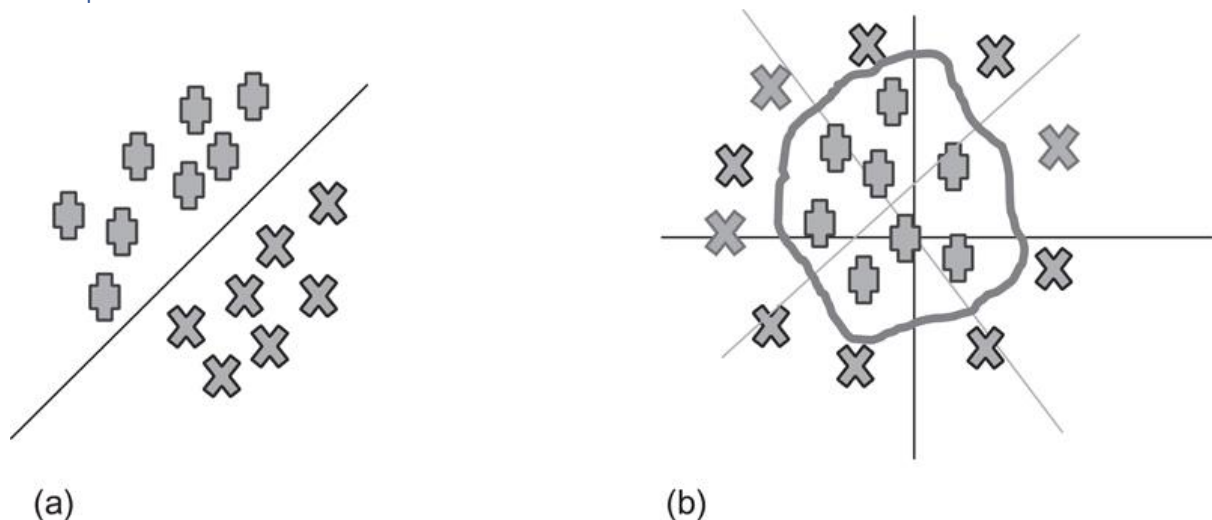
Alt Text for Illustration [34 words]:

An open cycle of tissue planted in dish with a nutrient medium, leading to growth which fills the dish, leading to cell dissociation allowing replating to larger surface area dish, starting the cycle over.

Long Description [72 words]:

An open cycle of tissue growth which feeds back on itself. Step one starts with tissue dissociation at the top. Step two adds tissue to a dish filled with a nutrient medium, growth of new cells leads to step three where the dish fills its surface area with tissue. Cell dissociation leads to step 4 and the cell sample is replated on a larger surface area medium leading back to step two.

Example 8



[example of poor alt text] Two different classes separated by a line in the first figure and by a polygon in the second figure.

Caption: (a) Linear boundary with classifier hyperplane and (b) nonlinear boundary with classifier hyperplane.

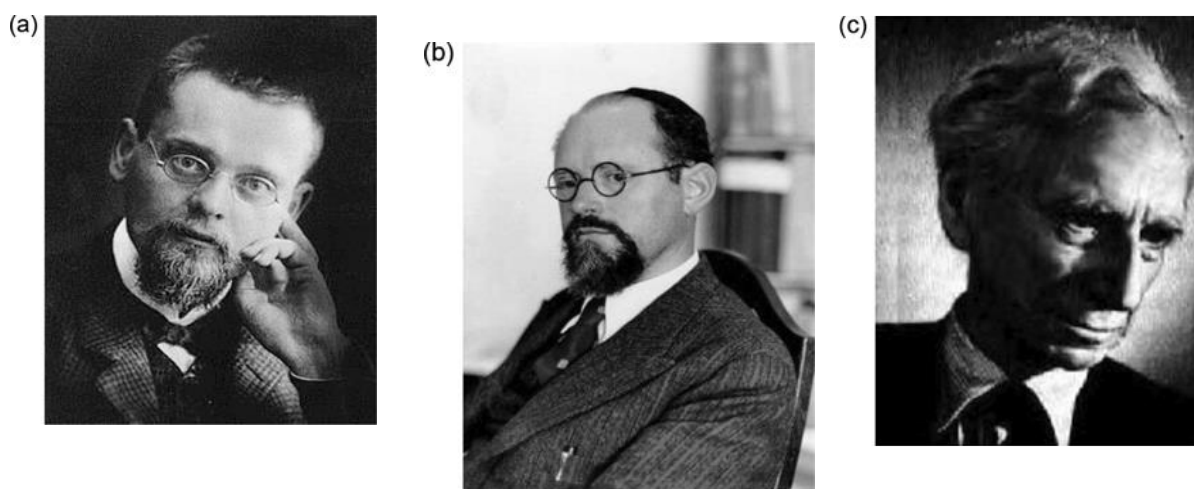
Alt text [51 words]:

