

Creating Accessible Images with Alt Text

The basic rule

Every image should either have meaningful alt text or be marked decorative.

Alt text should communicate the meaning or purpose of the image in its context - not necessarily describe every visual detail.

In Canvas

1. Open the page, assignment, discussion, announcement, or other content in Edit mode.
2. Select the image, then choose Image Options.
3. In the Alt Text field, enter a brief description of the image's important information.
4. Save your Canvas content.

If you are uploading a new image, **add alt text during the upload process**. Never leave the filename (such as IMG_4827.jpg) as the alt text.

In Microsoft Word and Powerpoint

1. Insert your image.
2. Right-click the image and choose Edit Alt Text.
3. You can also select the image and go to Format → Alt Text in your toolbar.
4. In the Alt Text pane, enter a brief description of the image's important information or purpose.
5. If the image is only decorative, select Mark as decorative instead of writing alt text.

Important: Microsoft may automatically generate alt text for some images. Review it and replace it when needed. Automatically generated alt text may be vague, inaccurate, or miss the purpose of the image in context.

Informative or Decorative?

Ask yourself: *If a student could not see this image, would they miss important information they need?*

- **Yes - Informative:** Add alt text that communicates the information or purpose of the image.
- **No - Decorative:** If the image is only included for visual interest, mood, or decoration, select Decorative Image in Canvas.

Remember: Whether an image is informative or decorative depends on how it is being used, not simply on what the image contains.

What About Complex Images?

Charts, graphs, diagrams, infographics, and maps may contain more information than can be written in 20-25 words.

1. **Use brief alt text** to identify the image and its main takeaway.
2. **Provide the important details** in visible text near the image.

Do not try to squeeze an entire chart or infographic into a very long alt-text description. Whenever possible, make the important information available as regular page text.

Example: *"Bar chart showing enrollment increased each year from 2022 through 2025. Detailed data follows."*

5 Rules to Remember

1. Describe the image's meaning or purpose in context - not every visual detail. If it is irrelevant to the course, it is likely decorative.
2. Keep alt text concise, specific, and useful. 20-25 words, 125 characters or less.
3. Avoid vague text such as "image" or "graphic."
4. Do not repeat nearby text or begin with "image of" or "picture of" unless the medium is important.
5. For complex images, pair brief alt text with the important information in visible page content.