

Everything you need to know to write effective alt text

Excel for Microsoft 365 Word for Microsoft 365 Outlook for Microsoft 365 [More...](#)

If a picture is worth a thousand words, what's it worth to people who cannot see? Without words, it's easy for people with a visual disability to miss critical information or get frustrated with the experience.

Alternative text (alt text) is descriptive text which conveys the meaning and context of a visual item in a digital setting, such as on an app or web page. When screen readers like Microsoft Narrator, JAWS, and NVDA reach content with alt text, the alt text is read

aloud so people can better understand what's on the screen. Well-written, descriptive alt text dramatically reduces ambiguity and improves user experience.

This topic describes how to understand, write, and use effective alt text in Microsoft 365 products.



Alt text tools in Microsoft 365

To help you with alt text, Microsoft 365 offers the Accessibility checker to review relevant visual content for alt text and get suggestions on improving content accessibility, an Automatic alt text generator, and a manual alt text editor.

Open the Microsoft 365 Accessibility Checker:

1. On the **Review** tab, select **Check Accessibility**.
2. In the right **Accessibility** pane, issues with accessibility appear under **Inspection Results**.
3. Select any flagged issues to see recommended actions.

Manually view and edit alt text, or approve automatic alt text:

1. Right-click an image, chart, or other object, and select **View Alt Text**.
Tip: On the **Review** tab, you can select the **Check Accessibility** drop down and choose **Alt Text**.
2. In the **Alt text** pane on the right, edit or approve the displayed alt text (if automatically generated).
3. If the image doesn't need alt text, such as a border, select **Mark as decorative**.

Turn automatically generated alt text on or off:

1. On the **File** tab, select **Options** and choose the **Accessibility** tab.
2. Select or clear the **Automatically generate alt text for me** checkbox under **Automatic Alt Text**.

Automatic alt text generation needs Microsoft 365 intelligent services. To turn this on:

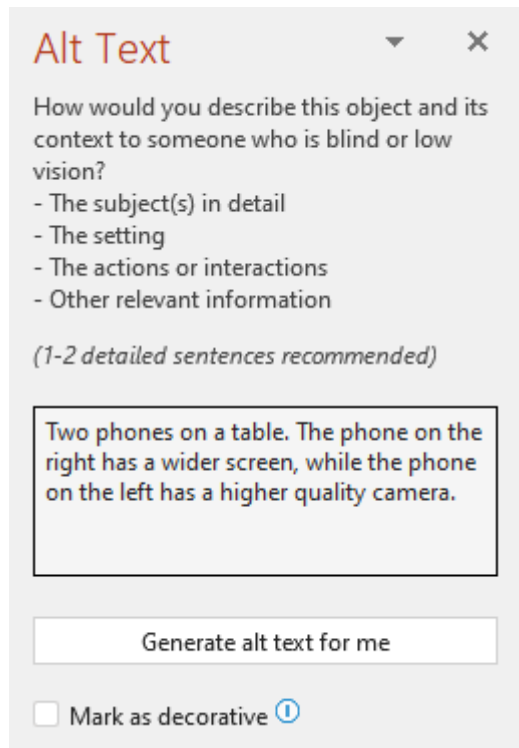
1. On the **File** tab, select **Options** and choose **General**.
2. Select **Enable services** under **Microsoft 365 intelligent services**.

When to use alt text?

Images and pictures

Make sure to convey the content and the purpose of an image in a concise and unambiguous manner. The alt text shouldn't be longer than a sentence or two—most

of the time a few thoughtfully selected words will do. Consider what is important about an image. For example, important context might be the setting, the emotions on people's faces, the colors, or the relative sizes.



Alt Text ▼ ✕

How would you describe this object and its context to someone who is blind or low vision?

- The subject(s) in detail
- The setting
- The actions or interactions
- Other relevant information

(1-2 detailed sentences recommended)

Two phones on a table. The phone on the right has a wider screen, while the phone on the left has a higher quality camera.

Generate alt text for me

☐ Mark as decorative ⓘ

Do not repeat the surrounding textual content as alt text or use phrases referring to images, such as, "a graphic of" or "an image of." In the example below, the alt text is referring to the image and does not describe the content of the image sufficiently.

Alt Text ▼ ✕

How would you describe this object and its context to someone who is blind or low vision?

- The subject(s) in detail
- The setting
- The actions or interactions
- Other relevant information

(1-2 detailed sentences recommended)

A photo of two phones.

