

Using Images and Alternative Text

Ideas for Using Images

When students skim a document, images can quickly convey information and increase students' understanding of standard components of the syllabus. Here are some ideas for adding images to your syllabus:

- Use a visual representation of the grade distribution list like a pie chart.
- Use images of key authors, required textbooks, or course management system logos such as Canvas or Blackboard.
- Use images to depict main concepts for class alongside a course description.

For more information on using images in your courses or syllabus visit our [Accessibility Handbook](#)

Alternative Text for Images (Alt Text)

Images are not automatically accessible to screen readers on a computer. Writers must build image descriptions into the code of a document or integrate image descriptions into the full text as demonstrated in earlier examples. This alternative text (alt text) allows images to be read by screen readers. [Bryan Gould](#) of the National Center for Accessible Media poses three questions to consider when creating alt text:

- Why is the image there?
- Who is the intended audience?
- If there is no description what will the readers miss?

This third question, Gould points out, does not imply that alt text should include every visual detail, but rather that it should include the most important concepts.

What constitutes the most important concepts changes based on the context, so authors should consider the rhetorical situation when crafting alt text. [STEM guidelines](#), for example, suggest that alt text be brief and focused on data, not extraneous visual details. In an English class where students will analyze the image, though, more description would be necessary. The following are general guidelines to consider when creating alt text:

- Don't enter "photograph" or "picture of." Screen readers already note the presence of an image.

- Move from general description to specifics to allow readers to choose whether to go further and deeper in the same way a visual reader does.
- Keep text as concise as possible based on the rhetorical situation. Many online sources recommend between 5-15 words, but this number is not an absolute. All of the alt text examples below use over 20 words to make room for crucial historical details.
- Ask someone who has not seen the image to review the alt text.

See example of alt text from a twitter box vs. alt text from a national news outlet:



For more information on using alternative text visit our [Accessibility Handbook](#)