Two part image of plot points. Part (a) shows two distinct groups separated by a linear boundary line going from bottom left to top right. Part (b) shows intermixed points which, when viewed at a higher level forms a nonlinear circular boundary with one group surrounded by components of the other.

Long description [129 words]:

Part (a) has two distinct groups separated by a linear boundary line going from bottom left to top right. The first group on the left is made of eight circles in two ragged ranks of four running parallel to the boundary. The second group is made of exes and is opposite the first, it consists of two ranks with four in the front rank and three in the second rank running parallel to the line. Part (b) shows the non-linear boundary with intermixed points and multiple linear boundary lines which define no distinct groups themselves. Evaluating the plots at a higher level shows a circular non-linear boundary containing eight circles and the boundary is surrounded by ten exes, placed almost equidistance around the perimeter, though at different z-axis heights.

Example 9



[example of poor alt text] On page 16 in the row above, the photo on the left is of Ernst Zermelo, on the middle is of Abraham Halevi (Adolf) Fraenkel, and on the right is of Bertrand Russell.

Caption:

(a) Ernst Zermelo, 1871–1953. (b) Abraham Halevi (Adolf) Fraenkel, 1891–1965. (c) Bertrand Russell, 1872–1970.

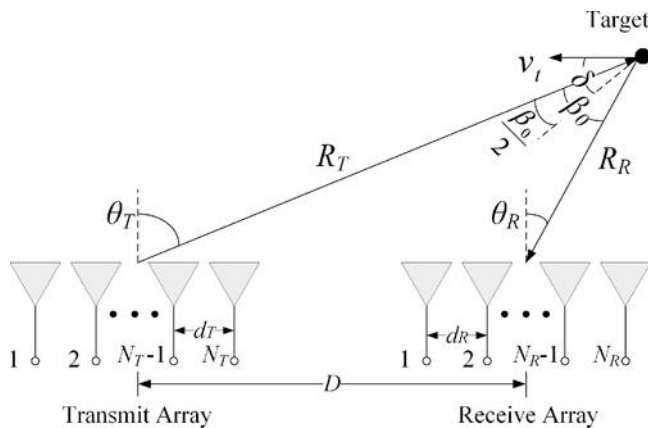
Alt text:

decorative

Long description:

decorative

Example 10



[example of poor alt text] The configuration of a bistatic radar, which consists of a transmit antenna array, a receive antenna array, and a far-field point target.

Caption:

Transmitting and receiving ULAs for bistatic radar.

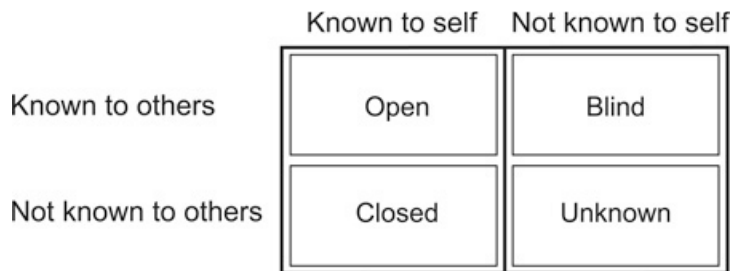
Alt text [47 words]:

Configuration diagram of a four element transmit array in the bottom far left sends a beam to a target in the top far right which reflects down to a four element receive array in the far bottom right. All elements are annotated with angular and distance equations.

Long description [180 words]:

Configuration diagram of a transmit array in the bottom left, a receive array in the bottom right, and a target in the top right. The transmit array shows four antenna, but may consist of more as annotated by N_T for antenna numbers, each antenna separated by d_T distance. The base transmit angle, θ_T , is directly above the transmit array. The receive array shows four antenna, but may consist of more as annotated by N_R for antenna numbers, each antenna separated by d_R distance. The base receive angle, θ_R , is directly above the receive array. The transmit array and receive array center points are separated by D distance. The target is traveling in level flight on angle ν . The transmit array beam is represented as a line leading to the target with angle δ over a distance of R_T . The returned signal is a line leading to the receive array with angle β from the target over a distance of R_R .

