



Effective use of Alt Text

What is Alt Text?

ALT text is used whenever an image is placed on a webpage or social media post and is used to describe what the image is. It can help people using assistive technologies to 'hear' those visuals. Alt text is used by search engines too, so using alt text can help grow a brand's visibility online.

Alt Text - Do's

Below are some key pointers from the Design102 blog on how to use Alt Text effectively.

<https://design102.blog.gov.uk/2022/01/14/whats-the-alternative-how-to-write-good-alt-text/>

- Alt text should be specific and not overly descriptive.
- Good descriptions are concise but describe what's in your images accurately enough to understand their context.
- Stay clear of repetition.
- Include any essential text or data that's part of the visual.

Alt Text Don't

- Don't add alt text when it is not needed:
The Governments Design102 blog states that unnecessary alt text can make the content 'noisy' - this is a term used by assistive technology users to describe alt text on images that don't need to be described and add no worthwhile information. This includes elements such as borders, line breaks and brand graphics.
- Never start your alt text with 'image of' as this is not needed.
- Images that already have a caption describing the image, may not need additional alt text.
- Hashtags are an essential part of social media. If you write a hashtag all in lowercase such as: #designinlondon – a screen reader will struggle to identify the individual words. For this hashtag to be read aloud accurately, use a capital letter for each word, so this hashtag becomes: becomes #DesignInLondon.

WebAim – examples of how to use alt text effectively

Take a look at the example below of how best to use Alt Text, taken from the WebAim site.



As the first Hispanic woman to go to space, and, later, the first Hispanic director of Johnson Space Center, Ellen Ochoa is widely regarded as a role model.

What alt text would you choose for the image above?

- "Astronaut Ellen Ochoa"
- "Image of Ellen Ochoa, Astronaut"
- "Ellen Ochoa, the first Hispanic women to go into space"
- Empty alt attribute (alt="")

In the example above, the image content informs the user that this is Ellen Ochoa. Her mode of dress further conveys that she is an astronaut—which is meaningful, given her achievements.

Based on this, we recommend **alt="Astronaut Ellen Ochoa"**.

"Image of Ellen Ochoa, Astronaut" redundantly describes the image as an image.

"Ellen Ochoa, the first Hispanic woman to go into space" includes information that is not part of the image and is also redundant as it is already in the body text.

An empty `alt` attribute is not appropriate either. Even though the body text names Ellen Ochoa, visual users can tell this directly from the content of the image - and so, since the image **conveys content**, it needs more than an empty `alt` attribute.