Accessibility Practices for Social Media

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Goal: To make feeds accessible to social media users who use assistive technology

When creating posts for social media, there are best practices to enable the greatest number of people to access the information.

Many of these best practices are geared toward people with sensory impairments who may use screen readers or other assistive technology to navigate content. Note: the information below is intended for social media content, and best practices for accessibility may vary for other forms of digital content.
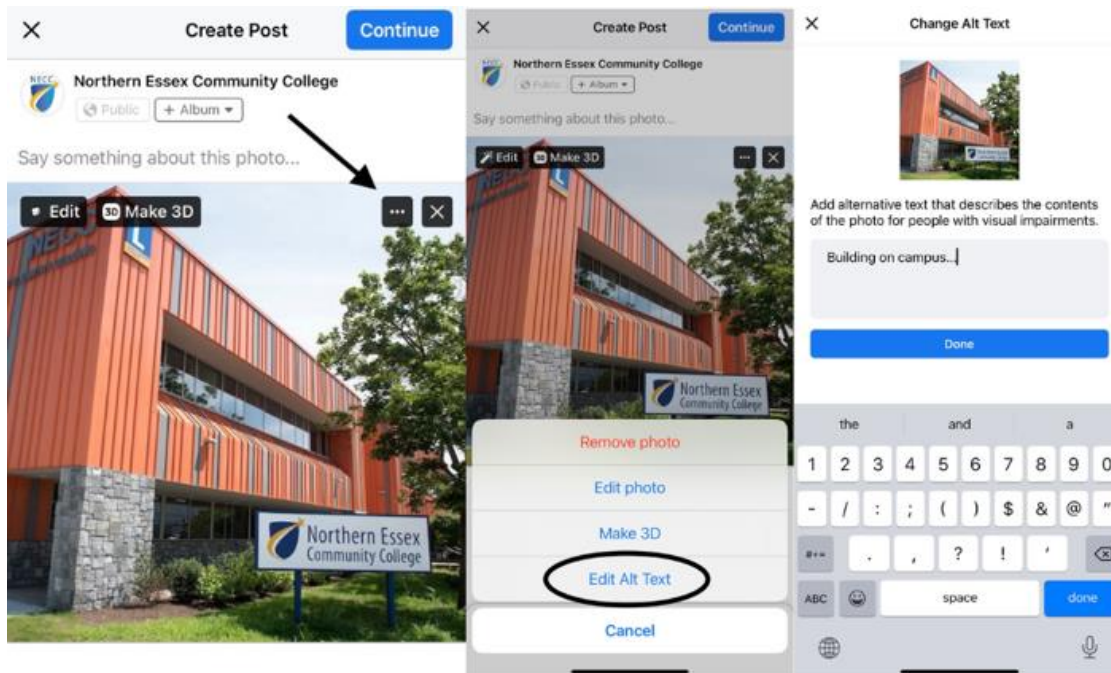
Images

Alt-text:

All of the major social media platforms have the option to add alt-text to a picture. This is a short description that will be seen and interpreted by a screen reader. It should be clear and concise and accurately describe what the picture shows. Adding alt-text is slightly different on each platform, but can usually be found when clicking 'edit' on the photo before posting. It can also be added directly in the caption, which you may notice on platforms like Instagram.
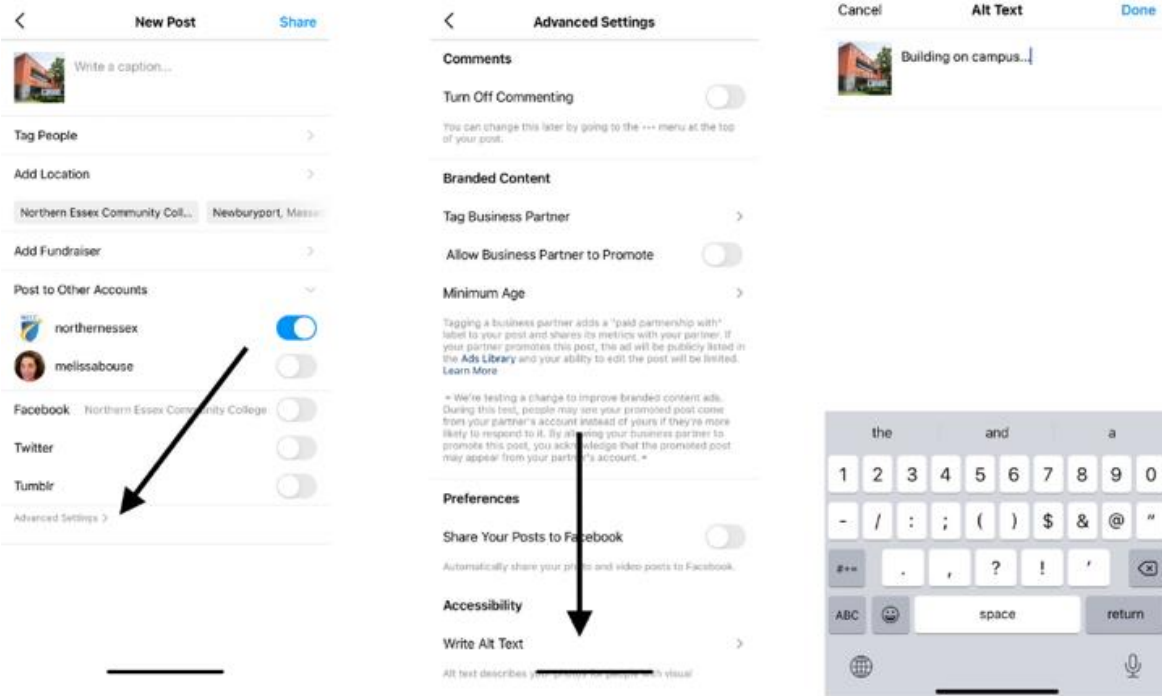
Facebook will automatically enter alt-text to images if none is inputted, but it is not always accurate and should not be relied upon.

