

Table of Contents

Editing Your Alt-text

Basic Steps

How to Edit Alt-text

Edit to Provide Clarity

Edit to Organize Information

Edit to Remain Neutral

Edit to Reduce Redundancy

Other Tips for Editing

Read Aloud

Sleep on It

Know Your Limits

1

1

2

2

3

3

4

5

5

5

5

Editing Your Alt-text

Part of the writing process for Image Descriptions is to self edit your work. Part of your job expectations is to produce accessible versions of the titles you are assigned. Alt-text is an essential part of accessibility.

It can take longer to learn how to write image descriptions than the other parts of reformatting an ebook, and we are here to help and support you on this journey. Even after you have gotten a handle on how to describe images, there will always be times when you struggle and need assistance. This section will walk you through the editing process, and provide you with some useful tips. We have also created the [Alt-text Q&A](#) page to help with any trickier images and all your Alt-text related questions!

It is important to remember that when a reader listens to Alt-text it is extra work compared to someone visually absorbing the image. Shorter, more efficient Alt-text helps people get that content and avoid cognitive overload. Editing is essential to this process.



Every writer and editor has a slightly different process for what works for them, but it is essential that you learn how to properly edit and write image descriptions. A major part of this job is attention to detail, and editing is part of this.



Do not rely on the built in Spelling and Grammar checker in Word. It is notoriously glitchy, and you will have to rely on your own reading abilities and attention to detail to edit your work.



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



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

Basic Steps

The first step is to write the Alt-text, and try not to get too bogged down on getting it perfect the first time. The documentation on this wiki, along with the additional resources and [Alt-text samples](#), will help you in your writing. Think of this as your first draft.



Write your image descriptions in a new Word document as the Alt-text boxes are difficult to edit in.

You should aim to edit your work at least three times before you submit a final draft of a title.

1. After writing, copyedit for clarity
2. Next day copyedit for structure and clarity (aim to be able to recreate the image in description)
3. Final proofread to catch any grammar and punctuation mistakes



Copyediting refers to doing a closer read of your work looking for mistakes that apply to the overall structure and clarity of the description, as well as any spelling, grammar, and punctuation mistakes. Proofreading refers to a close examination of grammar and punctuation only, and is the final step in any editing process to catch mistakes that may have slipped through the cracks.



Trickier descriptions may take a few more drafts to get right, and this is okay. Complex descriptions can be the most difficult, especially if you are testing out multiple modalities. For writing tips check out [Complex Descriptions](#).



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

How to Edit Alt-text

DAISY released a series of webinars on Alt-text, and their video on editing is very informative. You can watch it in its entirety through the following

link:<https://daisy.org/news-events/articles/art-science-describing-images-w/>

Below are the highlights from this video.

Edit to Provide Clarity

Make sure you use specific language and simple word choices in order to be clear. Write out any acronyms and symbols and use proper grammar and punctuation.



Remember, Alt-text cannot have any paragraph breaks or complex formatting. If the image description calls for this then it needs to go into a Long Description.



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

Edit to Organize Information

Work from the general to the specific and group like items together for ease of reading comprehension. Organize information within your image description in a clear predictable way. This will help the reader to get into the rhythm of the description. Start with similarities, and if needed describe differences.



If the image is complex, or is part of a series, then it is often better to describe the differences as opposed to the similarities for clarity.



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

Edit to Remain Neutral

Try not to instruct, or go beyond what is contained within the image. Describe what is in the image and avoid interpreting. This goes back to being clear, direct, and concise. You can describe actions or expressions, but don't attempt to interpret thoughts and feelings unless the context requires this. Go to [Be Objective](#) and [Skin tone, Gender and Age](#) for more of how to describe people in images.



Remaining neutral is the same as being objective. Only describe what you see, and stop yourself there. Try not to invent thoughts and feelings behind someone's expression. Try not to interpret what they are feeling.

Remove reference to gender, age, race if not important to image. Context is always key. If you do describe it, remember it is an additional detail **it does not go into the first summarizing sentence.**

For example:





Alt-text: Two young girls stand beside each other and smile in the sunlight. There is a green leafy bush in the background. They both look directly into the camera. They both have a light skin tone. One girl has blonde hair in pigtails and wears a white dress, and the other has long loose brown hair and wears a green dress.



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

Edit to Reduce Redundancy

Edit descriptions that are too wordy and cut unnecessary phrases. Avoid repeating a caption, if one is present, and try not to regurgitate the surrounding text. Use pronouns when necessary to help tighten up the description. Avoid phrases like `image of` as this is redundant. Avoid words like `shows` or `appears` as it will be clear in the description that what you are writing is what is in the image.



If the book has multiple images of a particular style (i.e. black-and-white photographs, portraits, colour illustrations, etc.) you can mention this in the first image in the book. After that it is not needed, unless the style changes (i.e. there is suddenly an image of a headline, and then it goes back to photos.)

Remember to consider the cognitive load of your reader. The average person can remember 7 items at a time, which means less is more when you are writing an image description. Using fewer words helps the listener to process information more efficiently. This is why being direct and concise is so important, and using [Active Voice](#) and Present Tense helps achieve this in your writing.



Some descriptions will be more repetitive than others, this is based on context.



Usually, complex images are more repetitive because you are describing data and information. This calls for a balanced sentence structure. Sometimes a medium description will call for balanced sentences (e.g. Tim and John stand to the right of the table, and Mack and Sam stand to the left of the table.) This can help avoid cognitive overload. You can learn more about balanced sentences [here](#).



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

Other Tips for Editing

Below are some more helpful tips for editing your work.

Read Aloud

After you finish writing your first draft, read your work back to yourself out loud. Reading aloud can help you hear mistakes that you may not catch when reading in your head.

It is good to combine reading in your head with reading aloud, as it breaks up the way you are absorbing the information and heightens your chance of catching any mistakes.

Sleep on It

It is important to wait at least a day before you start any deeper edits on your image descriptions. This will ensure you have fresh eyes, and will avoid burnout. You will not be able to write or edit any good image descriptions if you are tired or burnout.

Know Your Limits

Learn what time of day you have the best focus for writing and editing image descriptions. This work is all about attention to detail and self editing, so you need to know when you are the most focused to be able to perform these tasks efficiently. Don't write if you are tired, distracted or burnt out. You will not be able to focus and you will not be able to pay proper attention to details, which means you will make more mistakes.



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

[Return to Images main page](#)

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