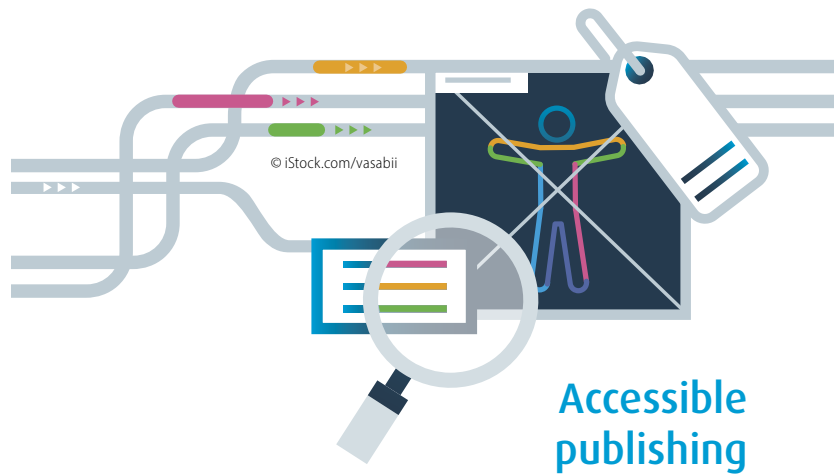


HOW TO WRITE EFFECTIVE ALTERNATIVE TEXT FOR IMAGES?



ALTERNATIVE TEXT: WHAT IS IT AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Alternative text, also referred to as alt text, is a concise textual description of an image. It serves as a crucial accessibility feature for users who rely on screen readers to navigate and understand content. Alt text effectively communicates the visual information conveyed by an image.

By incorporating alt text, you ensure that your content is accessible to a wider audience. Accurate and descriptive alt text enables people who are visually impaired to comprehend and engage with the content in a meaningful way, ensuring they do not miss out on critical information or experiences. Alt text also benefits other users, including those with slow internet connections or certain mobile devices that may not load images properly.

A QUICK GUIDE TO CRAFTING EFFECTIVE ALTERNATIVE TEXT

WHAT TO CONSIDER

According to the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](#), all non-text content, unless it is purely decorative, should provide a text alternative that serves the same purpose. This quick guide will help you craft effective alt text, ensuring the accessibility of your publication and maximising its impact.

When writing alt text, it is important to provide a concise and accurate description that conveys the essential details of the image. This includes describing its content, taking into account the context of the publication and providing any relevant information that helps understand the purpose and meaning of the image. Additionally, it is important to strike a balance by ensuring you provide enough information without overwhelming the reader with excessive detail.

EFFECTIVE ALT TEXT IN THREE STEPS

Step 1

Start by specifying the image type to help the audience visualise it. Keep in mind that the screen reader identifies the object as an image or graphic, so there is no need to repeat this. Be specific and enrich your description with more detail. Here are the most common image types and suggestions on how to be more specific when describing them.

- **Photograph:** portrait, landscape, selfie, group photo, etc.
- **Diagram:** flowchart, infographic, timeline, pictogram, etc.
- **Graph:** bar, line, pie, area, scatter, etc.
- **Map:** physical, geographical, street, satellite, etc.
- **Symbol:** logo, icon, label, etc.
- **Screenshot.**
- **Meme.**
- **Graphics Interchange Format (GIF) image.**
- **Artwork:** 3D, illustration, drawing, collage, etc.

Step 2

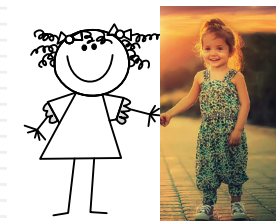
Describe the content of the image. Highlight the subject, any individuals present, relevant locations and the intended effect or message. Avoid duplicating the image caption, as screen readers will already read it. Instead, alt text should offer supplementary information to users who may have limited or no visual access to the image.



Step 3

Add any relevant details. Consider the specific context of the publication and include relevant details that enhance the understanding and meaning of the image. These details can vary depending on the content and purpose of the publication. For instance, alt text for scenic photographs can describe the location, landmarks, natural elements and overall ambiance. Alt text on diagrams, charts or graphs can describe the data being presented, any trends or patterns, etc.

PRACTICAL EXAMPLES



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Example 1

Explanation: the alt text for both images could be: 'A little girl smiling and standing.' But this may be confusing without further detail. In this case, specifying the types of images is crucial for clarity.

Alt text: two side-by-side images of a small girl smiling and standing. The first one is a black line drawing, whereas the second one is a colour photograph.

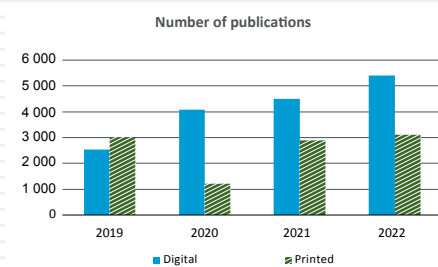


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Example 2

Explanation: since this is a general photograph, there is no need to specify the image type. The screen reader will identify the photograph as an image or graphic. Focus directly on the content.

Alt text: a person using their fingers on a refreshable braille display to read the information displayed on the computer screen.



Example 3

Explanation: start by specifying the graph type and follow by describing the data presented. Highlight the main trends.

Alt text: a bar chart showing the number of digital and printed publications produced from 2019 to 2022. The number of digital publications increased steadily from 2 500 in 2019 to 5 300 in 2022. The number of printed publications remained more or less constant at around 3 000, except in 2020 when it dropped to 1 100.



© Google

Example 4

Explanation: let us presume that the body text of the publication mentions the institutions marked on the map. In such a case there is no need to list them in the alt text. If this is not the case, the alt text ought to list them.

Alt text: a satellite map showing the district of four European Union institutions located in Luxembourg city. It also shows other centres of interest in that area.

CONTACTS

Are you interested in the accessibility services of the Publications Office?

Please contact OP-accessible-publications@publications.europa.eu

INFO BOX *Useful tips*

- Decorative images need neither a caption nor alt text.
- Include as much information as possible in the body text so you can keep the alt text as short as possible.
- Usually, two or three sentences should be enough.
- In graphs, define the axis values. If the graph contains complex data that show no trend or main takeaway, also add a table with all the data.