

## All About ALT Tags

*"All non-text content that is presented to the user has a text alternative that serves the equivalent purpose."* – WCAG 2.0 Guideline 1.1.1

### Accurate, Concise Description

It's important to not only provide an ALT tag, but also provide one that is useful in the context of the document. You may not need to include every artistic detail, and you may be able to skip over purely decorative images, but those that contain critical information need to have it spelled out in the ALT text.

NOTE: A good rule of thumb to consider is to include what you might relay over the phone.

### Example of Various Situations

Take this image as an example:



- If the context of the image was that any bird image would do, then the ALT tag could be as simple as "Bird".
- If the context of the image was about colorful birds, then the ALT tag could read "Colorful bird sitting on branch".
- If the context of this image was that it was about specific bird species, then the ALT tag could read "The rare Wattled Crane, seen perched on a branch in Uganda". (see Complex Images)

- If this were a simple image to decorate the page, the ALT tag would be NULL or blank when used in a website. If it were used in Word the ALT tag would contain an empty space.

## Complex Images

A course or document may need to use an image which would need a fairly long description to properly describe the content. In this case the recommendation is to include a short summary in the ALT tag which points to or links blind users to a long text description which fully explains the image.

In most cases, the long description should be available to all users. This long description will not only assist blind users but also sighted users who may not understand a complex image.

## Example of a Technical Illustration

Some images require detailed descriptions.



ALT="Octahedral, raw, uncut diamond crystal displaying multiple trigons on one of the surfaces"

## Decorative Image ALT Tags

A decorative image is one used to enhance the look of a document, but not to convey actual information. Decorative images can include tool bars, clip art, photographs to add "color" and repetitions of a logo.

Decorative Images do need an ALT Tag, but the ALT tag can be empty (ALT="", best for Web) or a blank space (ALT=" " best for Microsoft Office). Both are valid but produce slightly different results across environments.

## Long Description

ALT tags are generally recommended to be concise (about 150 characters). However, some images are so complex that more information may be needed. Today, most experts recommend including an ALT tag which refers blind users to a text based description elsewhere which is visible to everyone.

## Acknowledgments

Image of Waddle Crane courtesy of <http://Safari.co.uk>

ALT tag tips contributions by <http://accessibility.psu.edu/>.

Image of diamond courtesy of QualityDiam.

## Notes

This document is fully accessible.