Generate alt text for me

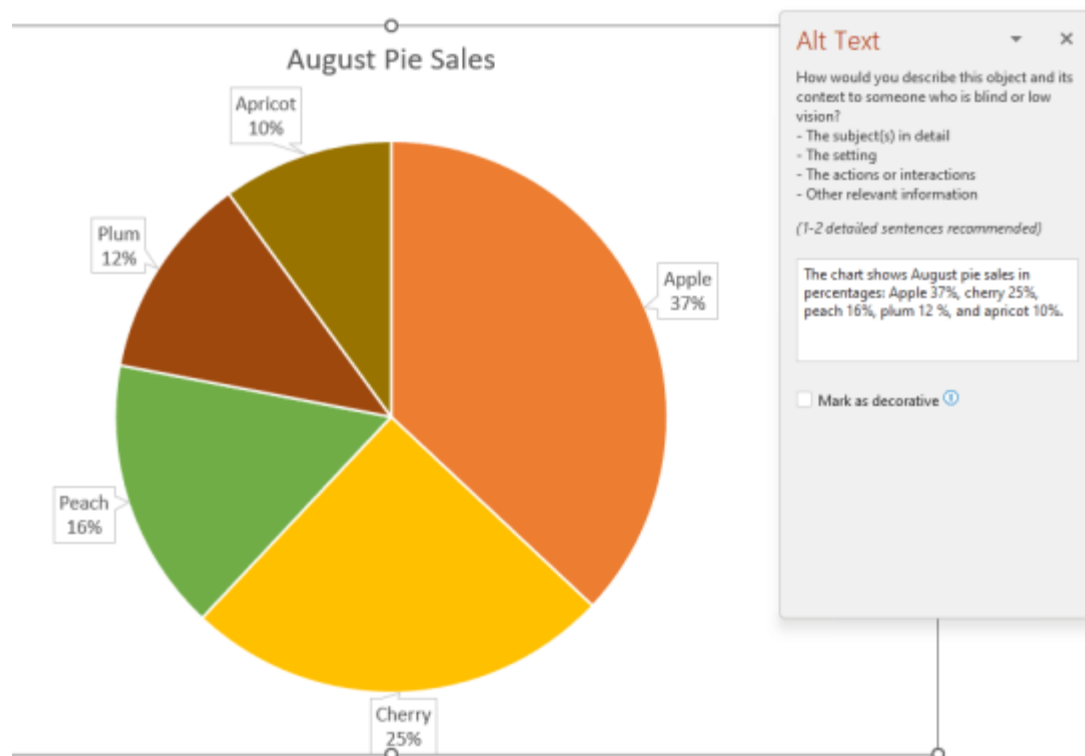
☐ Mark as decorative ⓘ

You can also add alt text as an argument to the [IMAGE function](#) either by using text in quotes or by using a cell reference that contains the text. For example, `IMAGE("www.contoso.com/logo.jpg", "Contoso logo")`.

Diagrams, flow charts, and charts

When dealing with objects that give detailed information, such as an infographic, use alt text to provide the information conveyed in the object. Describing a chart as 'A bar chart showing sales over time,' for example, would not be useful to a blind person. Try to convey the insight; for example, 'A bar

chart showing sales over time. In July, sales for brand A surpassed sales for brand B and kept increasing throughout the year.' Alt text should also clearly describe the beginning point, progress, and conclusion of flow charts.



Videos

Videos that don't explain their content require alt text to describe the visual experience, even if the user hears music, background sounds, and speech. Alt text should describe the content and purpose of the video.

Ideally, a video should contain a second audio track with a description of the video elements that are purely visual and not accessible to people with a visual disability.

Tables

The Microsoft 365 Accessibility Checker does not flag if a table is missing alt text. However, it is always a good practice to write a clear, descriptive, and concise alt text for a table.

When not to use alt text?

Decorative visual objects

Decorative objects add visual interest but aren't informative (for example, stylistic borders). People using screen readers hear these are decorative so they know they aren't missing any important information. To mark a visual as decorative, select the **Mark as decorative** checkbox in the **Alt Text** pane. The text entry field becomes grayed out.

Alt Text

How would you describe this object and its context to someone who is blind or low vision?

- The subject(s) in detail
- The setting
- The actions or interactions
- Other relevant information

(1-2 detailed sentences recommended)

Content marked as decorative will not expose a description to screen readers.

☒ Mark as decorative ⓘ

Tip: If you export your document as a PDF, any visuals you have marked as decorative are automatically tagged as artifacts. They are then ignored by screen readers when navigating through PDFs.

Slicers

If the Microsoft 365 Accessibility Checker doesn't flag an object when it's missing alt text, you don't have to write alt text for it. A slicer is an example of such an object.

How to add alt text to an object?

For instructions on how to add alt text in Outlook, Word, Excel, and PowerPoint, go to [Add alternative text to a shape, picture, chart, SmartArt graphic, or other object](#).

