INTRO TO ALT TEXT

Alt text (short for alternative text) is a written description of an image displayed on a digital device with a screen (such as a computer, smartphone or tablet). (insert picture)

Alt text can be added to:

* images / graphics posted online
  + (for example: images found on websites or certain social media apps)
* images / graphics in digital documents
  + (for example: PDFs, Microsoft Word documents / Google docs, etc.)

Alt text makes visual content (such as pictures) accessible to people who are blind, who have low vision, or who have certain cognitive disabilities.

(Many people use something called a screen reader as a form of assistive technology (define in pop-up) in order to browse the web or use digital devices such as a phone or computer. A lot of people use screen readers for a multitude of reasons but people who commonly rely on screen readers include:

-people who are blind or have low vision

-people who have differences in visual processing (dyslexia is one example)

Alt text gets read by something called a screen reader, which is a form of assistive technology

(define assistive technology through a details or drop down thing)

(Assistive technology is any tool These tools can be anything from simple objects like a pencil grip to more complex devices like screen readers for computers. The goal of assistive technology is to make daily activities easier and more accessible for people with disabilities.

https://www.atia.org/home/at-resources/what-is-at/

Assistive technology helps people who have difficulty speaking, typing, writing, remembering, pointing, seeing, hearing, learning, walking, and many other things. Different disabilities require different assistive technologies.

Screen readers are used by different people for different reasons but they are commonly used by people who are blind, have low vision or experience differences in visual processing.

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A screen reader is basically a type of software that reads the content on a screen (computer screen, phone screen, etc.) and relays back the content information to the person using the screen reader.

It can do this in 1 of 2 ways - either by reading it out loud with a synthetic (computer generated) voice or by providing the information on a refreshable braille display. A screen reader user can also use both of these outputs at the same time.

With no alt text present, people with visual disabilities may miss out on vital information within your webpage / document.

*(\*\*NOTE- there are instances when no alt text is needed- I'll touch on that later!)*

**Other ways alt text is used**

Alt text is a crucial part of web accessibility, as I explained above. But it also serves a few other purposes. For example, if an image fails to load on a webpage - the alt text will show up instead (if there is alt text provided).

The image above (found [here on this website](https://udayton.edu/blogs/onlinelearning/2021/07_07_2021_alttext.php)) shows what happens when an image doesn't load correctly. If there is alt text provided for the image, the viewer can still find out what information you're trying to provide.

Alt text also plays a role with SEO (Search Engine Optimization). I won't be discussing SEO in this website, though. We'll be looking at alt text as an accessibility tool above all else.

**The origins of alt text**

The concept of alt text originates from the “alt” attribute (also known as alt tag or alt description) in HTML, which is a coding language used to build websites.   
  
*(\*\*NOTE- If you don't know how to code- no worries!! You don't have to be someone who codes in order to provide alt text. If this section feels hard to follow, feel free to skip ahead to the next section titled "Alt text for non-coders")*

If you do want to talk code for a second- let's do it!

This is how you code an image in HTML:   
<img src="*insert image file name here*" alt="*insert alt text here*">

The part where it says “alt”- that’s where you include your alt text (a description of the image you are coding).

"Alt" is short for alternative. The alt attribute was introduced in HTML 2.0, which was published in 1995 by the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF).

**Alt text for non-coders**

Don't know how to code? That's no problem at all! A lot of programs offer the opportunity to provide alt text without having to touch any code.

Here is one example- this is a Google Doc. When you right click on an image in Google Docs, you can then click on "Alt Text", which will open up a textbox where you can type in your alt text!

Each program / website is going to be a little different when it comes to adding alt text (and some programs / websites unfortunately do not have direct, built in ways of providing alt text). Doing a quick Google search (for example: “how to add alt text to PowerPoint”) can let you know whether or not it's possible to add alt text in a direct / built in way (like the example I showed in Google Docs), and how to do so. There are workaround ways of adding alt text, one of which is providing an image description in the image caption or nearby text (I'll touch on this new term "image description" in just a second!).

Here are a few places where you can add alt text without touching any code:

* Certain social media platforms:
  + Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Tumblr
    - [How to add alt text on social media](https://www.perkins.org/how-to-add-alt-text-on-social-media/)
* Google Workspace
  + Google Docs, Slides, Sheets
    - [How to add alt text to Google Docs, Slides & Sheets](https://support.google.com/docs/answer/6199477?hl=en)
* Microsoft Office
  + Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, Excel, Outlook
    - [How to add alt text in Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, Excel & Outlook](https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/add-alternative-text-to-a-shape-picture-chart-smartart-graphic-or-other-object-44989b2a-903c-4d9a-b742-6a75b451c669)
* Adobe Acrobat
  + This is one way to add alt text to PDFs!
    - [How to add alt text to a PDF in Adobe Acrobat](https://csuf.screenstepslive.com/m/96806/l/1474315-alt-text-for-images-in-adobe-acrobat-pdf)
* Websites commonly used by designers:
  + Are.na (to images you upload yourself- not reposts), Behance, Canva, Wix

**Image description vs. alt text**

If you dive into the world of alt text, you will likely encounter the term "image description". Alt text is technically a form of image description (in the sense that you are partaking in the act of describing an image) but when it comes to web accessibility, there are some differences between the terms "alt text" and "image description".

From what I’ve learned so far, these seem to be the main differences:

**Location:** Alt text and image descriptions are “stored” in different places. Alt text is usually attached to an image, while image descriptions might be in the caption or nearby text.

**Visibility:** Alt text is usually only seen by screen readers. For example the image below is an example of an image with just alt text.

Now this is an example of an image with an image description. This is a [post on Twitter](https://twitter.com/DogsTrust/status/1646528737259978755?s=20) and the author has included the image description in the caption of the post. So viewers with the ability to see will be able to see the image description, due to the location in which it's being put (it's not hiding in the back-end stuff).

**Length:** Alt text is typically limited to 100-250 characters, while image descriptions can be longer.

**Level of Detail:** Image descriptions can offer more detail about visual elements compared to alt text because of their larger character limit. For instance, alt text might say "puddle on the floor," while an image description might describe it as "a puddle of orange juice on a white tiled kitchen floor."

**Platform Policies:** Different social media platforms have different rules for alt text length and editing options.

I know for me personally, it’s taken me some time to learn all that I’m sharing in this website and as I continue to learn about alt text / image description, I find myself having lots of questions. I honestly think this is common, as writing alt text and image descriptions is more of an art than a science. It’s a skill that takes practice. (write more/ work on this)

One question that came up for me as I’ve started to learn more about alt text / image description is: Should I write both alt text and image descriptions?

**How do you write alt text?**

So how exactly do you write alt text / image descriptions?

**Share resource library**

While there are things to avoid when writing alt text- alt text is unique in that there is not just one, singular correct way to write it. \*\*\*\*Work on this paragraph

(Maybe insert short, summarized paragraph about how to start going about writing alt text? Like the ultimate goal? )

*NOTE:* I am by no means an expert in writing alt text. This is something I am still learning about and it's also a skill that I am still striving to improve. I am going to share some things I've learned through my research and time spent learning about alt text, but bear in mind that there are many opinions on how to write alt text! This website provides my own perspective (as of this moment in time) but it's always good to seek out alternative points of view. I've created a page on this website with multiple perspectives and resources on how to write alt text and I encourage you to check them out!

That being said, here are some things that I've learned / heard when it comes to writing alt text:

* insert things to consider when writing alt text

**Examples**