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Writing effective Alt Text

- A guide for authors and editors*
- *The base text was generated using ChatGPT4.0
- Amsterdam University Press 2024

What is Alt Text?

Alt text (alternative text) is a concise description of an image that helps make content accessible to individuals who use screen readers or who have visual impairments. It also provides context if an image fails to load. Writing good alt text involves describing the essential content and purpose of the image in a clear and concise manner.

Why do I need to provide Alt Text and when?



From 2025 the European Accessibility Act will take effect, which means that online materials need to be accessible to people with disabilities or elderly people. As AUP will publish your book as an e-book as well as a printed book, we will have to supply an accessible EPUB. Any visual materials will need to be accompanied by descriptive texts.

You will be asked to deliver the Alt Text descriptions for your images at the time you will receive page proofs, but we ask that you also deliver the descriptions with the manuscript so that our gatekeepers can check them.

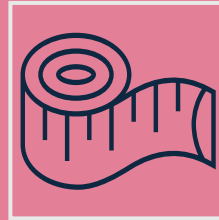


General Guidelines for Writing Alt Text



Be Descriptive and Specific:

Describe the content and function of the image. Focus on what is important for understanding the image within the context of the text.



Keep It Concise: Alt text should be short but informative—usually around 125 characters or less. Provide enough detail to convey the image's purpose without being overly wordy.

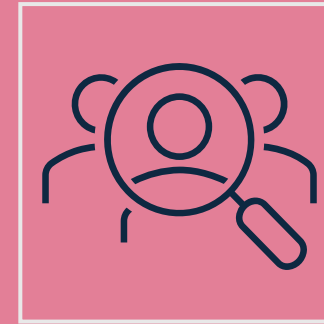


Avoid Redundancy: Do not include phrases like "image of" or "picture of" since screen readers typically announce the presence of an image before reading the alt text.

General Guidelines for Writing Alt Text



Context Matters: Tailor the alt text to the context in which the image appears. Consider what information the reader needs to grasp from the image in relation to the surrounding text.



Consider the Audience: Think about what the reader might need to know about the image. For example, a scientific book may require more technical descriptions, while a children's book might use simpler language.

Writing Alt Text for Different Types of Images



Photographs: Describe the key elements and context. Focus on people, objects, and actions depicted in the photo.



Charts and Graphs: Summarize the main data points or trends. Mention the type of chart and what it illustrates.



Illustrations: Describe the visual elements and their significance. For complex illustrations, focus on the most important aspects.



Maps: Highlight key locations, regions, or data represented. Mention any significant labels or landmarks.



Line Drawings and Diagrams: Focus on what the drawing or diagram represents and its purpose. Mention any labels or key features.

Photograph Example



Alt Text: A group of four people hiking on a narrow trail through a dense, green forest.

Chart/Graph Example

Alt Text: Bar chart showing a steady increase in book sales from 2018 to 2023, with sales doubling over the period.

