

T&F Journals – An Author’s Guide to Writing Alt Text

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What is Alt Text (alt-text)?

Alt Text (alternative text) is a short piece of text that can be attached to your figure to convey to readers the nature or contents of the image. It is typically used by systems such as pronouncing screen readers to make the object accessible to people that cannot read or see the object, due to a visual impairment or print disability.

Alt text will also be displayed in place of an image, if said image file cannot be loaded. Alt Text can also provide better image context/descriptions to search engine crawlers, helping them to index an image properly.

Why is Alt Text so Important?

Alt text is a key principle of accessible publishing. A digital “accessible” text is one that provides equal opportunity to all readers, including those with visual or print impairments. Taylor & Francis is committed to the supply of accessible content, ensuring as many readers as possible have access to the content we publish.

What are the Benefits of Authors supplying Alt Text?

We recognize that many of our authors and editors would like to maintain control of the content within the articles we publish. To accomplish the goal of creating equal access to all materials, Taylor & Francis may, in future, seek to outsource the writing of Alt Text descriptions where it is not supplied with a final manuscript. The outsourced authors responsible for producing this Alt Text will be Subject Matter Experts (SME) within their fields. However, Taylor & Francis offers the opportunity for authors to write and submit their own Alt Text, therefore maintaining control of the content and context used within their publications.

The benefits to author submission of Alt Text include:

- Working with Taylor & Francis in providing equal access and opportunity to users with visual impairments or print disability.
- Greater control of the text used within the publication to describe visual or graphical items, over the writing of an out-sourced Subject Matter Expert.
- Immediate production of an accessible article.
- Compliance for all United States government-funded works – [Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act](#) requires “Federal agencies to make their electronic and information technology (EIT) accessible to people with disabilities” and this “applies to all Federal agencies when they develop, procure, maintain, or use electronic and information technology. Under Section 508, agencies must give disabled employees and members of the public access to information comparable to the access available to others.” This is usually interpreted to include works (such as journal articles) that have been written by US Government employees, or those funded by a US Government agency.

How to write Alt Text

Alternative text is rarely a rote description of the image, instead it should convey the content and functionality of an image. **Alt Text is not the same as a caption**, which typically provides information that is not already in the visual element itself. For example, in a hypothetical journal article on inspirational photography, the figure caption for the below image may read:

Figure 1: Example of an inspirational image



Photograph of the word 'Hope', held up with two hands, silhouetted against a sunny sky.

Successful Alt Text describes key elements in a way that is comparable to a non-impaired user's understanding, when viewing the visual element itself. Unsuccessful Alt Text describes images in a way that is confusing or does not convey the educational goal of the content. Note, solely decorative images, such as chapter opening icons or place holder images in templates, do not require Alt Text.

Alt Text for a visual element can vary depending on how it is used. For example, the same image of New York City may be used within an architecture book and a book on photography. In the first case, the Alt Text may describe the construction elements and design of a skyscraper. In the latter, the Alt Text may discuss the angle of the sun reflecting off windows or the people walking by, or even what makes the photo "good" or "bad" from a photographer's standpoint.

Ask yourself:

- Why is this visual element here?
- What information does it present?
- What is its purpose?
- If the image were removed, how would I describe it to convey the same information and/or purpose?

Alt Text should be as objective as possible. Successful Alt Text follows some general rules. It is:

- **Concise.** Using a screen reader is time-consuming and unnecessarily long descriptions can create a burden on the user. Alt Text should strive to be under 100 words and generally 25 to 30 words long.
- **Targeted.** Descriptions should reflect the context and intent of the image, matching the focus of the text, chapter, and title. The Alt Text may have different descriptions depending on its purpose in a work.
- **Unique.** Do not repeat descriptions or text already provided in the caption or the surrounding text. When images are completely described by their caption or surrounding text, consider identifying them as decorative images.
- **Clear.** Spell out all contractions, numbers, and non-Latin letters and present the information in a logical and consistent order.
- **Simple.** Screen reading software does not read formatting in Alt Text, so do not use formatting, such as bullet points, in Alt Text descriptions.

- **Singular.** Screen reading software indicates the Alt Text is a replacement for an image, so do not use redundant phrases such as “Image of...” or “Graphic of...”.
- **Consistent.** Use the same level and style of language used within the main body of text.
- **Inclusive.** Alt Text should not contain additional information a sighted person (a customer not using a screen-reader) would miss.
- **Complete.** Conclude your Alt Text with a full stop/period (this allows for a pause in the screen reader, before it continues onto the next body of text).

