

Alt Text FAQs

▶ WHAT IS ALT TEXT?

Alt text (alternative text) is a brief, textual description associated with an image, video, or multi-media file used to convey key information about the file's visual content. Alt text is the textual equivalent of an image, making visual content decipherable for screen readers and other important accessibility tools. Including alt text connects your research to a wider audience by making it accessible to readers with visual impairments, reading disabilities, and many other conditions.

▶ WHEN IS ALT TEXT REQUIRED?

Alt text is required for all visual content on digital platforms. This includes figures, graphics, diagrams, schemes, charts, illustrations, photos, time lapses, and videos.

▶ WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ALT TEXT AND FIGURE CAPTIONS?

While figure captions are useful for highlighting key results and making visual connections to support an article's content, alt text is intended to provide a descriptive reference of what is being shown. Unlike figure captions, it is not a space to augment article content or provide analysis. Successful alt text concisely communicates specific visual elements, allowing a reader to quickly understand what is pictured through a few key descriptive points.

▶ DO TABLES REQUIRE ALT TEXT?

Yes. Authors should provide alt text that summarizes the key finding or comparison presented in the table. Alt text should not list individual data values or repeat column headings.

▶ DO VIDEOS REQUIRE ALT TEXT?

Yes. For video or multimedia files, authors should provide a brief description summarizing the purpose of the video and ensure that a transcript or caption describing spoken content is available.

▶ CAN AI GENERATE ALT TEXT?

In some workflows, automated tools may generate preliminary alt text for figures. Authors remain responsible for reviewing and confirming the accuracy of alt text and may revise it during the proof stage before publication.

▶ WHAT IF MY FIGURE NEEDS MORE EXPLANATION?

Alt text must be brief and cannot be used as a space to offer extensive details. However, if extensive description of visual content is needed, authors may provide a long description in addition to alt text. A long description is an optional supplement to alt text that offers a longer, more detailed description of the visual content. Like alt text, long descriptions are placed in the metadata of a webpage, making it accessible to assistive technologies. While long descriptions cannot be substituted for alt text, they can be a useful addition in making infographics and complex figures accessible to readers.

▶ WILL ALT TEXT CHANGE HOW MY WORK IS DISPLAYED?

Alt text will not affect your work's visual content or digital display. Alt text is located in the metadata of a webpage, making it available to assistive technologies such as screen readers without affecting visual content. It is a non-visual addition to a webpage's code designed to accommodate users of assistive tools without altering visual data.

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▶ HOW DOES MY WORK BENEFIT FROM ALT TEXT?

Readers are not the only ones to benefit from alt text. Effective alt text has many advantages for authors and researchers interested in the relevance and visibility of their work. These advantages include:

- Reaching a wider and more diverse audience to maximize viewership and impact
- Improving SEO rankings for related figures, schemes, and multimedia
- Boosting overall search engine relevance of content
- Optimizing viewer experience
- Providing a fail-safe alternative if visual content cannot be supported
- Building a stronger and more inclusive scientific community

▶ HOW DO I WRITE ALT TEXT FOR MY WORK?

Effective alt text should briefly describe what the visual shows and summarize the main result or trend. For detailed guidance, refer to the Alt Text Author Instructions document.