

JTRP Alternative Text Guidelines and Resources

On April 24, 2024, the Department of Justice ruled that all state and local governments' web content and mobile apps should meet the technical standard Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) Version 2.1, Level AA by April 24, 2026 (for entities with populations of 50,000 or more [Purdue University]) and by April 26, 2027 (for smaller entities [INDOT]). In order to comply with these updates to US law, **alt text is now required for all photos, drawings, charts, graphs, equations, etc., included in JTRP publications.**

Alternative text, or alt text, is a concise (25-30 word) visual description of a figure used by screen readers that enable people to listen to a publication rather than read it. When submitting the first draft of a Technical Report to the e-Pubs system, ensure these mandatory alt text descriptions are included for each figure, chart, graph, equation, etc. Preferred formatting is demonstrated in the newest [JTRP Technical Report Template](#) and as shown at the end of this document.

Preparing Alt Text

Please review the resources listed below and keep in mind the following key points:

- Alt text should be as objective as possible and concise. Aim to limit alt text descriptions to approximately 25-30 words.
- Do not repeat descriptions or text already provided in the caption or the surrounding text.
- Spell out all contractions, numbers, and non-Latin letters and present the information in a logical and consistent order.
- Do not use formatting, such as bullet points, in alt text descriptions.
- Screen reading software indicates the alt text is a replacement for an image, so do not use redundant phrases such as “Image of...” or “Graphic of...”
 - However, signify chart types for clarity, such as “Bar chart displaying...”, “Pie chart with...”
- Alt text should not contain additional information a sighted person (or someone not using a screen-reader) would miss.

When writing alt text, ask yourself:

- Why is this visual element here? What information does it present? What is its purpose?
- If the image were removed, how would I describe it to convey the same information and/or purpose?

Resources

- [Federal Government's Section 508 site](#)
- [Purdue Libraries' Guide on Adding Alt Text](#)
- Harvard's guide on composing [alt text for diagrams/charts](#)
- University of Iowa's guide on [writing effective alt text](#)

If you would like a review of your alt text early in the process, reach out to the JTRP Production Editor, Elizabeth Bower (ecbower@purdue.edu) with examples of your first few alt text descriptions.

Alt Text for Equations

Alt text must also be provided for equations as screen readers struggle to dictate equations accurately. Equation alt text is to be the literal verbal equation, so $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$ would be “a squared plus b squared equals c squared.” Thinking about how voice-to-text would record the equation is the best approach.

Formatting in Technical Reports

You will add alt text for each figure/figure part in the **green text** below each caption. When using the [JTRP Technical Report Template](#), apply the “Alt Text” style in Microsoft Word.

Required formatting:

- Located below each figure’s caption
- Written between brackets []
- Noted with a separate color text (use [template](#) for preprogrammed “Alt Text” Style)
- Includes corresponding figure number, for example, **[Figure 1.1 alt text:], [Figure 5.4 alt text:]**
- Separate descriptions for figures that contain multiple parts (a, b, c, etc.)
- *Please do not add the alt text to the built-in Microsoft Word alt text feature as that complicates the process for the typesetters.*

Example Alt Text Formatting



Figure 1.1 Caption Here in Title Case (All Major Words Capitalized and followed by a Period). Use Word’s Caption Feature for Figure Caption (Source: Grand Canyon National Park, Public Domain, via Wikimedia Commons).

[Figure 1.1 alt text: Write alt text here between brackets and ending in a period.]

$$a^2 + b^2 = c^2$$

Equation 1.1

[Equation 1.1 alt text: a squared plus b squared equals c squared.]



(a)



(b)

Figure 2.1 Include Subcaptions for (a) Details and (b) Details (Photo Credit: Infrogmation, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons).

[Figure 2.1a alt text: Write alt text for subfigure a here between brackets and ending in a period.]

[Figure 2.1b alt text: Write alt text for subfigure b here between brackets and ending in a period.]