

Dealing with Images – alt text

What Alt Text¹ does

Images can benefit one group of pupils but can present major obstacles to others. Images can help simplify what would otherwise be complex concepts. They can break up long passages of text and can be useful to British Sign Language users and others.

Many with visual impairments and especially blind pupils who use screen readers such as Jaws require an alternative text description of an image. Alt text allows them to understand what the image is meant to convey.

'Alt_Text' is familiar in web pages. When you hover the mouse over a link and information describing the link comes up that is alt text. It can also be added in Word documents and PDFs.

Good use of alt text

Good implementation of Alt Text can help to make a document accessible. If there is an image assume it needs an Alt text description. Technically it's easy to do, the hard part is doing it well. Here are a few Golden Rules:

- For every image there should be an alt attribute – alt text description.
- Alt text should consider the **content** and **function** of the image.
- Alt text should be simple and succinct.
- It should avoid redundancy – don't use describing text that is the same as text already there in the body (or in the caption)
- Avoid phrases like "image of..." or "graphic of..."
- Alt text of a functional image (e.g., an image within a weblink) should describe the function as well as the content.
- Decorative images should also have an alt description, it should be null (alt="").

With these points in mind answer the following.

¹ Be aware that the Alt Text facility is not available for Mac users using MS Word 2004 or earlier versions.