

Great Lakes ADA Center
A Division of the ADA National Network
800-949-4232 (TDD)
www.ada.gov/ada611-612

ACCESSIBLE TECHNOLOGY WEBINAR SERIES

**Inclusive Imagery:
Writing Alt-Text that Depicts People with Disabilities and Other Marginalized Identities**

March 16, 2023
A collaboration among:

Great Lakes ADA Center Southeast ADA Center

1

1

Great Lakes ADA Center
A Division of the ADA National Network
800-949-4232 (TDD)
www.ada.gov/ada611-612

The ADA National Network



The ADA National Network consists of 10 Regional ADA Centers.
> 800-949-4232
> www.adata.org

Funded by the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR).

2

2

Great Lakes ADA Center
A Division of the ADA National Network
800-949-4232 (TDD)
www.ada.gov/ada611-612

Webinar Participation

Today's webinar presentation will involve poll questions and an opportunity to practice writing alt-text

Poll Questions (2 options):


- **Web Option:** Open your browser (Firefox, Google Chrome, etc.) and type the URL pollev.com/docstacy
- **Mobile Option:** Text **DOCSTACY** to **37607** once to join

Alt-Text Practice:

- At specific times, the presenters will ask you to write your alt-text suggestions in the chat; some suggestions will be read aloud

3

3

Central Library  University of the South Florida

800-943-4232 (TTS) www.usf.edu/ada

Missing Alt-Text Disclaimer

Due to the interactive nature of today's session, there are a few images in the slides that do not contain accurate alt-text

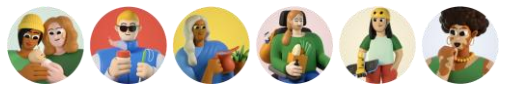
- For these slides, the presenters and audience will practice creating the alt-text together during the live session
- Images have been identified in the alt-text as "demonstration" images
- These images will be described verbally by the presenters
- **Practice Slides with Demonstration Images:** Slides 29-37

4

4

Inclusive Imagery

Writing Alt-Text that Depicts People with Disabilities and Other Marginalized Identities



5

5


Agenda

- Introduction
- Alt Text Guidelines
- Practice Writing Alt Text
- Alt Text Writing Processes
- Takeaways

6

6

Mx. Emory Edwards (they/them)



PhD Candidate | Informatics


✉ emoryed@uci.edu

🌐 [Emory's LinkedIn](#)

7

7

Dr. Stacy Branham (she/they)



Associate Professor | Informatics



✉ sbranham@uci.edu

🌐 [Stacy's website](#)

8

8

Dr. Ali Abdolrahmani (he/him)

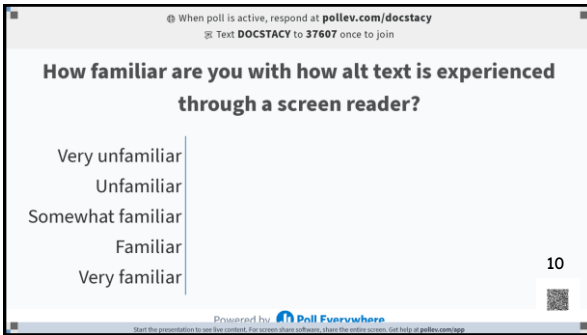


✉ aliab1@umbc.edu

🌐 [Ali's LinkedIn](#)

9

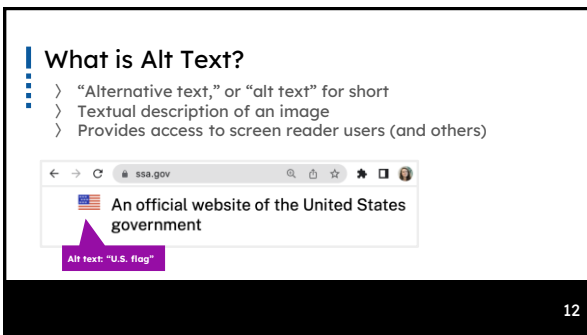
9



10



11



12

How Do You Define Alt Text for an Image?

