Give visual descriptions

Accessibility Basics Tutorial Series

Contents

Alt Text

- Alt text is a description of an image that assistive technology reads for users who can't see the image.

- Alt text is not visible on the page.

- Alt text should be added for images and graphics across all digital media: documents, slides, websites, and social media.

- To add alt text in Microsoft Office and Google Workspace, right click the image and select the alt text menu item. In Google Workspace, two fields will appear; you want the field labeled "Description."

Tips for good alt text

- Capture the content of the image that is **relevant and informative** given the context in which the image appears.

- Be **non-redundant** given the other information that appears in the surrounding text.

- Be as **concise** as possible-at most the length of a Tweet.

- If the image contains more information than can be captured in alt text, convey that information in an image description. An image description is a longer description of the contents of the image that is placed as regular text somewhere else on the page. [Learn more about image descriptions vs. alt text.](#)

Example: Ilhan Omar

- **Ilhan Omar in front of U.S. and House of Representatives flags.** This is a concise option that probably suffices in many contexts.

- **Close-up of Ilhan Omar, a Somali-American woman wearing a black hijab, smiling while posed in front of the U.S. and House of Representatives flags.** This is a more detailed option, closer to an image description. If Omar's heritage and religious presentation are both relevant and not conveyed elsewhere, then this may be a better option.
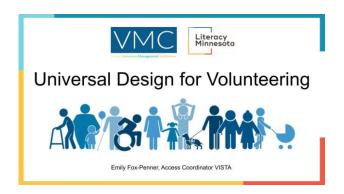
Purely decorative images

- When an image is purely decorative, sometimes you can mark it as decorative, which instructs assistive technology to ignore it entirely.

- Use this option if the image adds nothing to the audience's understanding or appreciation of the presentation.

Example: slide graphics

Universal Design for Volunteering

Emily Fox-Penner, Access Coordinator VISTA

- The colorful rectangular frame on this slide is purely decorative. Vector shapes usually are.

- The graphic at the center of the slide is not purely decorative, because it conveys some information about the subject of the presentation: that it's related to the topic of human diversity.

- The Literacy Minnesota logo is the only thing on the page indicating that the presentation is associated with Literacy Minnesota, so it conveys important information and should have alt text. It is enough for the alt text to read "Literacy Minnesota," though some people would use "Literacy Minnesota logo."

- If Literacy Minnesota were referenced as the author or sponsor somewhere in text, then the Literacy Minnesota logo would add no additional information and could be marked as decorative.

Verbal Descriptions

- During a live presentation, a lot of information is conveyed visually. Verbal descriptions help ensure equal access to this information.
- Live descriptions aren't a substitute for ensuring the audience has access to the slides in an accessible format to review the information at their own pace.

Verbal descriptions apply in three places:

1. A verbal description of yourself at the beginning of your speaking time.
2. Verbal descriptions of the contents of slides throughout the presentation.
3. Verbal summaries of important comments in the chat (in virtual settings).

Visual self-introduction

- Describe a few salient details about yourself at the beginning of the presentation or the first time you begin speaking.
- You can also encourage participants to give visual descriptions if they are speaking on camera at any point, including breakout rooms.

- There's no single, universally agreed upon formula for what to include. Your visual description can include any of the following depending on personal preference:

  o Race or skin tone.

  o Gender.

  o Disability status.

  o Details about clothing, makeup or hairstyle that convey personality.

  o Background or setting you're presenting from.

- There is some debate in blind communities about this practice. If you are interested in learning more, check out [Making a Case for Self-Description: It's Not About Eye Candy – Disability Visibility Project](#).

Examples

- "For my blind and low vision friends, let me explain that I'm a white disabled woman, I'm 73 years old, I have brown short hair, I'm wearing a blouse that's different shades of blue and glasses, in the foyer of our apartment." Judy Heumann at the [2021 Friend of Education Award](#)

- "My name is Leah, L-E-A-H, Lakshmi, L-A-K-S-H-M-I, Piepzna, P-I-E-P-Z-N-A, Samarasinha S-A-M-A-R-A-S-I-N-H-A. I am a light sand colored, mixed Sri-Lankan-Roma-Irish nonbinary femme, with big, clear cat-eye glasses and pink lipstick and brown and grey hair in an undercut." Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha at [Roundtable Discussion: Abolition and Disability Justice](#)

- Note that Leah spells out names for the ASL interpreter and CART captioner, speaking slowly enough that the ASL interpreter can keep up while fingerspelling. This is good practice for proper nouns that have to be fingerspelled.

Verbal descriptions for slides

Summarize the content on the slide for those who can't see it. There's no need to summarize purely decorative features. Try to integrate this into the flow of the presentation instead of pausing at the top of each slide.