

# Danielle Sellwood

## Creating Accessible Content



### How to: ALT text for social media

ALT text is a written description of an image or gif (not video), it is designed for blind or visually impaired (VI) people to help them access your content. They use a screen reader which is a technology that reads the text out to them and it can be a game changer for disabled people, but only if everyone knows about it, respects it and actually does it properly.

Aside from giving better access for blind and VI audiences, this isn't the only reason you should be adding alt text to your posts. ALT text also helps boost your SEO and is also the description that's displayed when an image fails to load on a web page (when there is poor connectivity for example). So it's a win win!



Twitter is super easy because it updated its functionality April 2022 – thanks Twitter. The only not so good thing about twitter is that you can't add ALT text retrospectively or edit once you have published the tweet. The only thing to do here is delete it and start again. But what is good is that the ALT Text button is clear and it is displayed on every image that uses it, which helps raise awareness.

#### Using the mobile app:

1. When you add your image click on the +ALT sign at the bottom.
2. Write (or paste) your Alt Text. Click done.

#### Using a desk or laptop:

1. When you add your image select "Add Description" below the image. Or you can click on the "Edit" button on the bottom right of the photo, and then go to the "alt text" section.
2. Write or paste your text. Click done.
3. You can edit this before you post it live by going to the Edit button, selecting "alt text" and making your changes.

*Image description: An atmospheric photo of an athletics track at dusk. It has been raining and puddles are illuminated by spotlights. There is a row of silhouetted trees surrounding the track and the sky behind indicates the passing of rainclouds and a hint of sunset.*





Instagram functionality is not as good as Twitter, yet arguably more important since it is an image lead platform. The bad news is that you can't add Alt text to a 'story' and even on posts there's nothing visible to show it has Alt text (as on Twitter).

#### **Using the mobile app:**

1. Choose, crop and edit your image as normal.
2. When you get to the page where you write the caption, can tag people or add location, go to the bottom of the page and click Advanced Settings.
3. Scroll down until you find accessibility, click 'write alt text'.
4. This shows you the image or images (if you have multiple) and has a space to write your Alt text.
5. Write or paste your Alt text then press done and post as normal.

#### **Using a desk or laptop:**

1. Choose, crop and edit your image as normal.
2. On the 'create new post' you will find accessibility under Add location – click.
3. Write or paste your Alt text and share as normal.

**Note:** Instagram claims “alt text will be created automatically for your photos or you can choose to write your own”. This is unfortunately very hit and miss and often inadequate. Think about it, do you really want to leave it to a generic software to describe your image or you want to add richness and authenticity by doing it yourself.



Facebook functionality is pretty easy, but also slightly misleading! The bad news is that like Instagram you can't add Alt text to a 'story' and there's nothing visible to show a regular post has Alt text (as on Twitter).

#### **Using the mobile app:**

1. Write your text and click to upload your image.
2. Click on the 3 dots to the top right of the image.
3. Click on Edit alt text. (this is misleading as it suggests there is something already there to edit - there is not!).
4. Write or paste your alt text. If your Alt text is longer than 100 characters you will get an annoying notification that says 'alt text is usually fewer than 100 characters - I ignore this if I need to.

#### **Using a desk or laptop:**

1. Create post as usual and click to add your image.
2. Click edit on the top left side of the image.
3. Click on Alternative text.
4. Here you have the choice to use generated alt text or add your own. In this case you can see the generated text (and how inadequate it is - try a few for laughs).
5. Add your text to the caption box and click the corresponding circle on the right of it. Strangely there is no alert to use under 100 characters here, so type away. I haven't found it's limit yet!

# Best Practice

1. Prepare your social media as usual. If you've chosen an image to accompany your text, now you need to describe it.
2. Keep it concise. Up to 140 characters is best practice but use your judgement. If the image is complex you may want to add more to give a fuller description, or less, if it is a simple image. Read it back to and ask yourself if what you have written adequately describes the visual, if it doesn't then try again. The more times you do it, the easier and quicker it becomes.
3. It's not good enough to simply repeat the tweet or Instagram words for the Alt Text because the screen reader will already have read that. It's also not ok to just write one or two words that say what the image is but don't describe it E.g. Football Poster
4. It's unnecessary to start the Alt Text with "image of", "photo of", etc. A screen reader will recognise the file as an image and let the user know for you. However if it's a painting, graph or a poster, or something that makes it visually or culturally different, then this should be stated.
5. Provide context. The key to effective alt text is to provide an accurate and specific description of the image. Try to describe the atmosphere or feel of an image, is it upbeat, nostalgic, miserable weather etc.
5. There's a debate over describing colour because some people can see colour and others not. To get round this it's nice if you can describe a colour by linking it to another sensory experience like, raspberry red or sandy yellow.
6. If the image is a meme or a funny response to something that is happening culturally, make sure that this is explained. Blind people enjoy a joke as much as the next person.
7. Add the brand or film name, location, or any other relevant information you can to help the image reach your target audience via search engines.
8. Describe diversity, state ethnicity or skin colour, if someone is a wheelchair user etc. see the AD section for more on this.
9. Don't get too smart and use alt text for anything other than what it was intended, this is a sure-fire way to alienate a whole community and it's not a good look! Manchester United Football Club recently did this by posting an image of a player with the caption 'Read the ALT text'. The alt text read, "Who's the greatest player in the Premiere League? It's you Juan, Juan, Juan...Manchester United faced considerable backlash.
10. Enjoy the process, don't view Alt Text as a chore. If you believe in equality, then you should be doing this as standard.

**Tip:** It can be helpful to type the alt text outside of the app so you can amend and re-use across different platforms.

## Language/fonts etc.

- When referencing disabled people, avoid passive, victim words. Use language that respects disabled people as active individuals with control over their own lives. Able-bodied v non-disabled. [www.gov.uk/inclusive-communication](http://www.gov.uk/inclusive-communication)
- Capitalise the first letter of each word in hashtags and usernames - #ItsEasierToRead
- Use sentence case not all caps as it has no visual shape
- Avoid using over fancy fonts, especially handwriting styles as they can be hard to read.
- Limit your use of animated gifs - the motion can be a problem for some people.
- Use a single blank line between paragraphs or statements, avoid leaving several lines that force people to scroll.
- Check your colour contrast in banners and quote style posts - a free online checker will tell you if your colour combination works. Note: it might be ok for the title text but not ok for a paragraph. <https://accessibleweb.com/color-contrast-checker/>

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