

**Alt Text Guidelines**

Alternative text (alt text) is a short description of an illustration intended to make our books more accessible for visually impaired readers using assistive technology. The alt text will not appear in the print edition of the book, nor will it be visible in the ebook; instead, it will be read aloud by screen-reading software frequently used by those with visual impairments. The length of alt text is constrained by common screen-reading programs, so rather than describing an image in full, alt text should aim to convey only the most essential information in the image.

Please include an alt text description for each illustration in your book in the same document as your captions, clearly distinguished from the captions themselves. When writing your alt text, please follow these guidelines:

1. **Keep it short:** Most screen readers will cut off the alt text after approximately 125 characters, so please keep your alt text descriptions as short and to the point as possible. To save space, avoid starting your alt text with “Image of . . .” or similar phrases. However, you may sometimes need to use more specific descriptors such as “graph,” “engraving,” or “cartoon” when the medium of an image is important and isn’t clear from context.

2. **Highlight the function of the image:** Just as your illustrations serve a specific purpose—to provide evidence, offer context, or illustrate an argument—your alt text should fulfill the same purpose for readers who can’t see the image. Since space is limited, your descriptions should focus on the elements of the image most important to that function.

For example, if you are using a graph to illustrate a specific claim in your argument, you may want to highlight the data that supports that claim in your description: “A graph showing the percentage of Supreme Court cases decided unanimously by year, with a sharp decline starting in the 1930s.”

3. **Avoid unnecessary duplication:** If your caption or running text already include descriptions of the image, you may not need to repeat the same information in the alt text. For a very complex image, your discussion of the image in running text may be the best place to provide a fuller description, since the length limits of alt text don’t apply there.

If your caption and text already supply all the description needed for an image, however, please still include a minimal alt text description as well. This lets readers using assistive technology know that alt text hasn’t been unintentionally omitted for the image.

Below are some examples of alt text descriptions of varying quality. What you include in your alt text will depend on the purpose of the image and the context of your manuscript, but these examples should give you a general idea of how effective alt text might read:

**Poor:** A graph

**Better:** A graph of the global child mortality rate since 1950

**Best:** A graph of the global child mortality rate from 1950 to 2012, showing a downward trajectory

**Poor:** A detail from a fresco

**Better:** A detail from a fifteenth-century Italian fresco depicting a foot race

**Best:** A detail from a fifteenth-century Italian fresco depicting a foot race, showing women participating in the race

**Poor:** An image of some children at school

**Better:** A group of children working at school desks

**Best:** A group of children working together on class work at school desks