



BRILL

■ BRILL ■ BÖHLAU ■ FINK ■ MENTIS ■ NIJHOFF ■ SCHÖNINGH ■ VANDENHOECK & RUPRECHT ■ V&R UNIPRESS ■ WAGENINGEN ACADEMIC

Accessible manuscript preparation – A guide to alt texts

Contents

1. About alt texts.....	1
1.1 What are alt texts?	1
1.2 Alt texts and their legal requirements.....	1
1.3 Why are alt texts important, beyond legal compliance?	1
1.4 Why is the author required to provide alt texts? Can't the publisher take care of it?.....	1
2. Preparing an accessible manuscript and creating alt texts	2
2.1 Dos	2
2.2 Don'ts	2
3. How do I submit alt texts for my publication?	4
3.1 Alt texts.....	4
3.2 Alt text examples	5
3.2.1 Map.....	5
3.2.2 Composite image / mixed media.....	6
3.2.3 Graph	7
3.2.4 Arts, architecture, and design.....	7
4. Tables	10
5. Further sources	10

1. About alt texts

1.1 What are alt texts?

The short form “alt text” stands for “alternative text” and refers to textual descriptions of images that people with visual or reading impairments might not be able to perceive (well) otherwise. Alt texts are read aloud by screen readers and are also displayed if images cannot be loaded (e.g. if the user has a poor internet connection).

1.2 Alt texts and their legal requirements

Alt texts are a fundamental tool for ensuring the accessibility of online publications. With the “European Accessibility Act” (and in Germany the “Barrierefreiheitsstärkungsgesetz”, lit. “law to strengthen accessibility”), it was made mandatory for all online publications (except journals) that are published from June 2025 onwards.

1.3 Why are alt texts important, beyond legal compliance?

Alt texts enable people who have some kind of permanent or short-term reading and visual impairment to read a book and interact with its content in a meaningful way. In addition, scientists with different needs for access have the opportunity to participate in the scientific discussion, consume content without loss of information and possibly use and build on it in their own scientific work.

1.4 Why is the author required to provide alt texts? Can't the publisher take care of it?

Authors know best why images are included in their publication and what information they are meant to convey. The alt text should not describe the image in detail, but rather summarize its most important aspects that are relevant for understanding the image or the scientific argumentation – as long as they are not included in the main text or caption. In this sense, the alt text should be seen as another important element of the content of the publication – just like abstracts, keywords, headings, or subheadings.

2. Preparing an accessible manuscript and creating alt texts

Here are some dos and don'ts to help you create an accessible manuscript.

2.1 Dos

- Please provide an alt text for **each** image.
- **Describe the figure in the main text** and state explicitly any conclusions that seeing readers would be expected to draw from it. The more information the main text contains, the less information is required in the alt text.
- In the alt text, briefly describe what the image shows, **focusing on what is most relevant** to understanding what the image is meant to convey.
- Keep it short (**100–150 characters incl. spaces**). There's a technical reason behind this limitation: screen readers stop reading after 150 characters. Another reason is that readers who rely on screen readers must often listen to the entire alt text before they can continue reading. Including irrelevant details or repeating information already mentioned in the main text can worsen their reading experience significantly.
- Consider the specific context of your subject/book/article: **there is no “standard alt text”**, i.e. the same figure can have very distinct meanings and functions in different books.
- Make sure you use **correct spelling and punctuation**. The alt text is part of your manuscript and should match its overall quality.
- You can also use tables in your manuscript to display complex data sets. However, please bear in mind that tables are only accessible to a certain extent and require a lot of effort for visually impaired readers to navigate. If possible, present your data as a simple list.
- Make sure to submit tables and simple text diagrams as text and not as figures.

2.2 Don'ts

- **Never rely exclusively on figures to convey key information**. Important data should always be included in the main text.
- Do not repeat the caption in the alt text. **Information that is not displayed in the figure** (such as author, date, source, bibliographic reference, etc.) **doesn't belong in the alt text**.
- Avoid repeating sentences that are already part of the main text. If the figure is already sufficiently described in the main text and/or caption and any alt text would be repetitive, please use “See caption” or “See main text” as an alt text. This is to show readers with visual or reading impairments that the alt text has not been forgotten but deliberately omitted.
- Do not include **any additional information or interpretation in the alt text** that a seeing person would not detect in the figure.

- Do not start the alt text with phrases such as “A picture of” or “Fig. 1 shows”, as it is repetitive and takes up unnecessary characters.
- Do not use **any markup (bold, italics, underlined, etc.) or manual line breaks in the alt text**. Special characters and symbols are not readable by screen readers (Unicode characters are fine).

