

Tips for Writing Effective Alt Text

Importance of Alt-Text

With alt text

- Provides equal access to information.
- Supports an inclusive reading experience.
- Increases the number of people your message will reach.

Without alt text

- Screen readers may only announce “image” or read the file name
- Users miss out on important visual information
- Readers will not fully understand your message

When to Use Alt-Text

Use alt text for meaningful:

- Photos, illustrations, icons
- Charts, graphs, infographics
- Screenshots and diagrams
- Images with embedded text

Skip alt text for:

- Decorative images such as borders, background shapes
- Repeated logos used only for branding

Structure of Good Alt-Text

Follow a clear structure:

1. Start with a general overview
2. Add key details relevant to the image's purpose
3. Avoid unnecessary detail — focus on what is important

Example:

“Bar chart showing sales growth from 2022 to 2025, with a steady 20% increase each year.”

Writing Tips

Use present tense and action verbs

Example: “A woman smiles while holding a guide dog’s harness.”

Be concise — aim for under 150 characters

Avoid phrases like “Image/graphic of...”

Don’t use alt text for marketing keywords or SEO

Avoid auto-generated alt-text

Context Is Key

Alt text should reflect:

- The surrounding content
- The purpose of the image



Ask yourself:

- Why is this image here?
- What message does it support?
- What would I say if the image wasn't visible?

See example on
next slide





Image used in an article about the history of the Royal family of England:

“King Henry VIII of England looking stern and wearing lavish royal clothing.”



Image used in an article focusing on royal fashion in the XX century England:

“King Henry VIII of England wearing a fur-trimmed hat and cape, bedazzled shirt and golden jewelry.”

Describing People

Be objective and inclusive:

Describe visible characteristics (e.g., hairstyle, clothing, skin tone)

Use emoji-style terms for skin tone: “light,” “medium,” “dark”

Avoid assuming gender unless pronouns are known

Include visible disabilities if relevant to the context

Text in Images

If an image contains text:

Write it out in the alt text

Don't rely on captions as they may not describe the image fully

Avoid redundancy; if the surrounding text already explains the image, use alt text to add value

Complex Images

For charts, maps, tables, and infographics:

- Use brief alt text to summarize the image
- Provide a long description elsewhere such as surrounding text, appendix, or linked page

Structure long descriptions:

- Overview
- Type of image
- Axes or layout
- Key data points or elements

Final Tips

Use inclusive, objective language

Describe only what's visible and relevant

Think of alt-text like a tweet



Describe decorative images

Use alt text for unrelated info

Repeat what's already in captions

Avoid long alt-text

Questions?

Email us at Info@RickHansen.com