

Alt Text (Alternative Text)

Author Instructions

▶ WHY ALT TEXT IS REQUIRED

To ensure all published content can be interpreted by assistive technologies such as screen readers, authors are required to provide alt text (alternative text) descriptions for visual content included in their manuscripts.

Alt text enables readers who cannot see visual elements to understand the scientific information presented in figures, tables, and multimedia. The goal is to give readers using screen readers and other assistive software a quick summary of the visual content rather than a detailed literal description.

Providing alt text is a requirement for publication. For more detailed information about alt text, please see our Alt Text FAQs.

▶ GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR WRITING ALT TEXT

Be concise

- Aim for one or two simple sentences, about 25-50 words
- Use simple, clear language that can be deciphered by a screen reader
- Remove unnecessary details that do not contribute to the point of the image, such as color, shape, and size

Select key details

- Focus on important details that illustrate the meaning of your work rather than the appearance of the object
- Summarize the data/information being communicated
- Highlight abnormalities or outliers pertinent to understanding the object's meaning
- Provide context that explains the scientific process or experiment being illustrated

Be specific

- Specify what the object is (i.e., a bar graph, scatter plot, flow chart, etc.)
- Use discipline-specific terms that provide context for an informed audience
- Incorporate a few relevant scientific terms from the text to improve searchability and context (without repeating caption or article text verbatim)

Be objective

- Stick to the facts, focusing on details of immediate importance to the image
- Do not offer opinions or interpretations
- Use unbiased language, avoiding adjectives or descriptions that could be interpreted as subjective or debatable (i.e., say "sunset" instead of "beautiful sunset")
- Avoid suggestions of emotion or intention

▶ COMMON MISTAKES

Effective alt text provides clear language for assistive technology systems and avoids cluttering the content with extraneous details. Here are a few things to consider when writing alt text:

Avoid redundancy

Do not include modifiers such as "image of" or "figure of" at the beginning of alt text (unless it is something specific like "bar graph" or "flowchart")

Do not repeat information already given in captions or article text

Do not repeat blocks of text from the article or captions verbatim

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Avoid overcomplication

- Avoid jargon or overcomplicated language, as this may be difficult for screen readers to interpret
- Avoid complex sentence structures or excessive punctuation
- Do not use alt text as a substitute for a caption or long description

Exclude unnecessary details

- Exclude details that do not contribute to the overall meaning or immediate interpretation of the image (i.e., color, shape, artistic/stylistic elements)
- Do not repeat text contained in the image itself (summarize or describe the text instead)
- Do not list file names or URLs (describe what it is instead)
- Do not use the space to draw conclusions or present an argument

▶ GENERAL FORMATTING GUIDELINES

Accurate formatting and grammar are crucial when creating alt text, and successful alt text is consistent across all media in an article. By following a few formatting guidelines, alt text can be effective for readers and accessible to assistive software. Please keep the following formatting features in mind:

Maintain consistent style

- Use a consistent writing style and sentence structure across an article/book
- Use capitalization and punctuation correctly and consistently
- End lines with a period to signal the end of the text

Use plain text

- Prioritize functionality over creativity
- Do not use bullet points or symbols
- Do not use color or unusual fonts
- Avoid using varied or colorful vocabulary

▶ OBJECT-SPECIFIC GUIDELINES

Much of the visual content in scientific publishing consists of unique, data-oriented objects. While alt text for these items generally adheres to the guidelines outlined above, here are specific elements to consider:

Graphs/charts

- Specify the type (i.e., pie chart, bar graph, etc.)
- Describe the trends being shown
- Do not include details such as color and visual style, unless they are necessary for understanding the graph/chart's overall meaning

Schemes/diagrams

- Specify the type of diagram, if applicable
- Describe the purpose or results illustrated in the diagram

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Tables

- Summarize the table's significant trends
- Identify the table's main point in relation to your work
- Do not write "table of" unless identifying a specific type of table or clarifying something unusual
- Do not repeat point-by-point data or table headings

Equations

- Use words to describe what the equation solves for or why it is important in the context of the article
- Do not reproduce equations (partially or fully) verbatim in alt text

Hyperlinks

- Avoid writing "link of," as the screen reader will already indicate it is a link
- Avoid phrases such as "click here"
- Provide a few key words to specify what the link is and why it is included

Logos, cartoons, and illustrations

- Identify the object type
- If the object is a widely known brand, a public figure, or a visual icon that would be familiar to your audience, just state what it is (i.e., "Starbucks logo" or "The Mona Lisa")
- If a logo is used frequently or as a stand-in for text, refer to the logo by the company's name (i.e., "AIP Publishing" instead of repeating "AIP Publishing logo")

Complex figure/infographics

- Provide only one alt text description, capturing the main idea of the image as a whole
- Do not repeat text or numbers from the graphic verbatim
- Do not submit separate alt text lines for every panel or separate section of an image
- Do not list panel labels or titles

Decorative icons and aesthetic features

- Visuals placed for aesthetic appeal such as borders and animations do not need alt text
- Do not include alt text for visual content that does not directly relate to article content

▶ VIDEOS AND MULTIMEDIA

For video or multimedia content, authors should provide:

- A brief alt text description summarizing the purpose of the video

Video descriptions should summarize the key scientific content shown in the video.

Example:

Video demonstrating the experimental plasma discharge process and resulting emission patterns under varying voltage conditions.

Providing captions or transcripts ensures that multimedia content is accessible to readers who cannot hear or view the video.