- › In **HTML**, alt text is defined by the **alt** attribute

```

```

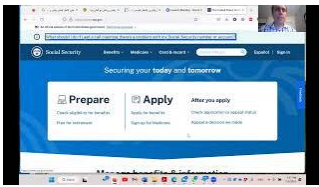
- › In **other apps**, like Google Slides, alt text can be added through the interface



13

13

How Screen Readers Interpret Alt Text



Alt text: "U.S. flag"
Screen reader: "Graphic, U.S. flag"

14

14

Alt Text is Often Missing, Done Poorly

Out of the top 1 million web pages (surveyed by WebAIM):

- › 55% of home pages were **missing** some alt text
- › Over 23% of images on those pages were **undescribed**
- › Another 10% had one-word or **meaningless** alt text

Overall, more than a third of ~40 million images on the top million websites lacked informative alt text

15

15

No Guidelines for “Inclusive Imagery”

Inclusive imagery is:

- › Visual representations of people with **marginalized identities** (e.g., people with disabilities, gender non-conforming people, people of color, etc.)
- › Image descriptions (including alt text) that accurately represent marginalized identities
- › Non-stigmatizing and informed by people with lived experience of marginalization



16

16

Agenda

- Introduction
- Alt Text Guidelines
- Practice Writing Alt Text
- Alt Text Writing Processes
- Takeaways

17

17

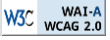

WCAG & WebAIM Guidelines

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG):

- › Section 508 requires WCAG 2.0 AA
- › Text Alternatives are a Level A feature

WebAIM’s Alternative Text article:

- › Interprets WCAG guidelines
- › Provides practical examples

18

18

Basic Alt Text Best Practices

- 1. ***Be succinct but accurate**
- 2. Consider the purpose of the image
- 3. Avoid repetition of surrounding text
- 4. Do not say "image of," "picture of," "graphic of," etc.
- 5. ***Use long alt text if details are essential**
- 6. Use specific names, not sensory details
- 7. Transcribe key text in the image
- 8. Be consistent with names and labels

W3C WAI-A WCAG 2.0
WebAIM


19

19

1. Be succinct but accurate

WebAIM W3C WAI-A WCAG 2.0

Several alt text guides recommend using fewer than 100-150 characters. Though this is not a WCAG requirement, it is an indication of the importance of conciseness.



Smart Wildlife Watching >
Know the risks of getting too close to wild animals and how to avoid them.

WCAG 2.0 logo

✗ "A small striped squirrel stands on hind legs on a rock, looking into the distance, with a snow-capped mountain and blue sky in the background"

✓ "A small striped squirrel stands on hind legs with a mountain in the background"


20

20

5. Use long alt text if details are essential

W3C WAI-A WCAG 2.0

This assumes that the body text does not contain important figures and trends from the graph.



VACCINES ADMINISTERED
88,208,666 Total
9,308 Daily Avg.
72.7% of population vaccinated with primary series

December 29 - February 22

✗ "Graph of vaccines administered."

✓ "Graph of vaccines administered. Decreasing trend from December 29 to February 22. 72.7% of population vaccinated with primary series. 88,208,666 total. 9,308 daily average."

21

21


Our Research on Inclusive Imagery

Inclusive Studio for Innovative Technology and Education (INsite)

- > Studies of alt text usage and quality
- > Studies on describing marginalized identities
- > Studies of how alt text gets made

With Google and people with disabilities, we developed 40 inclusive profile images

- > Shipped on ~40 million Chromebooks in 2021
- > First accessible profile images
- > First profile images that depict disability



22

22

Inclusive Imagery Best Practices

INsite

1. Defer identity descriptors to image subject when possible
2. ***Try not to assume ambiguous identities**
3. ***When unsure, describe visual details or use hedging language**
4. ***Be objective and use outside information if available**
5. Consider the artist's intent, author's biases, and user's experience

23

23

2. Try not to assume ambiguous identities

INsite



Cannot easily discern her race (e.g., latina, pacific islander, white, mixed race, etc.)

