

Guidelines for Preparing Alternative Texts for WUW Publications

According to the WCAG (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines), every graphical element published online must include alternative text (ALT). Screen readers enable visually impaired users to hear the description of an illustration provided in the ALT text.

General Guidelines:

1. Do not use automatically generated descriptions without critical review. They are often awkwardly phrased, incomplete, or incorrect.
2. Avoid unnecessary introductions such as “the photo shows” or “in the picture we see.”
3. A single ALT text should not exceed 150 characters (including spaces). In exceptional cases (e.g. complex charts), longer descriptions are acceptable, but brevity is always preferred.
4. Include only the most essential information—keywords that distinguish the image from others. Avoid overly general phrases. For example, instead of “women in long dresses in an outdoor setting,” use “a group of women in medieval clothing walking through a meadow” or “two women in 18th-century French gowns standing in front of a palace.”
5. Avoid excessive use of adjectives and participles. The description must be clear and concise. Use several short sentences with verbs to create a more dynamic and accessible description. For instance: “A man sits at the table. He looks at a woman who smiles as she places a bowl of soup in front of him.”
6. Avoid the passive voice. Use the active voice to ensure clarity and accessibility.
7. Consider the context in which the illustration appears. The same image may require different descriptions depending on its relevance. For example, a map of medieval Europe may be described as:
 - o “Map of 15th-century Europe showing state borders, royal residences, and major cities”
 - or
 - o “Map of 15th-century Europe showing state borders, royal residences, bishoprics, and major monasteries,” depending on the subject matter of the text.
8. Do not repeat information that already appears next to the graphic element. If the data from a chart is explained in the main text, the ALT text should provide only a general description.
9. Do not duplicate content from image captions. If the caption includes the artwork's title, artist's name, medium, and date, the ALT text should instead focus on what is visually depicted.

When writing ALT texts, ask yourself whether a blind user could reasonably imagine the image based on your description.

Describing Charts and Tables:

- The description should be understandable for screen reader users and must include the key information conveyed by the chart.
- Always name the chart type (e.g. “bar chart,” “pie chart,” “line chart,” “block diagram,” “infographic,” etc.).
- Describe the chart axes (where applicable) and the legend.

- Highlight the most relevant information (e.g. “a decrease in employee numbers in the first half of the year,” “the largest rise in migration in 1985”).
- If the chart contains complex data, it’s best to include a data table (either merged with the chart or placed below). Refer to the table in the ALT text: “Details are available in the data table on this page.”
- If any edits are made to the chart, ensure the ALT text is updated accordingly.

Examples of ALT texts for charts:

Simple Bar Chart

A bar chart showing Polish language exam results in Mazowieckie Voivodeship, 2020–2025: 2020 – 60%, 2021 – 62%, 2022 – 58%, 2023 – 55%, 2024 – 64%, 2025 – 61%.

Complex Bar Chart

A bar chart showing the number of migrants arriving in Visegrád Group countries, 2017–2024. The highest number was recorded in Poland in 2023. Detailed data can be found in Table 1 below.

Pie Chart

A pie chart showing fruit exports in 2024: apples – 38%, pears – 22%, plums – 15%, cherries – 15%, sour cherries – 10%.

Function Chart

The chart of the sine function $f(x) = \sin(x)$ shows a periodic function with a basic period $T = 2\pi$; its range is $[-1, 1]$ and its domain is all real numbers.

Or: The chart of $f(x) = \sin(x)$. A detailed function description is provided in the text below.

Block Diagram

A block diagram showing a triangle area algorithm: start; enter a, h; calculate $A = a*h/2$; display A; end.

Or: A block diagram showing the triangle area algorithm. Detailed description in section 2.1 below.

Infographic

A circular infographic showing the plastic recycling cycle: waste collection; sorting; waste transport; crushing, washing, drying; shredding, melting; creating new products.

Tables:

For complex tables, an alternative text should be provided. This should be a single description covering the entire table, including its subject and structure. Do not duplicate the data already presented in the table.

Note: If an illustration is decorative only (and does not contribute to understanding the content), label the ALT text as “Decorative.”