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Common Mistakes for Beginners

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We know this all can seem overwhelming, but fear not! It only takes practice.

To help you succeed we have pulled together the most common issues people face when they start writing Alt text.

The most common mistakes for beginners are:

- Over describing, or describing in illogical order
- Not paying attention to context
- Not using plain or direct language. For example, writing 'curvilinear line' when writing 'curved line' is more direct, concise and accessible to all reading levels and cognitive abilities.
- Editorializing / not being objective.
- Over interpreting and not letting the reader make the same conclusions or connections as others. For example, a graph showing decreasing prices vs a graph showing a line that starts out flat, then gradually decreases.

Below is an image along with its original caption:



[Caption]: Revels of bearded satyrs. Detail of an Attic red-figure psykter (wine-cooler), signed by Douris as a painter. Dated to ca. 500-490 BC. Currently in the British Museum. [Source](#)

We created this long winded description for you!

Alt Text: An image of a photo. The photo is of a black vase. It is a full color photograph with strong lighting that casts shadows around the image. The shadows go out from the left and right of the vase against a white greyish background. There is glare from the camera flash on the vase, which is distracting from the image depicted on the vase. The vase is black, tall, and bulbous in the center, but tapers in at the top so the top of the center is smaller than the bottom of this section. There is a painting on the vase that is in an off white color in either a Roman or Greek style. The image goes around the bulbus center with an intricate border with squareish shapes in the border. This image that is painted on the vase depicts a group of men in a row with beards and tails and they are not wearing clothes. They seem to be some wild men who are dancing and falling around with no care in the world. There are random chips in the vase that indicate that it is a relic from antiquity. Some of them hold what looks like jugs or fancy pots.

What is wrong with this description?:

- There is too much information. We do not need to know about the shadows, the lighting, the chips on the vase, and so on.
- It is clear from words such as 'Bulbous' and the phrase 'wild men' the describer has not looked at the context. These words and phrases are not direct plain language and can be confusing to the reader. Additionally, satyrs are not, in fact, men, so this description gives incorrect information.
- The description is also not objective, and editorializes what the describer thinks they see.
- It also censors what the image is actually showing.
- The description is poorly structured. It jumps around, talking about the content of the painting, then physical characteristics of the vase (chips), then about the painting again.

The source for this image is the British Museum website, and comes with a detailed description of the piece. This will inform us on the context and it will help with choosing what language to use, and how much to describe.

Below is a more appropriate example of alt text:

[Alt-text]: Four nude satyrs engage in drinking and revelry. One leans back on his hands, balancing a cantharos on his erect phallus. One pours wine into the cantharos; another stands behind him, holding a cantharos overhead. To the right, the fourth satyr dances around another cantharos, set on the ground.

As you can see it is a lot more direct and concise, does not censor, and is in a logical order.

We highly recommend going through the [Poet Centre Tutorial](#) to practice your Alt-text.



Go to [Writing Tip: Using Point Form Technique](#) for a breakdown on how you can start the writing process



If you have any questions, post your question on the [Alt-Text Q&A](#)

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