Additional things to consider:

- **Long Descriptions.** Long descriptions are in-depth descriptions of an image beyond what Alt Text can provide. Long descriptions are rare, but some STEM titles may require them. These descriptions are added in addition to Alt Text and generally follow the same rules, but they may be any length and can be formatted with lists and tables to clearly organize complicated information or data (this is particularly relevant on STEM topics).
- **Grouped Images:** When images are grouped together as in the example below, the Alt Text is to be provided at the **individual figure level**, corresponding to **each figure** separately, rather than to all figures combined.

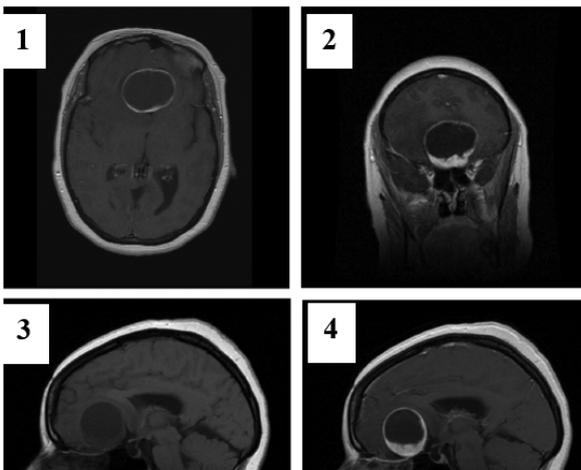


Fig. 1. Fundus photographs. There is Frisén grade 4 papilloedema with splinter and dot-and-blot haemorrhages **Fig. 2.** Upper images of brain MRI after contrast and Fig.3. Left to right: Post-op day 1, coronal T1-weighted MRI after contrast and fluid attenuated inversion recovery (FLAIR) M. **Fig.4.** Intraparenchymal schwannoma – histology.

Alt Text Examples

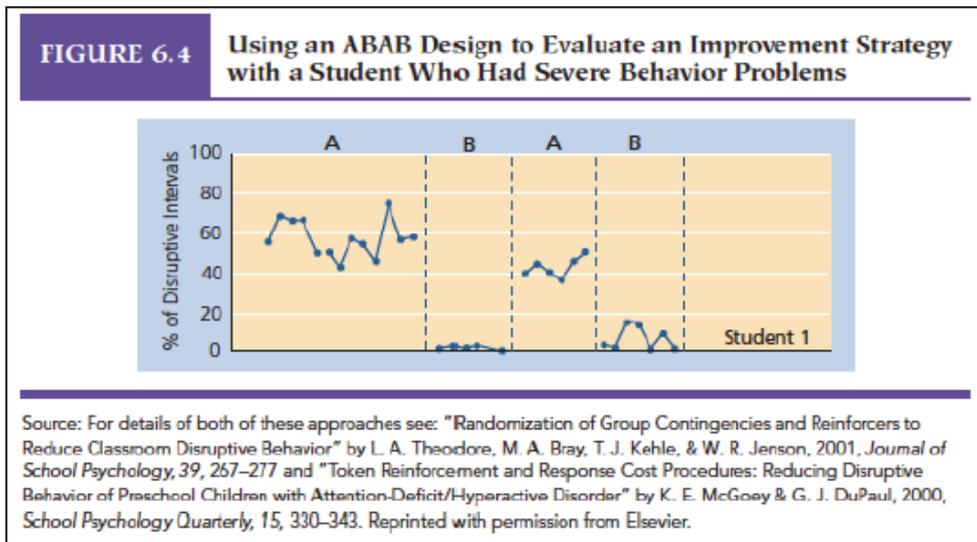
Alt Text for photograph [20 words]:

Three smiling young children in a classroom, with an iguana perched on one child’s forearm as another child feeds it.



GRANDMA’S RULE “First, do what I want you to do, and then you may do what you want to do.” According to the Premack principle, by making preferred activities contingent on learning and positive behavior, teachers can greatly increase both.

