



I. T. Accessibility Toolkit

Alternative Text Guidelines

Version 1.0

Introduction

The accessibility issue that is probably more important than all others is providing text information for non-textual web content. Non-text items include images, image maps, graphical buttons, audio files, and multimedia files that provide both audio and video. Color-conveyed information also falls into the non-text category.

Text alternatives and equivalents are important because they allow people with sensory disabilities to access non-text content. For example, if an image has a textual equivalent, then users with visual impairments can listen to that text by using their screen readers or talking browsers. Most images on web pages are simple, and thus their text equivalents are simple. Even when the images convey more information, such as with charts or graphs, techniques are available for providing that information textually. The process of providing adequate and useful alternative text for images so users will not be over-burdened is not an exact science; it requires judgment and style.

A person who has a hearing impairment, on the other hand, may have difficulty obtaining information from an audio file or an audio portion of a multimedia presentation. To compensate, captions or a word-for-word transcript is provided.

The Guidelines and Standards for Alternative Text

World Wide Web Consortium Web Accessibility Guidelines 1.0:

Section 6: Web Content Accessibility Guidelines – Guideline 1. Provide equivalent alternatives to auditory and visual content. [Checkpoint 1.1](#): Provide a text equivalent for every non-text element (e.g., via “alt”, “LONGDESC”, or in element content). This includes:

- images
- graphical representations of text (including symbols)
- image map regions
- animations (e.g., animated GIFs),
- applets and programmatic objects
- ASCII art
- frames,
- scripts
- images used as list bullets
- spacers
- graphical buttons
- sounds (played with or without user interaction)
- stand-alone audio files
- audio tracks of video
- video

[Commonwealth ITRM Accessibility Standard \(GOV 103-00\)](#): **Section 3.2.1 (d)**: Sufficient information about a user interface element including the identity, operation and state of the element shall be available to assistive technology. When an image represents a program element, the information conveyed by the image must also be available in text.

Alternative Text Defined

As discussed above, the idea of alternative text is to provide a text description that conveys the same information that is communicated by the image. Screen readers and talking browsers announce the alternative text as descriptions of images to blind users who cannot access the graphics otherwise. It should make sense in the context of the surrounding text and should not

Alternative Text Guidelines v 1.0

offer meaningless, repetitive, or unnecessary information. If an image conveys no information, empty alternative attributes should be applied.

Some examples of text equivalents are “[alt](#)” attributes, “[longdesc](#)” (long description) attributes, and [captions](#).

“Alt” Attributes

The attribute is used for simple graphics, pictures, and buttons. Text for “alt” attributes should be short and precisely descriptive of the object or its purpose, as in the case of functional buttons.

Example of an “alt” attribute for a graphical button:

``  **Figure 1: A button with an arrow graphic**

Example of an “alt” attribute for a picture:

``



Figure 2: A pink blossoming rose

As mentioned above, “alt” attributes can also be applied to images that do not convey any information, such as bullets and spacers. These “blank” alts help prevent screen readers from repeating the word “spacer” to the user, for example. Instead of text between quotes, quotation marks appear side by side with no spaces between them.

Example of an empty “alt” attribute for a bullet:

``

- ✓ Alt attributes
- ✓ longdesc attributes
- ✓ Captions

Longdesc and d-links

Longdesc (long description) attributes and d-links (description links) are text equivalents for graphics, such as charts and diagrams, which convey a large amount of information. Since some browsers do not support longdesc attributes, d-links are utilized. D-links are hyperlinks incorporated within the HTML code of the graphic. The target of a d-link is a text page or file containing the detailed description of the pie graph or chart. The d-link can be placed before or after the image.

Example of the code for a longdesc attribute:

``

In profits.html:

The pie shows that 20% of the profits went to pc sales, 10% went to printer sales, and 70% was for digital camera sales.

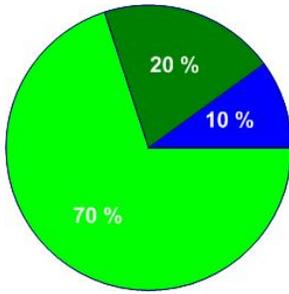


Figure 3: Picture of a pie graph

Example of the code of a d-link:

```
<A href="sales.html" title="Food Sales for 2000">[D]</A>
```

(Note [D] in the far right bottom of the image).