3. How do I submit alt texts for my publication?

3.1 Alt texts

The alt text should be inserted into the Word file as ordinary text directly after the placeholder and the caption:



[Placeholder]¹ Fig.1

[Caption] Figure 1: Title page of Ludwig Tieck's *Minnelieder aus dem schwäbischen Zeitalter*, published in 1805 at the Realschulbuchhandlung – the royal bookstore that was to become De Gruyter about a century later. © De Gruyter Book Archive 2017.

[Alt text] Alt text: Title page adorned with two angels embracing and kissing each other in a wreath of flowers.

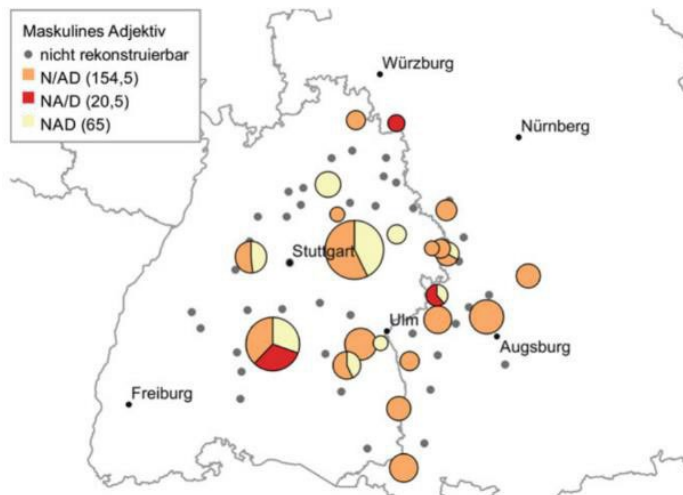
If an image does not have a caption, please insert the alt text directly underneath the placeholder in the Word file.

¹ Square brackets indicate that the content of the square brackets is not part of the manuscript, but is only used for orientation in these instructions. The illustrations in these instructions are for illustrative purposes only. Please only place the placeholder in the manuscript, not the illustration itself.

3.2 Alt text examples

The following examples show the caption and a suggestion for an alt text. The wording of the alt text always depends on the information that is already contained in the main text and the caption and is relevant to the context of the book.

3.2.1 Map²



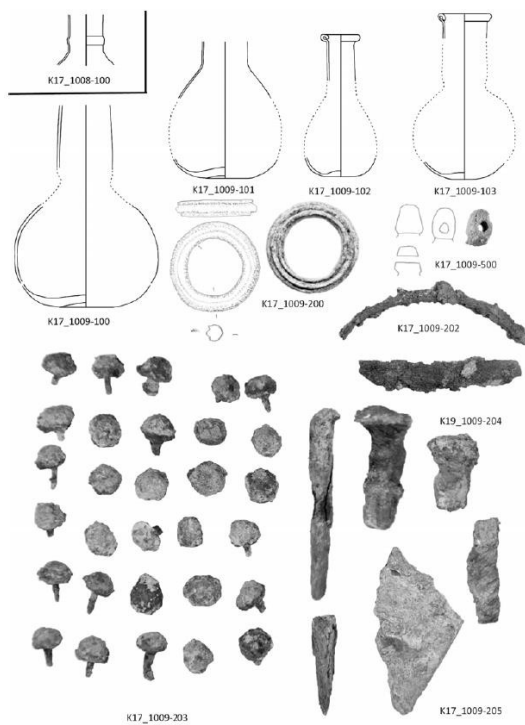
[Placeholder] Fig.1

[Caption] Figure 1: Geographical distribution of case morphological patterns according to corpus data for the masculine adjective.

[Alt text] Alt text: The area surveyed includes the cities of Würzburg, Nuremberg, Stuttgart, Ulm, Augsburg and Freiburg. Dots and pie charts visualize the collected data.

² Example from: Sophie Ellsäßer (2020). *Kasus im Korpus. Zu Struktur und Geographie oberdeutscher Kasusmorphologie*. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 161. CC-BY 4.0.