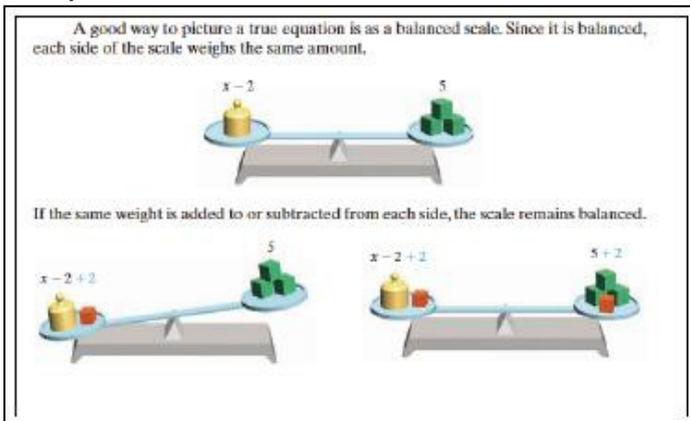
Example 2:



Alt Text for Graphical Figure [26 words]:

A four section ABAB line graph plotting the percentage of disruptive intervals of a student with behavioural problems. Significantly more instances occur in the A sections.

Example 3:



Alt Text for illustration [23 words]:

Three balance scales, with different combinations of weights represented by numerical equations, showing the effects of adding or subtracting weights from each side.

Long Description for illustration [153 words]:

Three separate balance scales, with different combinations of three types of weights: gold cylinders, green cubes, and red cubes. An equation is shown over each side of each scale.

The first scale shows a gold cylinder labelled $x - 2$ on the left side, and three green cubes labelled with the number five on the right side. The scale is shown equally balanced.

The second scale shows a gold cylinder and a red cube labelled $x - 2 + 2$ on the left side, and three green cubes labelled with the number five on the right side. The scale is shown unbalanced, with the cylinder and red cube side in a lower position.

The third scale shows a gold cylinder and a red cube labelled $x - 2 + 2$ on the left side, and three green cubes and one red cube labelled $5 + 2$ on the right side. The scale is shown equally balanced.

Example 4:

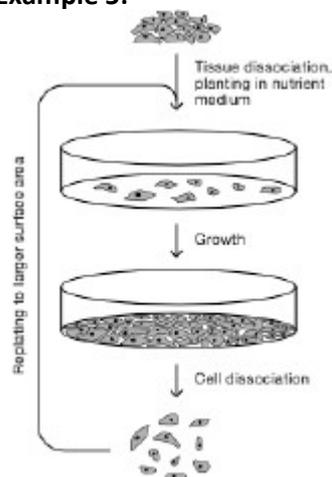


Alt Text for Cartoon including text [63 words]:

"A three-panel cartoon strip shows two adolescent boys walking. One boy says, "It's funny, but girls are a lot more interesting this year than they were last year." The other boy responds, "They're more interesting to me too." The second panel shows the two boys walking in silence. In the final panel, the first boy says, "I wonder what they did to themselves."

Note: An alternative solution here, to help shorten your Alt Text, would be to specify the text from the cartoon in the main body of text.

Example 5:



Caption: Anchorage dependency and contact inhibition in cultured normal diploid cells.

Alt Text for Illustration [34 words]:

An open cycle of tissue planted in dish with a nutrient medium, leading to growth which fills the dish, leading to cell dissociation allowing replating to larger surface area dish, starting the cycle over.

Long Description [72 words]:

An open cycle of tissue growth which feeds back on itself. Step one starts with tissue dissociation at the top. Step two adds tissue to a dish filled with a nutrient medium, growth of new cells leads to step three where the dish fills its surface area with tissue. Cell dissociation leads to step 4 and the cell sample is replated on a larger surface area medium leading back to step two.

How To Submit Alt Text With Your Article

When writing your figure captions these should be included as a list. Your Alt Text should be included along with the figure captions, for example:

Figure 1 Caption: Example of an inspirational image

Figure 1 Alt Text: Photograph of the word 'Hope', held up with two hands, silhouetted against a sunny sky.

Or, if you need to include long descriptions:

Figure 1 Caption: Anchorage dependency and contact inhibition in cultured normal diploid cells.

Figure 1 Alt Text: An open cycle of tissue planted in dish with a nutrient medium, leading to growth which fills the dish,

leading to cell dissociation allowing replating to larger surface area dish, starting the cycle over.

Figure 1 Long Description: An open cycle of tissue growth which feeds back on itself. Step one starts with tissue dissociation at the top. Step two adds tissue to a dish filled with a nutrient medium, growth of new cells leads to step three where the dish fills its surface area with tissue. Cell dissociation leads to step 4 and the cell sample is replated on a larger surface area medium leading back to step two.