- ✗ "White woman holding sign"
- ☑ "Light-skinned woman holding sign reading 'beautiful'"

Describer can decide which identities are relatively unambiguous, given visual cues

24

24

3. When unsure, describe visual details

INSite



- ✗ “Man with long hair and makeup”
- ✓ “Person with light brown skin, bleached blonde hair with pom-poms, posing with flamboyant makeup”
- ✓ “Person who might be a drag queen wearing blue, pink, and white”

Cannot tell the gender or pronouns of this person

Allow users to make their own guess, or use “hedging” language

25

25

4. Be objective and use outside information if available

INSite



- ✗ “Disabled war veteran sadly walks away”
- ✓ “Man walking down the street with a prosthetic leg while drinking coffee”

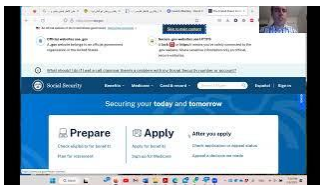
Do not portray subjective judgements, such as emotions or attractiveness, as fact

Do not portray subjective judgements, such as emotions or attractiveness, as fact

26

26

Guidelines Can't Replace User Testing



27

27

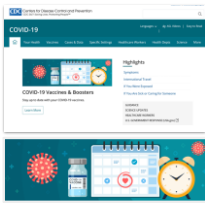
Agenda

- Introduction
- Alt Text Guidelines
- Practice Writing Alt Text
- Alt Text Writing Processes
- Takeaways

28

28

Practice #1: Context




› **Context:** Image on a CDC website about staying up-to-date on Covid-19 vaccines and boosters

› **Consider:** What is the purpose of the imagery?

29

29

Practice #1: What would you write?



› <share your alt text in the chat>

Context: Image on a CDC website about staying up-to-date on Covid-19 vaccines and boosters

Consider: What is the purpose of the imagery?

30

30

Practice #1: Takeaways

- > **What makes it tricky:** lots of elements to describe, needs to be short, unclear purpose (is it decorative or not?)
- > More important to describe relevant detail than all visual elements (as the current alt text does)
- > Sometimes "the right alt text" is **no alt text**



Current alt text: "Imagery of a vaccine vial, a calendar, and an alarm clock"

31

31

Practice #2: Context



- > **Context:** Link to Facebook page in the form of an icon. Adjacent icons have alt text such as "Call us", "Email us", and "LinkedIn [organization]"
- > **Consider:** How can you achieve consistency?

32

32

Practice #2: What would you write?



- > <share your alt text in the chat>

Context: Link to Facebook page in the form of an icon. Adjacent icons have alt text such as "Call us", "Email us", and "LinkedIn [organization]"

Consider: How can you achieve consistency?

33

33

Practice #2: Takeaways

- > **What makes it tricky:** needs to be short, because it's a small visual element amongst similar icons
- > Very important that icons with links have alt text informative of where the link will go
- > The current alt text could be improved on to remove the "follow where?" ambiguity



34

34

Practice #3: Context



- > **Context:** blog post on municipal accessibility measures undertaken through the partnership of these two people
- > **Caption:** "Dwight Owens, (left) and Lamar Rutland (right)"
- > **Consider:** how can you avoid repetition?

35

35

Practice #3: What would you write?




- Context:** blog post on municipal accessibility measures undertaken through the partnership of these two people
- Caption:** "Dwight Owens, (left) and Lamar Rutland (right)"
- Consider:** how can you avoid repetition?
- > <share your alt text in the chat>

36

36

Practice #3: Takeaways



- > **What makes it tricky:** Depicts people who we, the writers, know little about
- > **Need to consider:** What (if any) identity information is relevant or what do you notice first?
- > Avoid offensive language (e.g., "confined to a wheelchair," "suffering from," etc.)
- > If you cannot consult with the subject, make a judgment call; there is no one right answer

37

37

Agenda

- Introduction
- Alt Text Guidelines
- Practice Writing Alt Text
- Alt Text Writing Processes
- Takeaways