3.2.2 Composite image / mixed media³



[Placeholder] Fig.1

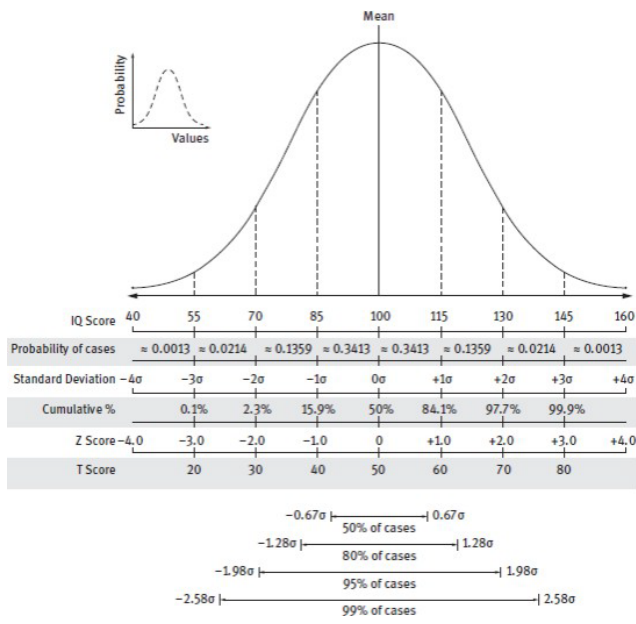
[Caption] Figure 1: Finds from grave box K17/1008: K17_1008-100 glass unguentarium (scale 1:2). Finds from grave box K17/1009: K17_1009-100 to K17_1009-103 glass unguentaria (scale 1:2). K17_1009-200 Copper alloy ring. K17_1009-202 Fragments of an iron bracelet with tissue traces. K17_1009-203 Shoe nails. K17_1009-204 Nails and nail fragments with wood remains. K17_1009-205 Fragments of a metal plate with wood remains. K17_1009-500 Amber eye bead/pendant fragment (if not stated otherwise scale 1:1).

[Alt text] Alt text: See caption.

In this example, the caption already contains detailed information about the objects shown in the figure, so any alt text would be repetitive. In this case, the note “See caption” is inserted as alt text.

³ Example from: Constanze Höpken et al. (2022). Ein Felsgrab aus der Nekropole von Doliche. In: Michael Blömer/ Engelbert Winter (Hrsg.). *Exploring urbanism in ancient North Syria. Fieldwork in Doliche 2015–2020*. Berlin/ Boston: De Gruyter, 138. Courtesy of the editors.

3.2.3 Graph⁴



[Placeholder] Fig.1

[Caption] Figure 1: Welchsler (WAIS–IV, WPPSI – IV) IQ classification (data provided by 123test, 2022).

[Alt text] Alt text: A bell curve ranging from IQ 40 to IQ 160 with a norming sample median raw score defined as IQ 100.

3.2.4 Arts, architecture, and design

Artworks cannot be described by alt texts, since describing an artwork already means interpreting it. In these cases, all the necessary information should be provided in the main text and/or the caption. Accordingly, “See main text” or “See caption” should be indicated in the alt text.

⁴ Example from: Jürgen Deters (2022). *Analytics and Intuition in the Process of Selecting Talent: A Holistic Approach*. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 66. CC-BY.

3.2.4.1 Photograph (architecture)⁵



[Placeholder] Fig.1

[Caption] Figure 1: School by the lake, Hard, Austria. On the left, the elevated gymnasium with tuck under parking, in the middle the school entrance and a walkway to the lake.

[Alt text] Alt text: The school building has floor-to-ceiling windows across the entire front, is brightly lit and photographed at dusk.

3.2.4.2 Photograph (art)⁶



[Placeholder] Fig.1

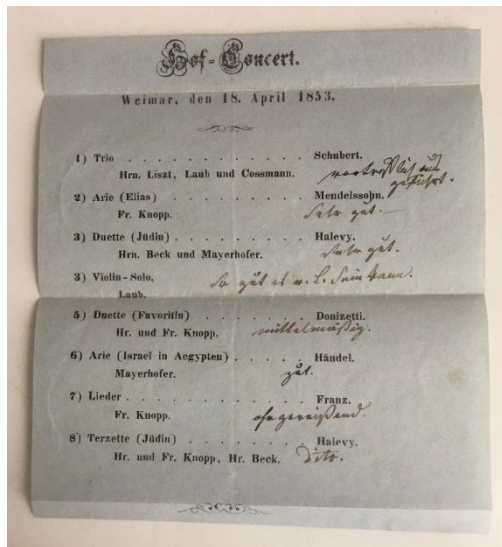
[Caption] Figure 1: Department of Old and Middle Stone Age of the State Archaeological Museum, Halle, 1946/47.

[Alt text] Alt text: Exhibition room with showcases displaying small objects. On the wall, an ice age landscape depiction, maps, and deer antlers.

