

Describe Images

Adding descriptions to images helps everyone access your content—especially people who are blind or visually impaired and use screen readers. Well-written descriptions (often called “alt text”) make content more inclusive and meaningful.

Why Describe Images?

- ❖ Screen readers read image descriptions out loud, so people who can’t see the image still get the message.
- ❖ Writing descriptions can help you choose the best image for your content.
- ❖ The best description depends on the image and its context.

Example: For a photo of a red apple in a tree:

- ❖ **OK:** “apple in a tree”
- ❖ **Better:** “red apple hangs from tree”
- ❖ **Best** (with context): “a red apple hangs from a tree glistening with raindrops”

The right choice depends on how the image supports your content. If the image is decorative (like a border or shape), it should be marked as decorative so screen readers skip it.

Your C.A.L.M. Guide to Great Image Descriptions

C: Context is Key

Think about why the image is there. What message does it support?

A: Audience Awareness

Write descriptions that make sense to your specific audience—students, coworkers

L: Limit Wordiness

Be brief but meaningful. Say just enough to get the point across.

M: Make it Clear

Use straightforward, objective language. Describe only what’s visually important.



How To Describe Images (and Where to Do It)

- ❖ Microsoft Word or PowerPoint (right-click > “Edit Alt Text”)
- ❖ Google Docs or Slides (right-click > “Alt text”)
- ❖ Canvas LMS (Rich Content Editor > image options)
- ❖ Web tools like Ensemble CMS or WordPress (image settings > “alt text”)

Use the “alt” attribute for website images. Resources like the Microsoft Accessibility Checker and Canvas accessibility tools can help ensure you’ve done it right.

Need More Guidance?

The DIAGRAM Center offers six helpful tips:

- ❖ Context is Key
- ❖ Consider Your Audience
- ❖ Be Concise
- ❖ Be Objective
- ❖ Describe from General to Specific
- ❖ Use Appropriate Tone & Language

Writing effective alt text takes practice—but it’s worth it. Your content becomes more inclusive, and your audience gains a richer experience.

We’re here to support your accessibility efforts!

Need Help?

Call 804-333-6789 or email
rcchelp@rappahannock.edu

