

Accessibility Help Guide: Making Images Accessible



What it helps with:

Images must always include alternative text to ensure that they can be used by people with various disabilities such as people using screen readers and speech input software.

Include alternative text with all visuals

Adding alternative text for images is the first principle of web accessibility. It provides a text alternative to non-text content and can be added to other forms of media as well as images.

Alternative text can be presented either as an **alt** tag on an image, or within the description above or below the image. In some cases where an image cannot be described succinctly, a link to a separate page containing the description can be provided.

Alternative text can be based on context:

The alternative text for an image may be very different depending on the context of the document or article you are writing. This can be determined by deciding whether an image has a function or is simply decorative. In most cases, an image will only have a function if it is used as a hotspot or as a button. If the content that the image represents is also contained in the text surrounding it, then an empty alt tag may be sufficient.

This document has been checked for accessibility on 18th August 2020.

Rules for using alternative text:

Alternative text should be accurate and contain the equivalent information in presenting the content of the image.

It should be succinct. Typically, no more than a few words are necessary for an alt tag.

Try not to use phrases like 'an image of...'. The user will usually be aware that it is an image. However, if the fact that the image is of a photograph or a drawing, it may be useful to include this information.

Functional images:

Images are often used to provide important functions such as navigation. For example, on a menu bar on a website, the alternative text that is provided should simply be the word displayed on the menu. This keeps the alternative tag simple and makes the website more functional for the user.

If an icon is used next to a link, for example an icon of a PDF to represent that the link will download a PDF, you should still add an alt tag. This can be something as simple as 'PDF' or 'PDF Icon'. However, if the icon itself is the link, then a full description of where the link is directed to is vital.

Decorative images:

Decorative images do not provide important content and are used for layout or non-informative purposes. In most cases, these types of images would just need a blank alt tag.

Ask yourself 'if I could not use this image, what would I replace it with?' to help you to determine what alternative text should contain.

Advanced images :

There are some images where determining which alternative text should be used can be difficult.

Form image buttons, for example a button that says 'submit' when signing up to a website, must have alternative text that describes the function of the button.

Image slices are sometimes used within a website for design purposes. Usually, an alt tag should be provided for the largest or most prominent image within this. It would not be necessary to repeat the alt tag across all images if they are only for decorative purposes.

Background images will not need an alt tag in most cases, as important information should not be added to a background image.

Complex images such as a graph or chart should have the information presented as an accessible table elsewhere if the alt tag is not efficient enough in describing the content.

More information:

[Further information on how to make your images accessible.](#)

This document has been checked for accessibility on 18th August 2020.