Example 11



[example of poor alt text] A graphic of a window with four panes. Inside the upper left-hand corner is written Open, below is Closed. Inside the upper right-hand corner is written Blind, below is Unknown. On the outside of the window to the left of the Open window is written Known to others, below is Not known to others. Outside the window above the Open window is written Known to self, next to that is Not known to self.

Caption: The Johari Window of intercultural communication. Source: Author

Alt text [78 words]:

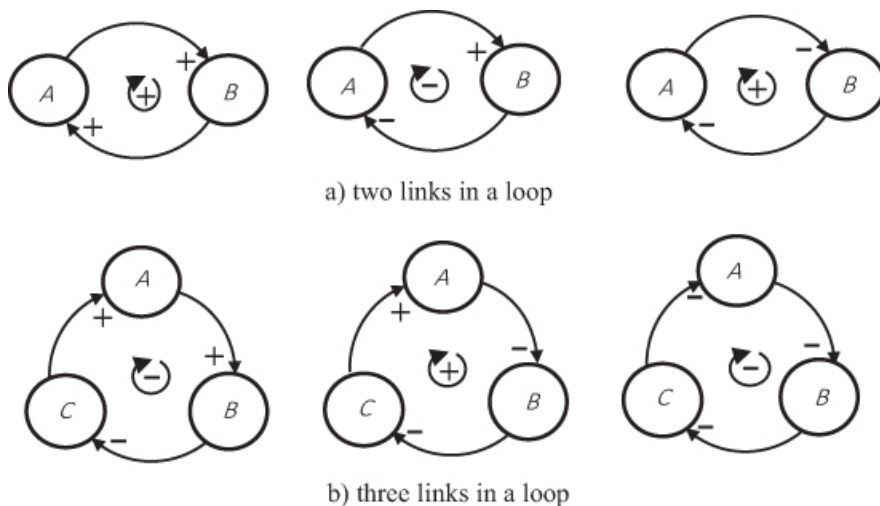
A four panel window showing the relationship axis of self comprised of 2 columns and 2 rows. Top left panel represents "Open" and is Known to Self and Known to Others. Bottom left panel is "Closed" and is Known to Self but Not Known to Others. Top right panel is "Blind" and is Not Known to Self but Known to Others. Finally bottom right panel is "unknown" and is Not Known to Self and Not Known to Others.

Long description:

None

.....

Example 12



[example of poor alt text] Ultimate type (negative or positive) of a feedback loop consisting of links of various signs depends on concrete proportion between the various links.

Caption: Combinations of different links in feedback.

Alt text [52 words]:

Six feedback loops divided evenly between two groups. Group (a) Two Links in a Loop, has two positive loops and one negative loop created by elements A and B. Group (b) Three Links in a Loop, has two negative loops and one positive loop created by elements A, B, and C.

Long description [298 words]:

Group (a) two links in a group has three examples. Example A1 is the left diagram and has A orbiting clockwise as a positive value to B which orbits clockwise as a positive value back to A, creating a positive loop. Example A2 is the center diagram and has A orbiting clockwise as a positive value to B which orbits clockwise as a negative value back to A, creating a negative loop. Example A3 is the right diagram and has A orbiting clockwise as a negative value to B which orbits clockwise as a negative value back to A, creating a positive loop. Group (b) three links in a group has three examples. Example B1 is the left diagram and has A orbiting clockwise as a positive value to B which orbits clockwise as a negative value to C which orbits clockwise as a positive value back to A, creating a negative loop. Example B2 is the center diagram and has A orbiting clockwise as a negative value to B which orbits clockwise as a negative value to C which orbits clockwise as a positive value back to A, creating a positive loop. Example B3 is the right diagram and has A orbiting clockwise as a negative value to B which orbits clockwise as a negative value to C which orbits clockwise as a negative value back to A, creating a negative loop. [something completely different] Two groups of three feedback loops. Group (a) has three examples of “two links in a loop” where elements A and B diametrically orbit clockwise around a positive or negative central element. Group (b) has three examples of “three links in a loop” where elements A, B, and C are spaced equidistance and orbit clockwise around a positive or negative central element.