Alt Tagging Best Practices

Best practices:

- Every image, graphic, figure, or model must have alt text.
- Determine what to write based on the image's purpose and function in that context.
- Be accurate and equivalent when choosing what information you describe. Succinct and informative descriptions are best.
- Avoid using "image of…" or "graphic of…" because this adds clutter and pushes the important information further away from the student.
- Before classifying an image as decorative, make sure the content on the page can be understood without it. Any image of the same shape and size could replace a decorative image with no impact on the content.
- On complex images, state where the student can find more information about the image, such as a separate table, paragraph, or webpage.
- To determine the image type, ask:
    - What kind of information does this image display?
    - What meaning does this image add in this context?
    - Does the page make sense without the image?
    - What happens if I click on this image?
    - What other information relates to this image?
    - How would I describe this image out loud?

Do I need to provide alt text for tables?

Yes, alt text is also needed on any student-facing tables. Tables have additional accessibility conditions to consider, and alt text is covered among these in a separate guide. Refer to resources listed below for more guidance.

What types of Alt Text is best?

Type	What do they look like?	Where do they appear in courses?	What should the alt text say?
Text	Any image that displays words	Logos with text, motivational phrases, overview images that feature words	Repeat the words.
Decorative	Any image that is there purely for decorative purpose; without the image, the page still makes sense	Occasionally decorative images will appear in documents and in uLearn.	Write "" or select "Decorative". This labels the image as decorative and a screen reading device will skip it.
Descriptive	Any image that provides meaningful and valuable information to aid in mastering a course concept or assessment of that mastery	Overview images, required content, images on documents, images on quizzes, images requiring analysis	Short and succinct is better, but add more description as needed, especially if the image illustrates a key concept or needs to be distinguished from other adjacent images.
Complex	Any chart, graph, map, theoretical model, or image requiring complex analysis	Required content, quiz questions	The alternative text should direct students to another resource that helps to interpret the information, such as an adjacent data table containing the data used to create the figure. The alternative text could also provide a URL to a web page that provides the longer description of the complex image. In regards to testing and assessment, alt-text could describe what the image is supposed to assess (e.g. "Graph showing a SIN curve" or "X-ray with a tumor the student must locate")
Functional	Any images with navigational purpose	Video shortcut images, navigation bars in media presentations, images that respond to a click	For this type of image, it is best to focus on the function, task, or sequence that the image is conveying. For example, with an image of an app icon, you would not describe what the icon itself looks like, but instead what it does.

Complex Situations:

Graphs and Charts

- Try to keep these as simple as possible when showing information to students.
- Examples:
  - sin(x) with over the domain of $0 \leq x \leq 2\Pi$
  - Line graph showing X, Y, and Z over time.
  - Double bar chart comparing X and Y.
  - Venn diagram showing overlap between A and B.
  - For charts and graphs as they become more complex, additional resources should be provided – e.g. a table with the same information. Alt text could refer to the table – e.g. "Pie chart with 15 segments. Refer to table 'Preferences from 15 cities"

Formulas

- Where possible, use equation input (MathML) methods as much as you can.
- When you need to use an image of a formula, examples of alt-text:
  - Example of quadratic formula
  - For images of formulas or diagrams, additional resources should be provided – e.g. a YouTube video with closed captions. Alt text could refer to the video – e.g. "Example of a quadratic formula. Please refer to video 'How to use the quadratic formula'".

X-Rays, Blueprints, Maps, Engineering diagrams, etc.

- Description of the image is still applicable
  - X-ray of lungs with a tumor
  - Blueprint of housing project
  - CAD drawing of iPhone 4 PCB
  - Map of the Boston Marathon path
- In many cases, these are images specifically used in industries. It's best to provide alternatives for the students to get the concepts or information from the image. This can be an audio file with transcript, video with captions, or a text-based alternative. Since the tools that specific industries use cannot be changed, we need to take a step back and determine what the image is trying to do.
  - Is the image there for aesthetics? E.g. a picture of Vitruvian Man in a lesson about anatomy. The alt-text could read "Leonardo Da Vinci's Vitruvian Man".
  - Are you providing a visual representation of a concept that is found elsewhere? E.g. in the textbook? If so, the text is fine and the alt-text could read "X-ray of tumor as explained in chapter 3". This is for cases where the data in the image isn't as important as the concept itself.
  - Do students need the specific information found in the picture? If so, the specific information must be provided to students in a table or narrative format.

Handwritten notes or calculations

- Notes Only
  - Notes should be retyped. If you have a lot of documents that need to be converted, it's OK to leave some while you work on others, so long as the handwriting is legible and preferably in print over cursive.
- Notes + Diagrams or calculations
  - Notes should be retyped and the diagrams added as images with appropriate alt-text and/or additional resources as mentioned above.
- Calculations for homework answers or explanations
  - Alt text should read "Handwritten calculation for Week 3 homework" and answers should be provided to students either in the alt-text or separately.
- Calculations as a demonstration

- o Alt-text should read "Handwritten calculation for Week 3's lesson on XYZ" and additional resources and explanations should be provided, whether a video with captions or a text-based explanation.

Exams, Quizzes, and Assessments

- Images on assessments and exams are typically to gauge a students' capability.
  - o Tables
    - Table shouldn't be images of a table.
    - Tables should have alt-text describing what the table is.
    - Table should include a header row.
  - o Charts & Graphs
    - Alt text should explain what the chart or graph is showing as mentioned above and data should be tabulated if possible as well.
  - o Images for analysis (e.g. Find a tumor in this x-ray)
    - Alt text should mention what the image is and rephrase the question.
    - In the example, appropriate alt-text could be "X-ray where the student needs to find the tumor"
  - o Images for identification (e.g. Which artist painted this painting)
    - Alt-text could be, "the Birth of Venus"
- Alt-text should focus on what the purpose of the image is on the assessment, typically a rephrase of the question.

Additional situations that don't fit into the above categories

For instances where your situation may not fit neatly into a category, please contact IDT@jwu.edu for assistance.

Resources

- WebAIM: [Alternative Text](#)
- UDL on Campus: [Images](#)
- Penn State Accessibility: [Images](#)
- Microsoft Office: [Everything you need to know to write effective alt text](#)
- Moz: [Alt Text](#)
- Deque: [How to Design Great Alt Text](#)
- Techsmith: [How to Create Alternative Text for Images for Accessibility and SEO](#)
- Tiny: [How to write alt text for different image types {infographic}](#)
- Digital Services of Georgia: [Adding Alt Text to Digital Tables](#)
- [NWEA Guidelines for images in assessment (PDF)](#)
  - Note: A lot of these use "longdesc" or "long description" which has been depreciated in some browsers and is often not supported by screen readers.
- Harvard: [Write good Alt Text](#)