Examples (please note these may differ with platforms, app updates, and user devices)

Facebook:

Instagram:

If you're not an admin on an account and you want to check if an image has alt-text, you can use the Chrome or Edge browsers to check. Right click and choose 'inspect' to access a panel with a tab labeled 'accessibility.' Any alt-text will show up in that field. On an iPhone, you can also go to Settings>Accessibility>Spoken content to turn on a screen reader option.
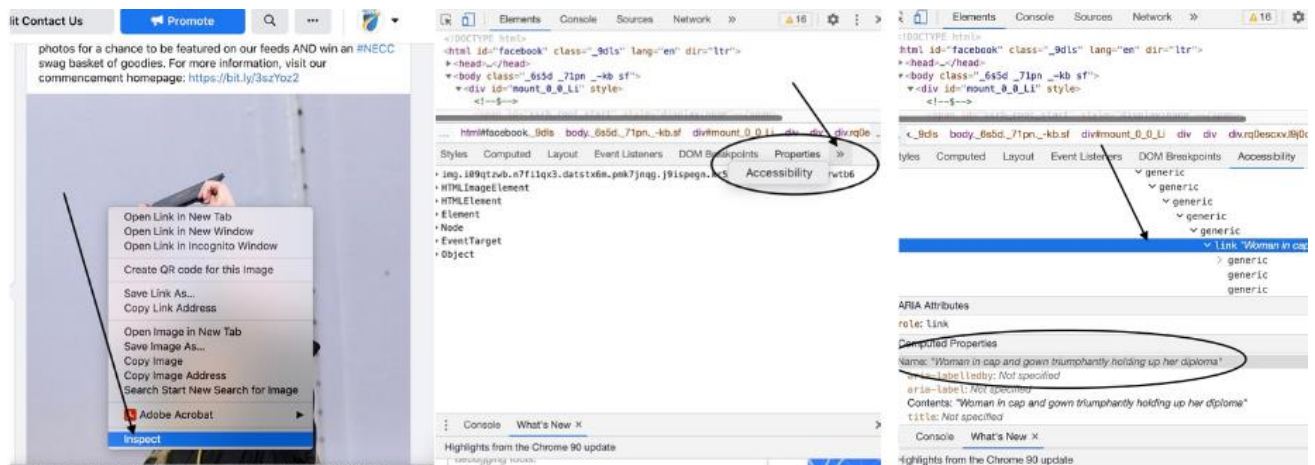
Flyers: Flyers are generally problematic for assistive tech because they are flat images: words on a flyer can't be read by a screen reader, and the user could miss out on the whole message. A better option would be to use a photo or create a simple graphic (with the description in the alt-text) and then include all of the pertinent information in the caption.

Copywriting

Captions:
When writing captions for posts, the first thing to consider is using what's called plain language. This helps people understand your content more quickly. Plain language is conversational and uses an active voice. It is clear, concise, organized and uses words a general audience understands

Hashtags:
Most screen readers can interpret hashtags, but have trouble with compound hashtags. Those are made up of more than one word. For best results, use what's called Pascal Case or camel case- that is capitalize the first letter of each word in the hashtag. Example: #WeAreNECC as opposed to #wearenecc

Acronyms:
 When writing an acronym in a caption, screen readers will typically need dashes, periods or spaces between the letters to read them accurately. Example: N.E.C.C. can be read better than NECC

Emoji Icons and Special Characters

Emojis:
Each emoji already has an alt-text description assigned to it. Before using an emoji, check the descriptions to make sure it says what you think it does, and that it makes sense in the context of your caption. For example: "We just love ❤️ Fridays!" would be read by a screen reader as "We just love red heart Fridays!" You can check assigned descriptions here: https://emojipedia.org Emojis are best used in moderation and at the end of captions.

ASCII Art or Text Art:
This is made using standard text to create images or shapes.
Example: ¯_(ツ)_/¯ These can't be read by screen readers, and it's best to avoid using them

Fonts:
Use the native fonts for each platform. There are font generators that allow users to access different fonts and characters for posting, but these alternative fonts are not always compatible with accessibility tools.

Video

Audio:
More than 80% of videos on social media are viewed without sound. Therefore, it's always a best practice to include captions on all videos. There are several third party apps that can generate captions or allow users to add captions. Some examples include: Mix Captions, Kapwing, Clipomatic, and AutoCap. A few of the platforms will also auto-generate captions with the right settings:

-YouTube will autogenerate captions on unlisted videos. Captions can then be edited, and then the privacy settings can be changed on the video.
-IGTV will also autogenerate captions, but videos must be uploaded using the IGTV app.
-Facebook (only when posting to a page) allows users to add autogenerated captions by going to the

"Subtitles and Captions" tab on the right, after a video has been uploaded.

-Twitter and Instagram will give the option of auto-generated captions for their story features.

Visuals:

For a short video like an animation or a boomerang, adding alt-text (as you would with a still image) can provide context for visually impaired users. But videos with more than a few seconds of action , a second audio track can be added with audio descriptions. This would need to be added during the video editing process.

Please note:

Social media platforms are constantly evolving, and some of the accessibility tools described in this document may change. For the most up-to-date information, search for the accessibility guides on each, individual platform.