

1.1 Text Alternatives

Definition

“Provide text alternatives for any non-text content so that it can be changed into other forms people need, such as large print, braille, speech, symbols or simpler language.” - World Wide Web Consortium.

What's that mean?

If you display content in any way other than through text, such as an audio file or video, you should provide a text alternative of the content. This could be something like a transcript for a video or a sign language video for an audio file.

Why?

Text alternatives for non-text content are necessary to provide the content to a wider audience. Text alternatives have the unique ability of being manipulated visually, audibly, or symbolically depending on the user and their needs/preferences. Providing a text alternative of a graph, for example, will help a visually impaired user understand the content of the graph.

Caveats

Non-text content such as CAPTCHAs, time based content or tests to name a few, require different guidance to meet the text alternative requirement. For example, if you include a CAPTCHA on your website to ensure humans are participating in the action and not computers, you would need to include a text alternative describing the CAPTCHA for your users. For guidance on all non-text content situations, refer to section 1.1.1 of the WCAG guidelines.

Example

A great example of this would be a video of a lecture. This is common in education as we look to utilize more technology into courses each year. If I were to upload of a video of me lecturing for a half hour, I would need to provide a text-transcript of that lecture. This transcript should contain all of the information and content that was said in the video, so users who are visually or hearing impaired could manipulate the text to understand the content.