Quick Fix Guide: Creating Alt Text for Images[1]

To ensure screen reader users can access the necessary information associated with an image, the images must have a text alternative (known as "alt text"). Alt text should serve the same purpose and present the same information as the original image. *(Source: W3C WCAG Technique G94)*

When to Add Alt Text
- ✅ Informative images (convey content or function)
- ✅ Functional images (buttons, links, icons)
- ✅ Complex images (charts, graphs, diagrams)
- ❌ Decorative images (use empty alt="" or mark as decorative)

Writing Effective Alt Text
- **Be concise**: Aim for roughly 125 characters or less
- **Be selective**: Describe what's important, not every detail
- **Consider context**: Convey the image's purpose on the page
- **Avoid redundancy**: Screen readers announce images, so avoid "image of..." or "picture of..."
- **Mark decorative elements**: Borders, spacers, purely aesthetic images
- **Avoid images of text:** Written words should be rendered as text, not images (except logos)
- **Logos:** Make sure alt text includes any logo text verbatim

Platform-Specific Quick Fixes
- **Canvas**: Edit image → Alt Text field
- **Word/PowerPoint**: Right-click image → Edit Alt Text
- **Google Docs/Slides**: Right-click → Alt text
- **PDFs**: Acrobat Pro → Accessibility tools → Set Alternate Text
- **Web/HTML**: Add alt="description" to <img> tag (or alt="" for decorative images)

Need More Detail?
For complex images (charts, graphs, diagrams with multiple data points), use brief alt text to summarize the main point, then provide detailed description through one of these methods:
- Long descriptions in surrounding text
- Referencing data in the alt text (alt=Bar chart showing enrollment trends; see table below)
- Appendices with detailed descriptions

Good Questions to Ask About Alt Text *(Source: W3C WCAG Technique G94)*
- Why is this image here? What information is it presenting? What purpose does it fulfill?
- If I couldn't use the image, what words would convey the same function or information?
- If alt text is auto generated, does it describe only relevant content?

---

[1]This document is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International license (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 International). Users are welcome to distribute, adapt, remix, and build upon the material in any medium or format if they provide attribution to USM Kirwan Center for Academic Innovation and any other identified original authors, provide a link to the Creative Commons license, and indicate if changes were made. Users may not use the material for commercial purposes, and if users remix, transform, or build upon the material, they must distribute their contributions under the same CC BY-NC-SA license.