

## Accessibility Captions Guidelines

The University of Cincinnati Press and Cincinnati Library Publishing Services are dedicated to promoting and providing accessible digital content. One avenue of this is creating alternative text captions for all images used in a project.

ALT text refers to invisible description of images which are read aloud to disabled users on a screen reader. Adding ALT text allows authors to include images, but still provide the content in an alternative text based format.

## HOW TO MAKE A PDF FILE ACCESSIBLE?

Using Adobe Acrobat Pro, you can take the following steps to improve the accessibility of an existing document:

- If the text in your PDF is an image and not selectable text, convert it to text. Select **Tools > Text Recognition > In This File**. This is the most important step in making your document readable by assistive technology.
- Add tags to indicate heading structure. Select **Tools > Accessibility > Add Tags to Document**. This is important for navigating long and complex documents, such as textbooks.
- Add alternate text to images. Select **Tools > Accessibility > Set Alternate Text**. Users who cannot see images must rely on you, the author, to provide alternate text to describe the content of an image. This alternate text should be succinct, convey the important information, and not overburden the reader.
- Set reading order. Select **Tools > Accessibility > Touch Up Reading Order**. Reading order is important, as it is the order in which a screen reader will read the content to the user.
- Set language. Select **File > Properties > Advanced > Reading Options**. This setting helps screen readers switch to the correct language

## GUIDELINES FOR WRITING THE CAPTIONS

### Guidelines from Harvard's accessibility office:

- **· Provide a short description for content images.** A short phrase describing the image will make its purpose known to screen reader users.
- **· Don't use the title attribute for images.** There is no real need to provide a title as well as alternative text.
- **· Don't describe decorative images.** For images that don't contribute to the content and functionality of the page, hide them from screen reader users. (Mark as decorative image while doing the alt-text for the image)
- **· Describe the action for images that are inside a link.** And when you're using images as controls or links to other pages, the text alternative should describe the action (such as "Print page") rather than the image ("Printer icon").
- **· Look to other means to describe complex images.** You can provide a full description of a complex image in a variety of ways—such as in the text of the page, as an image caption, as a data table, or on a separate page linked from the image.

### OTHER GUIDELINES-

- Ask yourself- "What do I want my readers to get from this image?" Put the required information in the Alt Text and leave out irrelevant details.
- Keep the text short- Usually between 5-15 words
- Do not use the name of your file as Alt text.
- Although alt text is brief, make sure it contains all relevant information.

**Artistic Example ( Note- This can also be followed in the case of a creative/design book)**

Consider this painting of George Washington at Valley Forge (Picture from [Library of Congress](#)).



When thinking of an ALT tag, the task would be to consider WHY the image is included.

Is it within a history course? a course on climatic history? Is the point of the image to show how soldiers were dressed or that LaFayette was at Valley Forge? The answer could affect how you write the ALT text.

Possible Alt texts for the Above Painting-

1. ALT = "George Washington at Valley Forge" (most succinct)
2. ALT = "George Washington and Lafayette on horseback talking to soldiers in snow at Valley Forge" (more detailed)
3. ALT = "Valley Forge in winter. The landscape is snowy and soldiers are sitting by the open road with a campfire." (emphasizing climate)

**A possible confusion which occurs commonly is between the caption vs Alt text.**

When creating an ALT text, it's important to remember that it should describe the image. It should NOT include information about copyright or any extra information that would be relevant to a viewing audience.

See example below



Painting is by John Dunsmore ca. 1907 and shows both George Washington and the Marquis de Lafayette on horseback. Note small cabins in the background. Image from [Library of Congress](#)

ALT Text =

George Washington on horseback in winter Valley Forge

Source- <https://accessibility.psu.edu/images/alttext/>

### **Other Good practices to follow when doing an Alt text- (Harvard Accessibility office)**

- If the photo is being used to show something generally, the description should name the person, place, or thing: "Photo of Harvard Yard."
- If the photograph is being used to provide detailed information, the description should be more specific: "Photo of the Old Yard section of Harvard Yard showing the bronze statue of John Harvard in front of University Hall."
- If the image is being used to link to another page, its short description should describe the link's destination, not the image. For example, an image of a question mark that serves as a link to a help page should be described as "help"—not "question mark."

- If the image is informational, such as a chart, diagram, or illustration, its short description might be "Diagram of John Harvard statue." Its long description should include the details conveyed visually, such as dimensions and materials used. Note that a long description should be provided for images that are the sole source of that information, but you don't need to describe a chart if the same data were also displayed on the page in a data table.
- If the image is a map, its short description might be "Map showing location of John Harvard statue." If the map is intended to provide directions to the statue, then its long description should provide step-by-step text directions.
- For icons, their short descriptions should be the equivalent to the information provided by the icon, such as "PDF document" for a PDF icon.
- For images that require a long description, consider using a figure caption to display the long description. That way, the descriptive information is available to all users.

SOURCE- <https://accessibility.huit.harvard.edu/describe-content-images>

|   | Image   | Poor Alt Text   | Good Alt Text*  | Reason  |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 |    | Brown-haired young woman in jeans and a pink short-sleeved shirt with a blue backpack sitting alone on steps outside smiling at the camera. | Female student sitting on steps and smiling at the camera.            | Leave out irrelevant details and use 5-15 words.  |
| 2 |    | Greatwall.jpg   | Great Wall of China   | Don't use the file name as the Alt Text.  |
| 3 |   | Kentucky  | Outline of the state of Kentucky with tobacco plant, banjo and horse. | Include sufficient detail to make the Alt Text useful.  |
| 4 |  | Picture of a computer key with the word Home.   | Home  | When the image contains text, the Alt Text should be exactly the same as the text in the image. |

\* These are examples. The purpose of the image must always be taken into consideration.

SOURCE-[http://louisville.edu/delphi/resources/creating-accessible-courses/-/files/resources/accessibility/Writing\\_Alt\\_Text.pdf](http://louisville.edu/delphi/resources/creating-accessible-courses/-/files/resources/accessibility/Writing_Alt_Text.pdf)