



## MSU Denver Alternative Text – The Basics

Alternative text, also known as alt-text or alt-tags, is a contextual description of an image read by screen readers and is provided to users when their image does not load properly. The primary role of Alt-text is to provide image descriptions to screen reader users. Education is filled with image-based content in the form of diagrams, graphics, charts, and numerous forms of multimedia. However, creating alternative text can be difficult as its limitation of 150 characters makes providing meaningful description challenging. This guide is meant to provide guidance.

### Alt-Text Basics

1. Determine the value of your image
  - a. If an image is purely subjective, like a picture of a pet or a nondescript mountain range, ask yourself if it is necessary to include the image. It is always easier to remove an image than to write alternative text for an unnecessary image.
    - i. If the image is decorative and you have elected to keep it, tag it as decorative or use the null tag which is - ""
2. Describe the context and purpose of your image
  - a. It is important to determine the context and purpose of the image. Is your image informational or decorative? Is it explained in the text previously, or is this the first time the image and its data be shown? Answering these questions will tell you exactly what you are going to write in the alt text.
3. Review the image Objectively
  - a. Now that you know the value, the context, and the purpose of your image Attempt to describe the image objectively. Focus on important details, instead of things like color or adjectives like cute. this will help you craft the most focused off text
4. Be Succinct
  - a. Remember alt-text is 150 characters at most, so try to fit your objective description into 150 characters.
    - i. If you cannot this may be a good place for a long description, for an opportunity to expand information about the image before it is displayed.

### Avoid common Mistakes

- Don't include "image of" or "picture of" inside your alternative text.
- Avoid images of text. Images of text including pictures of quotes, billboards, and other images of text are inaccessible by design.
- Avoid describing every single detail in an image, like the detailed appearance of individuals and groups.
- Avoid inferring outcomes or including personal beliefs in all text. We want students to evaluate the value of images and discern their own outcomes. We do not want buy them are personal beliefs unless they are academically valuable.