



Effective use of Alt Text

What is Alt Text?

ALT text is used whenever an image is placed on a webpage or social media post and is used to describe what the image is.

The RNIB state that “while its use is seen by some as best practice, ALT text can often cause issues with accessibility. For blind and partially sighted users who rely on screen readers such as JAWS or NonVisual Desktop Access (NVDA), ALT text can create unnecessary 'noise' that can detract from the rest of the page.”

Below are some key pointers from the RNIB on how to use Alt Text effectively.

Consider the purpose of each image:

If the image is purely decorative alt text information is NOT required. In these cases, a null (empty) alt text should be provided (alt="") so that they can be ignored by assistive technologies. Some systems may also have a tick box option within the alt text to mark an image as decorative.

If the image conveys content, then alt text information should be added.

Don't include words such as “an image of” “a photo of” as this redundantly describes the image as an image - screen readers already announce "graphic" along with the alt text.

Ensure the wording is succinct and relevant - only a few words are necessary, occasionally a short sentence or two may be appropriate.

[RNIB](#) - full article

[WebAim](#) – examples of how to use alt text effectively

See page two for an example of how best to use Alt Text, taken from the WebAim site.



As the first Hispanic woman to go to space, and, later, the first Hispanic director of Johnson Space Center, Ellen Ochoa is widely regarded as a role model.

What alt text would you choose for the image above?

- "Astronaut Ellen Ochoa"
- "Image of Ellen Ochoa, Astronaut"
- "Ellen Ochoa, the first Hispanic women to go into space"
- Empty alt attribute (alt="")

In the example above, the image content informs the user that this is Ellen Ochoa. Her mode of dress further conveys that she is an astronaut—which is meaningful, given her achievements.

Based on this, we recommend `alt="Astronaut Ellen Ochoa"`.

"Image of Ellen Ochoa, Astronaut" redundantly describes the image as an image.

"Ellen Ochoa, the first Hispanic woman to go into space" includes information that is not part of the image and is also redundant as it is already in the body text.

An empty alt attribute is not appropriate either. Even though the body text names Ellen Ochoa, visual users can tell this directly from the content of the image—and so, since the image conveys content, it needs more than an empty alt attribute.