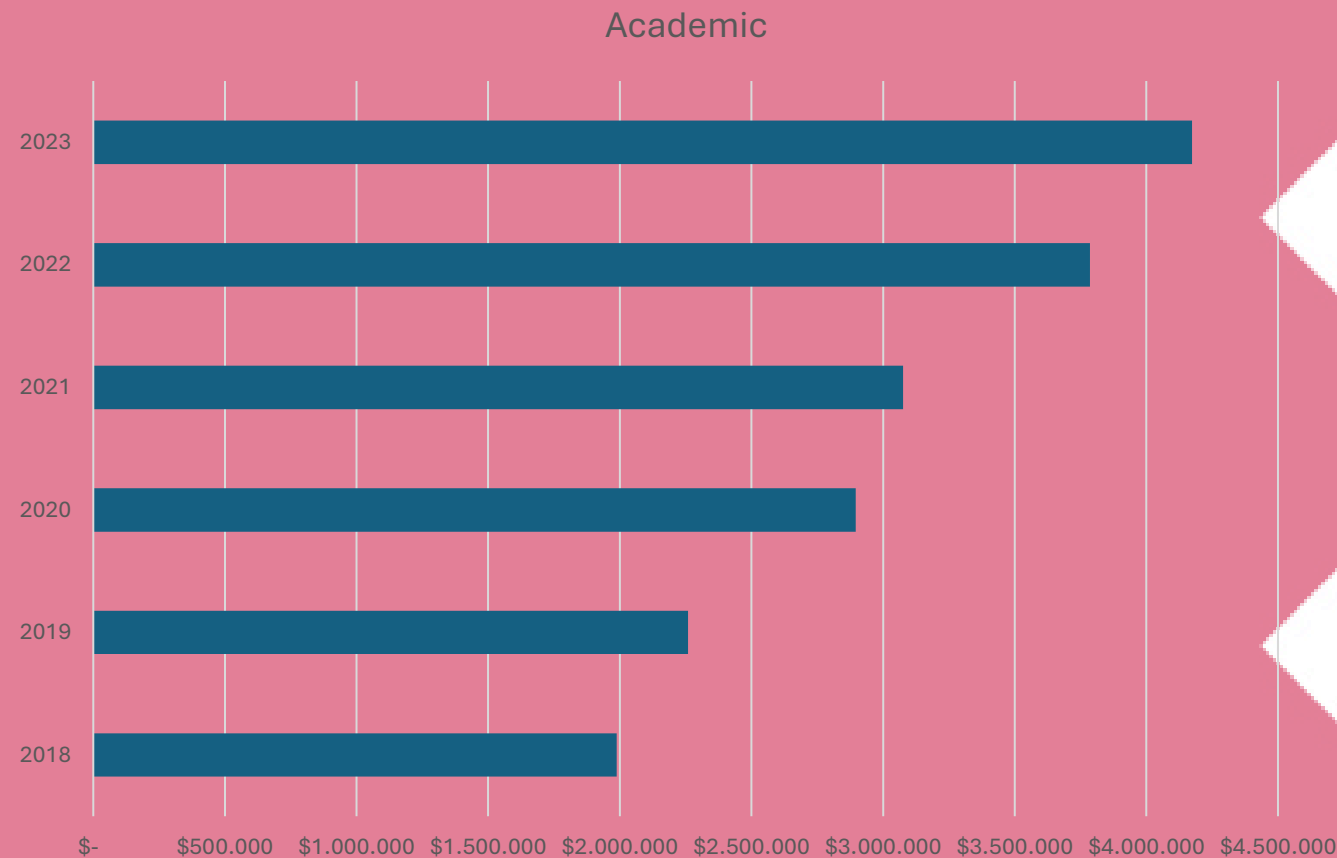
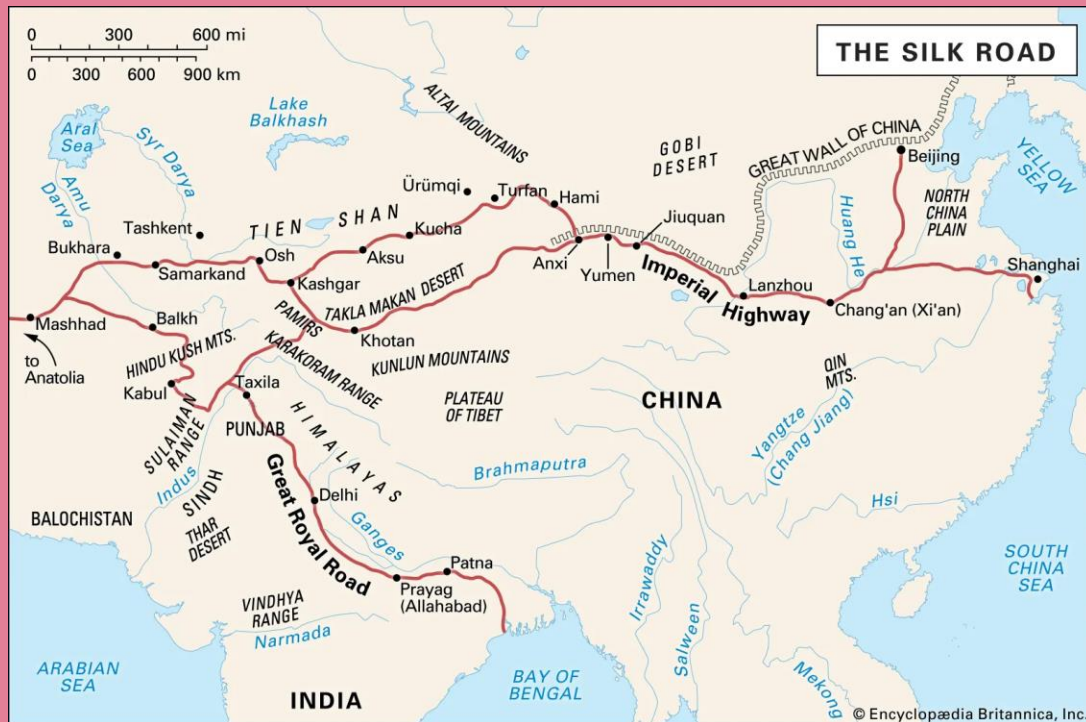


