Social Media Best Practices

Using Image Descriptions

Image descriptions are text captions for images on the internet. They can be put in plain text near the image (usually directly following it) or placed as alternate text in the HTML to be picked up by screen readers. It's simple to add them and it makes the internet more accessible for several groups.

As a final note, image descriptions are always separated from the rest of the text with symbols ({}, [], **, (), etc.) in order to announce their presence to screen readers.

There are two main categories of image description. For the purposes of this article, I've decided to classify them as sparse and lush.

Sparse

Sparse image descriptions are best suited for images presented with a particular focus in mind. They contain basic information on what is in the picture and call attention to the important aspects of it without detailing everything.

Pros: Shorter to write, get straight to the point, and don't clutter that point with unimportant details
Cons: Can remove reader autonomy (letting the reader decide what they think is important about the image), inappropriate for images that are just meant as visual art

Lush

Lush image descriptions are for when you want to describe everything. They are the best when presenting visual art without trying to point out anything in particular to your reader, or when you want the reader to decide what's important.

Pros: Detailed and give the exact picture
Cons: Take longer to write, can be confusing and overwhelming if overdone, can demonstrate author bias

General Tips

1. Disable automatically-playing GIF files (some fast-playing GIFS can induce seizures. This will be under the same accessibility settings where you enabled alternate text).

2. Write the word [LINK] before linking to another website. This may assist someone with a screen-reader in skipping the reading of a long link if they are uninterested in it.

3. Capitalize the first letter in each word of a hashtag. It makes the hashtag easier to read for someone with a visual disability or a learning disability. Additionally, some screen-readers can detect individual words in a hashtag if the first letter is capitalized. If not, it will read each individual letter, which can create an internal spelling bee in your brain!
4. If you cannot find a gif with alternate text, consider saving it as a still image file or writing a description of the gif.

   a. Example One: “FYI: If you try to shake my hand during flu season, I may lysol you.” Two lines later, the following is written in brackets to illustrate the gif: “gif: Sheldon Cooper of Big Bang Theory sprays everything with Lysol.”

   i. Example Two: “If you feel you may be having an anxiety attack then it might be a good time to do a breathing exercise just to slow it down a bit. [enter twice] [gif showing shapes expanding for 5 seconds with the text Breathe In followed by shapes collapsing for 5 seconds with the text Breathe Out]”
Facebook

2 main styles for providing alternate text:

1. Alternate text that describes the picture in the initial post
   a. If you provide the alternate text in the initial post, we recommend placing the text in brackets and/or writing the words “Alternate text” prior to your description. This will allow users who use a screen-reader the opportunity to prepare for a description of an image.

2. Alternate text in the comments.

In-post Alternate Text

A great example of using in-post alternate text may be found on the Joshua Tree National Park’s Facebook page.

![Image of Joshua Tree National Park]

There's nothing like finding shady refuge while hiking in the desert. Escape the sun by resting under one of the larger pine trees found around the park. Although shade is rather sparse in the desert, it can be found in parts of the park where larger trees may grow such as along the Hidden Valley Nature Trail and other higher elevation areas.

In this photo, park wildlife biologist Jeff Rangitsch scope out a large pine tree while surveying the Barker Dam area for raptor nests.

[Photo by NPS/Jesmira Bonean: A hiker looks up at a large pine tree]

Alternate Text in Comments

If you switch between the two styles of alternate text on Facebook, you may wish to add “alternate text in comments” to your post. You will also want to make sure that your comments are shown in chronological order. To change your comments to chronological order, go to the bottom of your post and then click the word chronological or top comments. This will be next to the names of people who have liked your post. Make sure the checkmark is next to the word “chronological” instead of “top comments.” Below is a screenshot of this toggle setting.
For an example of alternative text in the comments section, please refer to this post from the UGA Disability Resource Center, which may be found at this link (www.tinyurl.com/AltTextComments), or in the screenshot below, which has alternative text.
Twitter

Enabling Alternate Text: Twitter Website and Official Applications

To enable alternate text for tweets using the official Twitter website or applications, follow the instructions at the following link: https://support.twitter.com/articles/20174660#. Supported applications include: Twitter for iOS, Twitter for Android, Twitter for web (www.twitter.com), VoiceOver for Twitter on iOS, Talkback for Twitter on Android, VoiceOver for Mac with twitter.com, JAWS for Windows Screen Reader with twitter.com, and NVDA screen reader for Windows with twitter.com.

Sample Tweet: Alternate Text

**Visible Text:** @UGAability: Stressed about #midterms? Here’s a picture of Poppins to make you feel better. #UGA #FutureServiceDog

**Hidden Alternative Text:** Black lab puppy wearing a guide dog foundation vest peers at service animal registration paperwork

Retweeting Others’ Posts

Because alternative text is not easily visible on twitter, check before retweeting someone else’s post that has an image. To check on a Windows computer, right click the image and click “view image info.” A dialog box will pop up, and there will be a section entitled “associated text.” If a custom alternative text has been written, it will appear in that section.

Retweeting: Quoted Tweet

A flyer without accessible text was posted with the comment “Let’s be real...we all need this! Free workshop begins January 23.” Because the flyer did not have alternative text, a student who uses a screen reader would not know that this was a stress and anxiety workshop or where it meets. When retweeting, the user quoted the tweet and added “Stressed about classes? Starting January 23, join the @UGAHealthCenter On Mondays at 12:30 for a stress & anxiety workshop in Ramsey 213!” This provided access to information for a screen-reader user while also sharing an already-popular post.
Examples of Alternative Text on Instagram

Below is a sampling of Instagram photos that are utilizing alternate text to create a more inclusive experience for all users. Note how and where the text is included in each example.

Example

- Alternate text embedded in original post
- Included a hashtag for #alttext to assist with individuals who may be searching for this specifically
- Alternate text description is included at the end of the comment, separated by brackets: popular practice
- Advantage: All the information is included in one block of text so it can be easier to navigate
- Alternate text as a comment
- Advantage: Prevents from providing too much text at once, which may feel a little overwhelming for individuals with disabilities

- Sometimes no alternate text is needed: Comment provides a pretty clear picture
- Important to not get so entrenched into the idea of providing alternate text that you are providing duplicate information
Example of duplication:
Comment- Catching the sunset tonight at the beach. It is beautiful! #AllTheColors #Sunset
Alternate Text: Beautiful sunset at the beach