Tips for using alt text in Microsoft 365

- Remember to use the Microsoft 365 Accessibility Checker during your review process. It checks that all relevant visual content has alt text and also gives you other suggestions for improving the accessibility of your content, such as checking contrast ratios. To run the Accessibility Checker, on the **Review** tab, select **Check Accessibility**. For more info on the Accessibility Checker, go to [Improve accessibility with the Accessibility Checker](#).

- Do not use a file name, duplicate text, or URLs as alt text. The Accessibility Checker flags these since they are not useful to someone with a visual disability. For more info, go to [Rules for the Accessibility Checker](#).
- If there is a group of objects that forms a semantic group, such as a group of photos that all show dogs, assign alt text for the whole group. If objects have been grouped together for formatting reasons, ungroup the objects and assign appropriate alt text for each object.

Note: If you have used Microsoft 365 for a while, you might have noticed that the **Alt Text** pane used to have two fields, **Title** and **Description**. Now we use a single **Description** field in most of our apps—it has been found that having a single field is easier and less confusing for both you as the author and also anyone using a screen reader to consume the content.

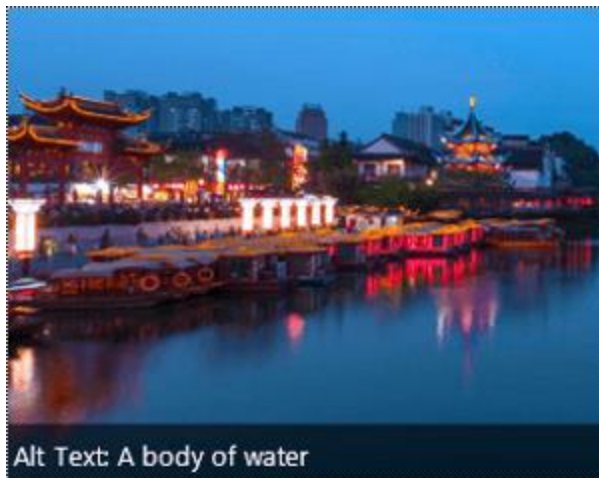
Automatic alt text

In Microsoft 365, alt text can be generated automatically. When you insert a picture, you might see a bar show up at the bottom of the picture with automatically generated alt text.

In Office 2019, alt text is not generated automatically when you insert an image. If you want to add automatic alt text, select the **Generate a description for**

me button in the **Alt Text** pane. Depending on the content of the image, sometimes the feature gives you descriptive tags and sometimes you get full sentences.

If automatic alt text is generated, remember to review and edit it in the **Alt Text** pane and remove any comments added there such as "Description generated with high confidence."



Turn automatic alt text on

Note: Before you can use automatic alt text, you might have to enable Microsoft 365 Intelligent Services in any Microsoft 365 product.

1. On the **File** tab, select **Options** and choose **General**.
2. Select **Enable services** under **Microsoft 365 intelligent services**.

For more info, refer to [Connected experiences in Microsoft 365](#).

1. On the **File** tab, select **Options** and choose **Accessibility**.

2. Select **Automatically generate alt text for me** under **Automatic Alt Text**.

Approve automatic alt text

1. In the Microsoft 365 app, right-click the item to review and select **View Alt Text**. The **Alt Text** pane opens.
2. If the alt text is satisfactory, select the **Approve alt text** checkbox.

Alt Text

How would you describe this object and its context to someone who is blind or low vision?

- The subject(s) in detail
- The setting
- The actions or interactions
- Other relevant information

(1-2 detailed sentences recommended)

A group of puppies sitting in the grass

☒ Approve alt text ⓘ
☐ Mark as decorative ⓘ

Turn automatic alt text off

1. On the **File** tab, select **Options** and choose **Accessibility**.
2. Clear **Automatically generate alt text for me** under **Automatic Alt Text**.

Where to find alt text functional guidelines

Get additional resources to help you write effective alt text:

- [Improve accessibility with the Accessibility Checker](#)
- [Rules for the Accessibility Checker](#)
- [Make your content accessible to everyone](#)
- [Make your Word documents accessible to people with disabilities](#)
- [Make your Excel documents accessible to people with disabilities](#)
- [Make your OneNote notebooks accessible to people with disabilities](#)
- [Make your Outlook email accessible to people with disabilities](#)
- [Make your PowerPoint presentations accessible to people with disabilities](#)
- [Make your Project Online sites and projects accessible to people with disabilities](#)
- [Make your SharePoint site accessible to people with disabilities](#)

- [Make your Sway design accessible to people with disabilities](#)
- [Make your Visio diagram accessible to people with disabilities](#)
- For more information on how to ensure that Microsoft 365 products and user experiences meet the requirements for accessibility, visit our accessibility sites [An inclusive, accessible Microsoft 365](#) and [Make your content accessible to everyone with the Accessibility Checker](#).