⁵ Example from: Wolfgang Fiel (2021, Hrsg.). *Coming Full Circle. Nachhaltige Architektur von Baumschlager Hutter Partners*. Basel: Birkhäuser, 64–66. Courtesy of the editor and Baumschlager Hutter Partners.

⁶ Example from: Arne Lindemann (2022). *Vom Germanenerbe zum Urkommunismus. Urgeschichtsbilder in Museen der SBZ und DDR*. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 38. CC-BY 4.0.

3.2.4.3 Archive material (art)⁷

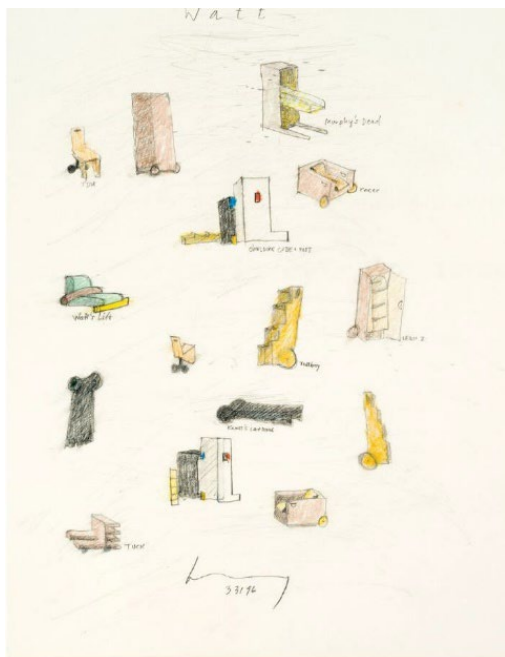


[Placeholder] Fig.1

[Caption] Figure 1: Concert program with handwritten notes by Preller.

[Alt text] Alt text: In block letters: “Hof-Concert, Weimar, den 18. April 1853”. Each of the 8 program items is followed by a handwritten predicate in German Kurrent.

3.2.4.4 Drawing⁸



[Placeholder] Fig.1

[Caption] Figure 1: Household Vehicles (1996)

[Alt text] Alt text: Freehand crayon drawing: 15 furniture items such as shelves, armchairs, cabinets are depicted with wheels.

⁷ Example from: Reinhard Wegner (Hrsg.). *Briefedition Friedrich Preller d. Ä. Ich habe die Feder in Bewegung gesetzt*. Deutscher Kunstverlag Berlin München 2023. Courtesy of the editor.

⁸ Exampre from: Lars Lerup (2022). *The Life and Death of Objects*, Basel: Birkhäuser, 216. Courtesy of the author.

4. Tables

Some information is best presented in a table. But please remember: avoid complex tables. Tables can only be accessible if they are simple and clearly designed, i.e. the column and row assignment must be unambiguous. Only then can a screen reader read out the information in the same order as a sighted person would perceive it. Example:

Month	Year	Population	Table header
January	2024	50.000	Table body
February	2024	55.000	Table body
March	2024	45.000	Table body
...	Table body

Avoid single-column tables. In such cases, enter the information as text in the form of a list (enumeration function in Word). Example:

Don't:

Month
January
February
March
...

Do:

Month:

- January
- February
- March
- ...

5. Further sources

Institute of Professional Editors (2023). Books without barriers. CC BY 4.0. <https://www.iped-editors.org/resources-for-editors/books-without-barriers/>. See Part 3 “Describing images and tables”, 81–138.

Accessible Books Consortium/International Authors Forum (2016). Accessibility Guidelines for Self-Publishing Authors. https://www.accessiblebooksconsortium.org/en/web/abc/w/news/2016/news_0002. See Part 4 “Constructing an accessible source document”, 8–11.

iBoB, inklusive berufliche Bildung ohne Barrieren (2019). Gut fürs Image. Praxisleitfaden zur Erstellung textbasierter Alternativen für Grafiken. CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0 [DE] https://weiterbildung.dvbs-online.de/files/ibob-daten/Inhalt/Infothek/Brosch%C3%BCren/bf_Gut%20of%C3%BCrs%20Image%20-%20Praxisleitfaden%20zur%20Erstellung%20textbasierter%20Alternativen%20f%C3%BCr%20Grafiken.pdf

Oliveira, Domingos de (s.d.). „Leitfaden zum Schreiben sinnvoller Alternativtexte“. [DE] <https://www.netz-barrierefrei.de/wordpress/barrierefreies-internet/barrierefreie-redaktion/leitfaden-zum-schreiben-guter-alternativtexte/>