Illustration Example



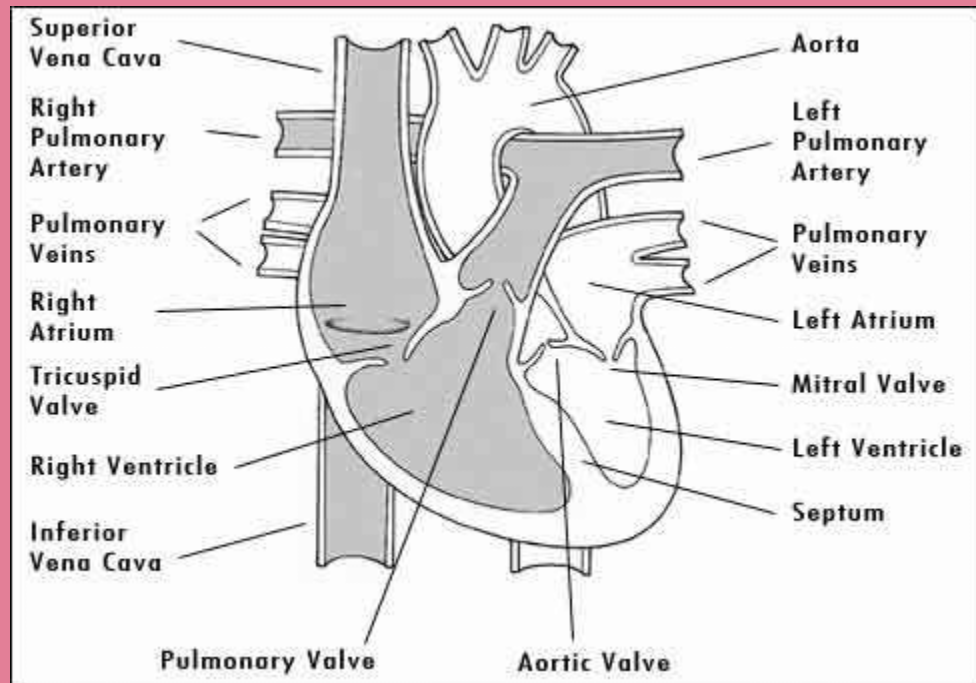
Alt Text: Illustration of a stone medieval castle with turrets, surrounded by knights on horseback carrying flags.

Map Example



Alt Text: Map showing the Silk Road trade routes stretching from China to Europe, with key cities marked along the way.

Line Drawing/Diagram Example



Alt Text: Line drawing of the human heart, labeled with the left and right atria, ventricles, and major arteries.

Special considerations

Complex Images: For more complex images, such as detailed diagrams or scientific illustrations, you may need to provide a longer description or supplementary text within the book.

Decorative Images: If an image is purely decorative and adds no significant information, it may be appropriate to use empty alt text (`alt=""`) to indicate that the image can be ignored by screen readers.



Conclusion

Good Alt Text enhances the accessibility and usability of your book, making it more inclusive for all readers. By providing clear, concise, and contextually relevant descriptions, you help ensure that everyone can fully appreciate the content, regardless of their visual abilities.

Alt Text will also make your book or article better discoverable through search engines.