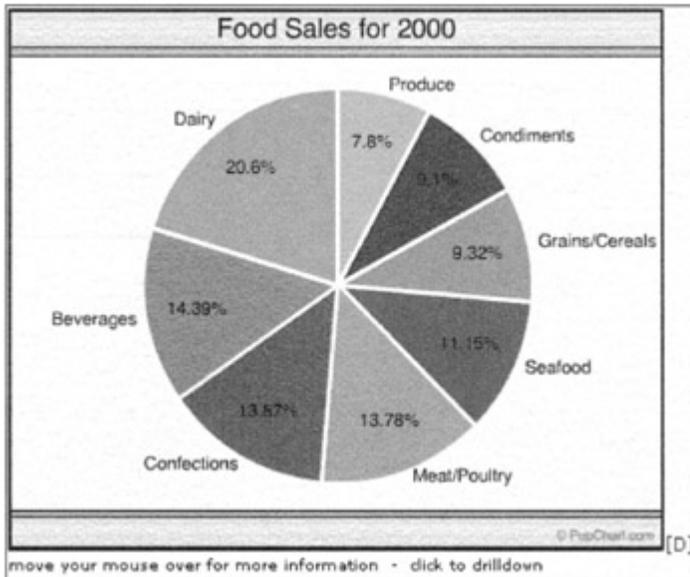


Figure 4: Picture of the pie graph for food sales

Below is a screenshot of the page returned after activating the D-link for the CORDA Food Sales chart:

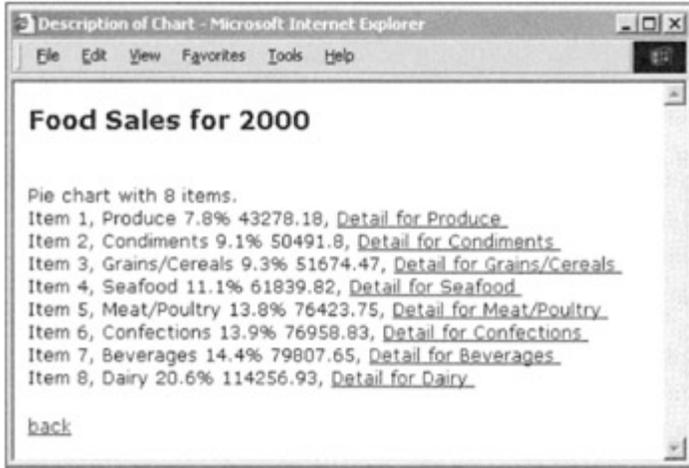


Figure 5: The page target for the d-link

Not only is the data equivalent to the chart but the additional function of providing links to get more detail about the eight items is available also. The example shows the kind of meaningful detailed description that can be provided with the D-link.

Note the [back](#) link is included for the user to return to the initial page.

Captions

Captions are textual equivalents that are in plain view. They are placed below, above, or next to graphics or video images. With the exception of video images, captions are usually utilized to describe graphical contents that are not recognized immediately by the average person (i.e., photo of a sculpture). In these circumstances, captions aide persons with and without visual impairments. They can also accompany solo audio presentations. Unlike transcripts, each caption is synchronized with everything heard in a presentation.

Example of a caption for a scene in an adventure film:

Samuel: Can you make it down that mountain? (The wind howls while the thud of a tree occurs in the background.)

The three major online media players of QuickTime, RealPlayer, and Windows Media allow captions to be incorporated within presentations. Below are link references to adding captions:

QuickTime Caption Tutorial <http://www.webaim.org/techniques/captions/quicktime/index.php>

RealPlayer Caption Tutorial <http://www.webaim.org/techniques/captions/real/index.php>

Windows Media <http://www.webaim.org/techniques/captions/windows/index.php>

Transcripts

Transcripts are accessible alternatives for all three types of media presentations. Transcripts are written versions of everything that is heard in audio, such as dialogue and off-screen sounds. They can also include descriptions of video scenes. An advantage of transcripts over other alternatives is anyone can search for specific information that is presented in the audio/video. They can also be converted into Braille. Moreover, transcripts can be produced in-house.

Audio Descriptions

Audio descriptions provide specific information about video content. They are descriptive asides for persons with vision disabilities. Audio descriptions can recount any visual details that are vital to a scene, such as specific actions and props. If done correctly, a narrator can subtly include audio descriptions without interfering with the dialog.

Example of an audio description:

Paula: Don't forget your briefcase, Bob!

Narrator: Bob rushes back into the house, takes the briefcase from Paula's right hand, and kisses her on the cheek in a hurry. As he rushes out the door, he trips on his shoelace.

Paula: I married Calamity Joe.

Text Equivalents for Color-Conveyed Information

Like graphics and multimedia content, color-conveyed information is inaccessible to screen reader users and users who are colorblind. The solution is to provide accompanying text as the comparison below illustrates.

Inaccessible:		
	(green button)	(red button)
Accessible:		
	(green button with text)	(red button with text)