38

38


General Alt Text Creation Process

Artist Writer(s) Users

39

39

4 Models of Alt Text Creation Processes




Lone Writer Artist-Writer Team Write-a-Thon User Evaluation

40

40

Model 1: Lone Writer Process




- > One person wrote alt text for an 800-image set over two weekends
- > Simple hand-off, little to no collaboration with others
- > Fast turnaround time
 - o Writer only spent approximately 1 minute per image
 - o Might not scale for complex images
- > Consistency between all images
 - o Only one writer makes it really easy to keep language consistent
- > Huge labor burden
 - o Both emotionally (in terms of feeling responsible) and energy-wise the lone writer can be overburdened

41

41

Model 2: Artist-Writer Process




- > Image creators collaborate with alt text writers
 - o OR when the art is made and described by the same person
- > Clarity of purpose
 - o The artist knows best what the purpose / details of the image are
- > Iteration on alt text and image are possible
 - o If something is very hard to describe, potentially the image itself can be simplified
- > Can (like all the processes) potentially be combined with other methods

42

42

Model 3: Team Write-A-Thon Process

- > Close collaboration with many writers on a team
- > Good way to educate people not familiar with alt text
 - o Gets them up to speed before sending them to write alt text on their own
- > Initial worker overhead
 - o Need to get everyone focused on this one task
- > Hard to agree on consistent wording
 - o Is this an "icon" or an "avatar" or a "profile picture"? Everyone has to use the same term every time
- > Can reduce bottlenecks / labor burden
 - o Once everyone is creating quality alt text, many images can be made accessible in parallel




43

43

Model 4: User-Evaluation Process

- > Used to gather the guidelines I talked about earlier (alt text about identity)
- > Involves iterating with users to decide wording, level of detail, clarity of purpose, etc.
- > Can take months
 - o From recruiting, analyzing & integrating feedback, speaking to enough users, it is laborious
- > Great buy-in from everyone – users and professionals know it creates the best quality alt text



44

44

When poll is active, respond at polllev.com/docstacy
 Text **DOCSTACY** to 37607 once to join

What types of alt text creation processes have you used before? (please submit multiple responses)

- Artist-writer (write alt text for images you create)
- Lone writer (write by yourself)
- Team write-a-thon (write in a group meeting)
- User-evaluation process (write with screen reader users)
- I use a different process
- I have not written alt text before

45

Powered by  Poll Everywhere

45

Agenda

- Introduction
- Alt Text Guidelines
- Practice Writing Alt Text
- Alt Text Writing Processes
- ▣ Takeaways

46

46

Takeaways

- > Be succinct and tailor alt text to the purpose of the image
- > Consider if images truly have a purpose. If not, mark as decorative
- > Describe visually apparent or known details, especially about people
- > Consider how alt text is made in your organization and if the process could be changed to improve quality
- > Ultimately, nothing replaces user testing and evaluation

47

47

Thank You! Q&A in Zoom


Mx. Emory Edwards ✉ emoryed@uci.edu


Dr. Stacy Branham ✉ sbranham@uci.edu


Dr. Ali Abdolrahmani ✉ aliab1@umbc.edu

48

48

Auxiliary Slides

49

49

Resources

- > [WCAG 2.1](#)
- > [WebAIM Alternative Text](#)
- > [INsite's Research Papers](#)

50

50

Resources, Cont'd

- > [Museum Alt Text Guidelines](#) - Helpful if you need to describe artwork
- > [American Anthropology Guidelines](#) - Discuss the difference between alt text and image description
- > [National Center for Accessible Media](#) - In-depth tips for specific types of images / diagrams / graphs
- > [Alt Text as Poetry](#) - An alternative point of view, calling for alt text to be approached creatively

51

51

Basic Alt Text Best Practices

- 1. **Be succinct but accurate**
- 2. Consider the purpose of the image
- 3. Avoid repetition of surrounding text
- 4. Do not say "image of," "picture of," "graphic of," etc.
- 5. **Use long alt text if details are essential**
- 6. Use specific names, not sensory details
- 7. Transcribe key text in the image
- 8. Be consistent with names and labels


W3C WAI-A WCAG 2.0
WebAIM

52

52

1. Be succinct but accurate

Several alt text guides recommend using fewer than 100-150 characters. Though this is not a WCAG requirement, it is an indication of the importance of conciseness.



