

Fixing Alt Text

A quality assurance and accessibility campaign

Sponsored by Queen's Website Governance Committee

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Purpose

To encourage website editors across campus to improve the health of Queen's websites by adhering to legislated standards and best practices for authoring and maintaining content.

Images without alt text, or with poorly written alt text...

- are non-compliant with AODA requirements
- are a barrier to information for users of assistive technology
- negatively impact search engine optimisation of the queensu domain



Campaign overview

Campaign start and duration

January 24 through March 1, 2024

Issues and prevalence*

images missing a text alternative

19,481

*images with alt text input as alt="" meaning decorative
(a potential issue)*

25,763

Who is involved?

Website owners, administrators, and editors

*according to our Siteimprove reporting tool

What is alt text?

alt is an html attribute, found within an `` tag in the source code of a web page.

The HTML source code for an image looks something like this:

```

```

The alt (or "alternate") text that is provided here is rendered on the page when a user disables images in the browser (because of a slow internet connection) or is read aloud by assistive devices (screen readers) for users who may not directly see the image.

The alt text is also shown on the page when the image link is broken.



Why alt text is important

Alt text ensure that users have a full access to the information provided on a page, including graphic information, regardless of whether an images is viewable.

Search engines also use alt text understand the content of a page.

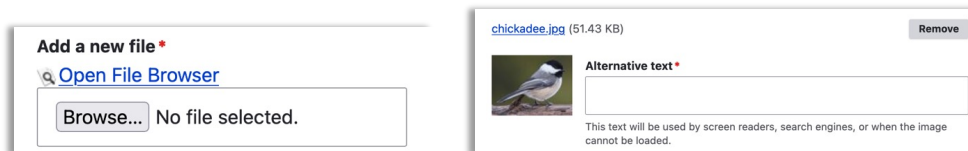
When we don't include appropriate alt text, we create an accessibility barrier.

As such, this is a failure to comply with [The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005](#).

How and where to do this

Every CMS is different, but a field to add alt text usually appears at the time of adding an image.

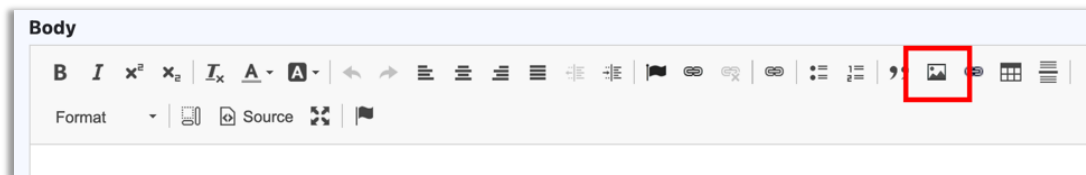
e.g. in WebPublish, where an image is added in a dedicated image upload field, the alt text field appears once the image is loaded...



The screenshot shows a file upload interface. On the left, there is a box titled "Add a new file*" with a link "Open File Browser" and a "Browse..." button. The text "No file selected." is displayed below. On the right, a file named "chickadee.jpg" (51.43 KB) is shown with a "Remove" button. Below the file name is a small image of a chickadee and an "Alternative text*" field. A note below the field states: "This text will be used by screen readers, search engines, or when the image cannot be loaded."

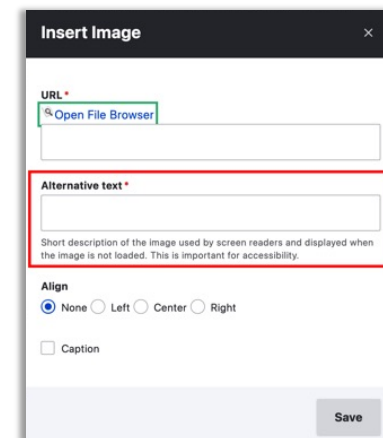
First, upload an image, then add the alt text in the field provided

e.g. in WebPublish, when you add an image via the [WYSIWYG](#) editor area, a pop-up dialogue box with an alt text field appears...



The screenshot shows a WYSIWYG editor toolbar. The toolbar includes various icons for text formatting (bold, italic, underline, strikethrough, text color, background color), alignment, bulleted and numbered lists, link, unlink, table, and image. The image icon, which shows a small picture of a landscape, is highlighted with a red rectangular box.

Select the image icon, upload an image file, then add the alt text



The screenshot shows an "Insert Image" dialog box. It has a title bar with a close button. The main content area includes a "URL*" field with an "Open File Browser" button. Below this is an "Alternative text*" field, which is highlighted with a red rectangular box. A note below the field states: "Short description of the image used by screen readers and displayed when the image is not loaded. This is important for accessibility." Below the field are "Align" options: "None" (selected), "Left", "Center", and "Right". There is also a "Caption" checkbox. At the bottom right, there is a "Save" button.

Some best practices for images on webpages

Create and select images that showcase the content of the page and enhance understanding of the topic

Be sure to explain the relevance of the image by including **both alt text and descriptive captions**.

Alt text and captions should not be the same.

Whereas alt text is objective, captions are contextual.

Captions describe images to help users relate them to surrounding text, such as by providing the cultural context, tone, or complexity of an image.

See for example, this recent CBC.ca story:

[In case you weren't aware, outdoor cats are stone-cold killers](#)

Alt text: a grey cat with green eyes looks into the camera

Caption: A Cuban blue cat is pictured in Havana Cuba in 2011. A new study tallies how many species cats have been recorded to hunt or scavenge worldwide.



A Cuban blue cat is pictured in Havana, Cuba in 2011. A new study tallies how many species cats have been recorded to hunt or scavenge worldwide. (Desmond Boylan/Reuters)



Exceptions

Linked images: If an image is linked – i.e. the `` element is nested inside an `<a>` element, the alt text should explain where the link goes.

Decorative images: Use `alt=""` if the image is only for decoration.

Whether an image is decorative is a judgement call, but one that is overrepresented on our websites.

A decorative image is usually a background graphics that provides visual style/ambiance.

[Learn more about what constitutes a decorative image](#)

Leaving out the alt attribute is never an option.

How to find and fix issues on your site

Use Siteimprove to identify the campaign-related issues in your site(s):

1) [Log into your Siteimprove account](#)

2) Under the DASHBOARD menu

Go to **Policy > My Policies**

Find the policy **Images missing an alt attribute** →

And find the policy **Alt text input as alt="" (decorative)** →

3) Use the results table to identify the number of occurrences for each page listed.

4) Click on a linked page title to see the individual page report

5) Use the CMS deeplink button to go directly to the page and make the appropriate changes





More reading on this topic

W3C Images Tutorial: <https://www.w3.org/WAI/tutorials/images/>

Includes a [Tips and Tricks](#) page and an [Alt Text Decision Tree](#)

Siteimprove: [Accessibility: Image Alt text best practices](#)