

Creating Image Text Alternatives ("alt text")

Alt Text is a text alternative for an image. An image includes pictures, illustrations, icons, charts, etc. Imagine if an image on your webpage did not load on the page. How would you describe that image to someone? What would a person need to know about the image?

The alt text should describe either what a person can't see if the image doesn't load or the person has vision impediments, or what the purpose of the image is (such as a search button). Hence the appropriate text alternative for a search button image which looks like a magnifying glass would be "search", not "magnifying glass".

The text should be functional and provide an equivalent user experience, not necessarily describe the image. However, the alt text should not be an expansive description. Avoid unnecessary information, but strive to make it succinct, which means brief and clearly expressed.

Who uses alt text?

Text alternatives are used by people who do not see the image. One example is people who are blind, vision impaired, or have trouble concentrating and use screen readers. With a screen reader they can hear the alt text read out to them.

In addition, people who have turned off images to speed download or save bandwidth can see the alt text. Likewise, people that are using a mobile device and either have a poor signal or their phone runs at a lower bandwidth may also see the alt text instead of the image.

What images need alt text?

Every image should include `alt` in the markup.

- If an image conveys information useful for interacting with or understanding the web page content, then it needs alternative text.

- If an image is just decorative and people don't need to know about the image, then it should have null alt (`alt=""`). Be aware though, that these images are usually only placed in a webpage by a designer or a developer. Therefore if you are not a designer or a developer then most likely all your images need alt text.

How do you write appropriate alt text?

The text needs to convey the same meaning as the image.

This means, if someone cannot see the image, they get the important information from the image in the alternative text.

Alternative text depends on context

For example, for an image of a couple in a row boat on a boat website, the alt text might include the type of boat and water (ocean, lake, river etc.); however, the same image in the header of a local recreation website may be there just to make the page more attractive, and the image might not need any alt text (and should have null alt). One way to help you consider what the appropriate alt text for an image is: if you're helping someone read and interact with the web page and they cannot see it, what would you say about the image?

An Image that is functional needs alt text that is the functional equivalent

Functional images are images that initiate actions, and are linked images. Examples are Buttons such as submit, navigation links, and linked images. The alt text for images that initiate actions should tell the person what is going to happen "submit" or where they are going "Contact us".

Linked images require additional consideration when writing the alt text. Be aware that an image that has a link on it to open a larger image is still functional. If you believe your image does not convey useful context for the page and is just a design image, but you want to keep a link on the image to open a larger one, you must include alt text for it. So if that image was just a head shot of a smiling person you would still have to have alt text. In this case the alt text may only be the person's name. Use your best judgement though.

If there is text in the image that text has to be included in the alt text

A logo or chart is an example of an image that includes text. If the image is not a logo or chart, and is only an image with text layered into it with image editing software such as Photoshop then it is a graphical image. Including text in a graphical image should be an exception, and should be avoided.

Additional requirements are need for charts and graphs

If the image has complex information that you would find in a charts or graphs the image should have a short alt text to identify the image, and then the detailed description of the information should be provided elsewhere. (for example, in a data table).

What is not needed in the alt text?

Design images do not need alt text

Examples are color background, borders, lines, faded image backgrounds and decorative images. If the image is not important for understanding the content — for example, it is just decoration or "eye candy" — it should have null alt (`alt=""`). One way to help determine if an image should have null alt is to ask yourself: *If the image was removed, would the user still get all the information from the page?*

Functional images do not need descriptive words

The alternative text does not need to include the words "button", "link", or "image of". Screen readers automatically provide that information. In addition, you don't need to include words such as "click here".

Charts, Graphs and Diagrams can have brief descriptions if long text is provided elsewhere

Charts, Graphs and Diagrams should be either sufficiently described in the text, or a long text description should be added for them. For instance, the long text descriptions could be added directly beneath it as part of the page, or a link to a post with it. For example, a diagram of the structure of a cell, if it has a long text description it can have brief alt text such as "Diagram of the structure of a cell as described above."

Where do see alt text?

You don't usually see the alt text on a web page, it is in the web page markup (like this:

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Stories Related to Text Alternatives

- [Ilya, senior staff member who is blind](#)
- [Preety, middle school student with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and Dyslexia](#)

Learn More about Alt Text

Every image has alt with appropriate alternative text. Automated tests can tell you if `alt` is missing. To determine if the alternative text is appropriate, you need to see the image and judge it in context.

This document was created using guidelines from the World Wide Web Consortium's (W3C) [Web Accessibility Initiative \(WAI\)](#). You can explore more information using the links below:

- [Image Concepts](#) is a Tutorial on how to provide appropriate test alternatives based on the purpose of the image.
- [An alt text decision tree](#)
- [Text alternatives for non-text content](#) is an easy introduction with links to more details
- [Non-text Content](#) - Understanding Success Criterion 1.1.1 for WCAG (Level A)