Alternative Text Best Practice

When using image alt text, it should not include:

- **"picture of "**
- **"image of "**

Screen readers automatically announce an image as an image. So an alternative text "Image of an apple" would be read aloud by a screen reader as "image, Image of an apple".

Choosing appropriate text alternatives:

Imagine that you're reading the web page aloud over the phone to someone who needs to understand the page. This should help you decide what (if any) information or function the images have. If they appear to have no informative value and aren't links or buttons, it's probably safe to treat them as **decorative**.

Prioritize information in text alternative:

Aim to put the most important information at the beginning.

Length of the text alternative:

The alt text should be the most concise description possible of the image's purpose. If anything more than a short phrase or sentence is needed, it would be better to use one of the long description methods discussed in **complex images.**

Alt Text Examples

Alt text for informative images

If the image is a photograph, drawing or painting, the alt text needs to describe the image as concisely as possible. Having long alt text will result in poor user experience for those using screen readers. If the image requires a lengthier description, it is better to describe the image in the content and provide a short alt text.

For example, if the image below of Mount Rushmore were used in an article about the history of American President, the alt text should simply describe the image.

HTML: < alt text ="Mount Rushmore National Memorial" />

Digital Documents: Mount Rushmore National Memorial

Alt text for decorative images

Decorative images are images that serve no specific purpose, meaning that they are not meant to convey any meaning or important information. In this case, it is best practice to use what is called the **NULL alt text or empty alt text**. Note that the alt attribute is still present, even though it is empty. When a screen reader comes across null alt text, it will completely skip over the image, without announcing its presence. If no alt attribute is present, the screen reader will read the file name for the image instead, which can be a major distraction to those using screen reading technology.

Null or empty al text: <img alt=""> (two quotation marks after the alt=)

HTML:
Digital Documents: On most authoring tools such as Microsoft Office or Adobe can check alt text as "descriptive image".

Image with text

According to WCAG, images of text are not allowed. If you cannot avoid images of text, it's best to have the exact same text in the alt attribute.

For example, for the alt text of this non-linked image you could use the words in the image itself:
 HTML: < " alt="Do something creative everyday" />

Digital Documents: Do something creative everyday

Adding alt text to tables
Feel like your content would really benefit from a table but don't want to put your users through that narration nightmare? Good news! The same way alt text can convey the meaning of an image, the alt text in a table provides users of screen readers the same summary information that sighted users get when quickly browsing a table.

To add alt text to your tables:

1. Right-click the table.
2. Select **Table Properties**.
3. Select the **Alt Text** tab.
4. Enter the summary information for the table in the **Description** field.

Accessibility Errors	Fall2010	Spring 2011
Document	50	65
PDFs	100	150

Functional images (Linked image)

Functional images are used to initiate actions rather than to convey information. They are used in buttons, links, and other interactive elements. The text alternative for the image should **convey the action that will be initiated** (the purpose of the image) rather than a description of the image.

Missing or empty alt values create significant problems for screen reader users because functional images are essential to the functionality of the content. Screen readers will typically announce the image file name, the image URL, or the URL for the link destination, which is unlikely to help users understand the action that will be initiated by the image.

Example 1: Image used alone as a linked logo

The following image contains a link that leads to UAB's webpage and is shown without any other link text. It has the alternative text "UAB home" to indicate where the link will take the user.

HTML:

<img src="logo_UAB.jpg" alt="UAB home">

Digital Documents: UAB home

Example 2: Image within link text

in this example, an image is used to supplement text within a link that leads to UAB's website. The image does not represent the full functionality or convey other information than that already provided by in the link text, so a null (empty) value is applied (alt=""), to avoid redundancy and repetition.

UAB Home

HTML:

<img src="logo_UAB.jpg" alt="">
UAB Home

Digital Documents: On most authoring tools such as Microsoft Office or Adobe can check alt text as "descriptive image".