Smart Wildlife Watching >
Know the risks of getting too close to wild animals and how to avoid them.


- ✗ "A small striped squirrel stands on hind legs on a rock, looking into the distance, with a snow-capped mountain and blue sky in the background"
- ✓ "A small striped squirrel stands on hind legs with a mountain in the background"

WebAIM W3C WAI-A WCAG 2.0

53

53

2. Consider the purpose of the image



graphic text

- ✗ "Security symbol"
- ✗ "Green padlock"
- ✓ "HTTPS padlock symbol"

WebAIM

54

54

3. Avoid repetition of surrounding text

WebAIM

Secure .gov websites use HTTPS
 A lock (🔒) in the address bar means you've safely connected to the .gov website. Share sensitive information only on official, secure websites.

decorative graphic (points to lock icon)
graphic with alt text (points to lock icon)

X "Lock symbol"
 alt=""

✓
 alt="lock icon"

An empty alt tag denotes a "decorative" image. If the image is purely decorative or, as in this case, it is completely described by surrounding text, the alt text should be left empty.

55

55

4. Do not say "image," "graphic," etc.

WebAIM




X "Photo of soup kitchen"
X "Grainy, black and white photo of people"
✓ "People in a Depression-era soup kitchen line"

56

56

5. Use long alt text if details are essential

WDC WATIA WTAG 2.0



X "Graph of vaccines administered."
✓ "Graph of vaccines administered. Decreasing trend from December 29 to February 22. 72.7% of population vaccinated with primary series. 88,208,666 total. 9,308 daily average."

This assumes that the body text does not contain important figures and trends from the graph.

57

57

6. Use specific names, not sensory details

WC WAI-A WCAG 2.0



- "Four flags"
- "Four flags with a combination of red, white, blue, and yellow stripes and symbols."
- "Cuban flag, Haitian flag, Nicaraguan flag, and Venezuelan flag."


58

58

7. Transcribe key text in the image

WC WAI-A WCAG 2.0

Processes for Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans, and Venezuelans



This description is good, but unnecessary given the context.


- "Flags for Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Venezuela."
- "Processes for Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans, and Venezuelans."

59

59

8. Be consistent with names and labels

WC WAI-A WCAG 2.0




- "FTC seal"
- "Federal Trade Commission logo"
- ""

Assuming there are multiple FTC seals on the same page, any of these options alone could be appropriate. But, once you choose an alt text label, use it consistently.


60

60

Central Library  Division of the State Historical Museum

800-949-4232 (TDD)
www.adata.org


QUESTIONS



**You may type and submit questions
in the Q&A area of the Zoom**

61


61

Central Library  Division of the State Historical Museum

800-949-4232 (TDD)
www.adata.org


Still Have Questions?

Contact your Regional ADA Center


 800-949-4232
 www.adata.org

 62

62


Central Library  Division of the State Historical Museum

800-949-4232 (TDD)
www.adata.org



Session Evaluation
Your feedback is important to us

You will receive an email following the session with a link to the on-line evaluation

 63

63

The slide features the 'ACCESSIBLE TECHNOLOGY WEBINAR SERIES' logo at the top center. On the left, there is a screenshot of a web form with a blue checkmark icon and a dark overlay menu listing accessibility options: 'Forms & PDF', 'Text Input', 'Choice', 'Dropdown', 'Signatures', 'Photo', 'Form Only', 'Email', 'Description', 'i18n/Captions', and 'File Upload'. The main text on the right reads: 'Next Session: Thursday, May 11, 2023 PDF Fillable Forms: Consider Your User First Registration Coming Soon! Visit our website for updates: www.ada-accessibletech.org'. The slide number '64' is in the bottom right corner.

64