

Alt-Text for Web Images

**Tips and Tricks for Writing Alternative Text for
Art and Architecture Images**

Agenda

- What is alt-text and why is it important?
- Our process for writing alt-text
- General strategies and practice
- Strategies for art and architecture images and practice
- Questions and feedback

Goal - become familiar with writing alt-text for art and architecture images, so you can support SFS website accessibility and compliance.

What is Alt-Text?

Alt-text is a written description of an image posted online. Alt-text can be viewed by hovering over an image on a website or document and is also the text that is displayed if an image does not load.

Why Use Alt-Text?

- Providing alt-text when you post images online is the best way to ensure that a resource is accessible to everyone.
- Alt-text is especially important for people with low/no vision or with certain cognitive disabilities who use screen readers to navigate web content.
- As of March 2021, Washington University is requiring all new or revised digital content to meet WCAG 2.1, Level AA accessibility standards.

Alt-text for Art and Architecture

Describing art and architectural images for alt-text purposes can present a unique challenge...

How would you describe these images to someone who could not see them?

The Process

1. Write a full image description.
2. Take your image description and figure out the subject-action-context sequence.
3. Voila! Your alt-text is complete.

Alt-text tells someone that there is an image of a red brick house, while an **image description** shares that the house is two stories, the front door is white, and there are large white columns in front of the house (Veroniiiica, n.d.).

General Strategies

- Consider your audience's contextual knowledge.
 - Use specific language around artistic methods and architectural styles in your image description, even if you are writing an image description for a general audience.
- Keep image descriptions at 30 words or less, or 1-3 sentences written as simply as possible. One-word descriptions such as “dog” or “building” are not sufficient.
- Image descriptions and alt-text should be objective. Write relevant information about what is in the picture; don't describe the overall project that led to the image.

General Strategies

- Don't include phrases like "image of" or "photo of."
- Use descriptive color words like "tomato red" or "seafoam green."
- Transcribe all legible text in an image.
- If describing people in a picture, describe their appearances such as hair color, height, clothing choices, and other relevant characteristics. Do not assume their race or gender.
- Age identifiers like "baby" and "child" are ok.

Example



Two people work together to change out ink colors in a risograph machine.

A person with blue hair watches while a person in a black apron adjusts a hot pink ink drum in a risograph printer.

Small Group Practice

Work in teams to come up with image descriptions and alt-text for images that will be posted on the SFS website.

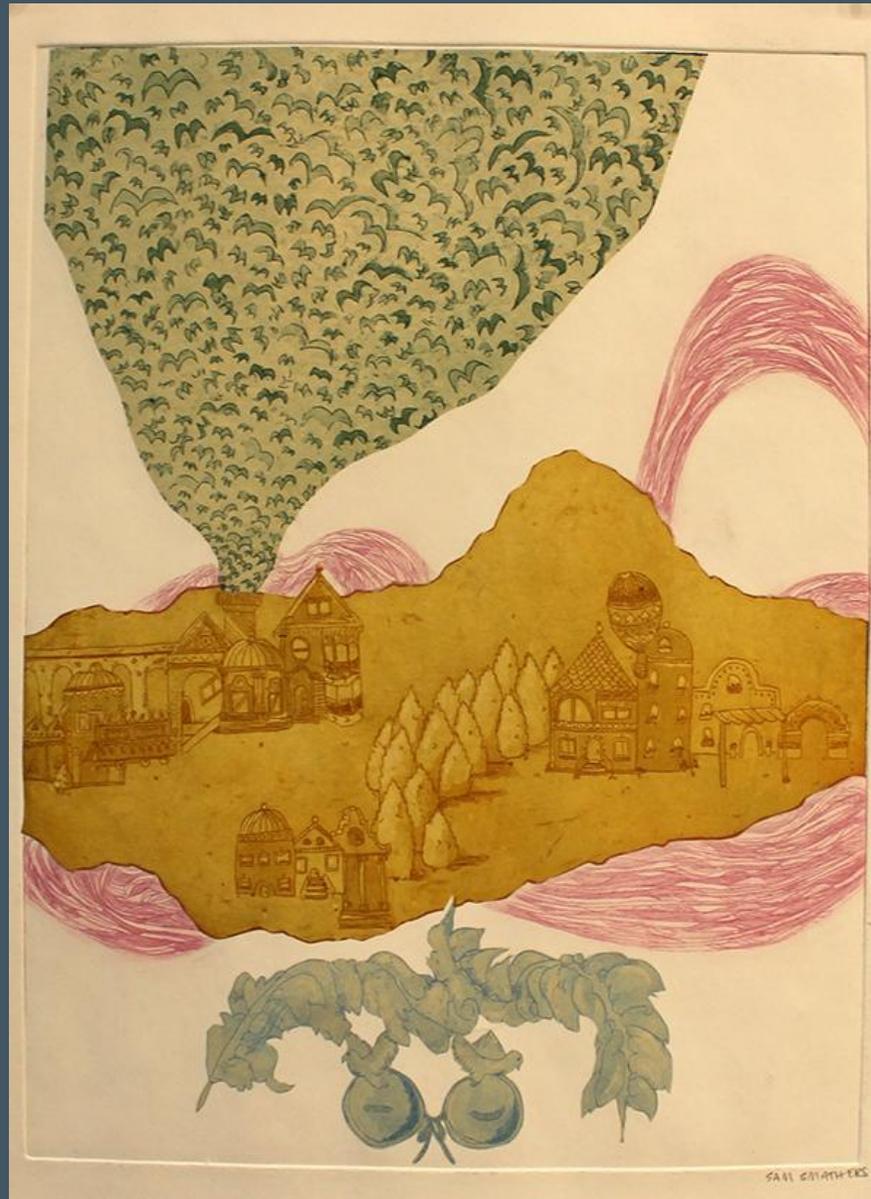
Specific Strategies for Art

- Name the medium of the art when writing the description, and any other unique materials used.
- Start by describing the most noticeable feature of the artwork.
- After mentioning the top item, pick 3-5 other elements that are relevant in the picture and describe their shape, size, location, color, etc.
 - When describing the location of objects in an image, mention them relative to the main subject of the image.

Specific Strategies for Art

- If describing people in a picture, describe their appearances such as hair color, height, clothing choices, and other relevant characteristics.
 - Do not describe the gender or race of people in images unless it is relevant, the subjects have confirmed their identities, and you are consistently identifying the race and gender of all subjects in the piece.
- If the image involves a particular character from popular culture, simply write the character's name and leave out any other description of what they look like, unless their appearance has been changed drastically.

Example



Relief print of a village scene of buildings and trees overlaid by an irregular mustard-colored shape. Pink linework curves behind the shape, and a green cloud of birds bursts overhead. A green laurel emblem appears below.

Drawing of a small village with yellow, pink, and green shapes intersecting on top and around it.

Specific Strategies for Architecture

- The type of structure that is being shown, such as a house, church, capital building, monument, etc.
 - For popular landmarks, mention the name of the structure, such as the Space Needle or the Taj Mahal.
- The size of the structure - is it a small house or a large skyscraper - and other details such as height or number of stories.
- The color and material of the structure.

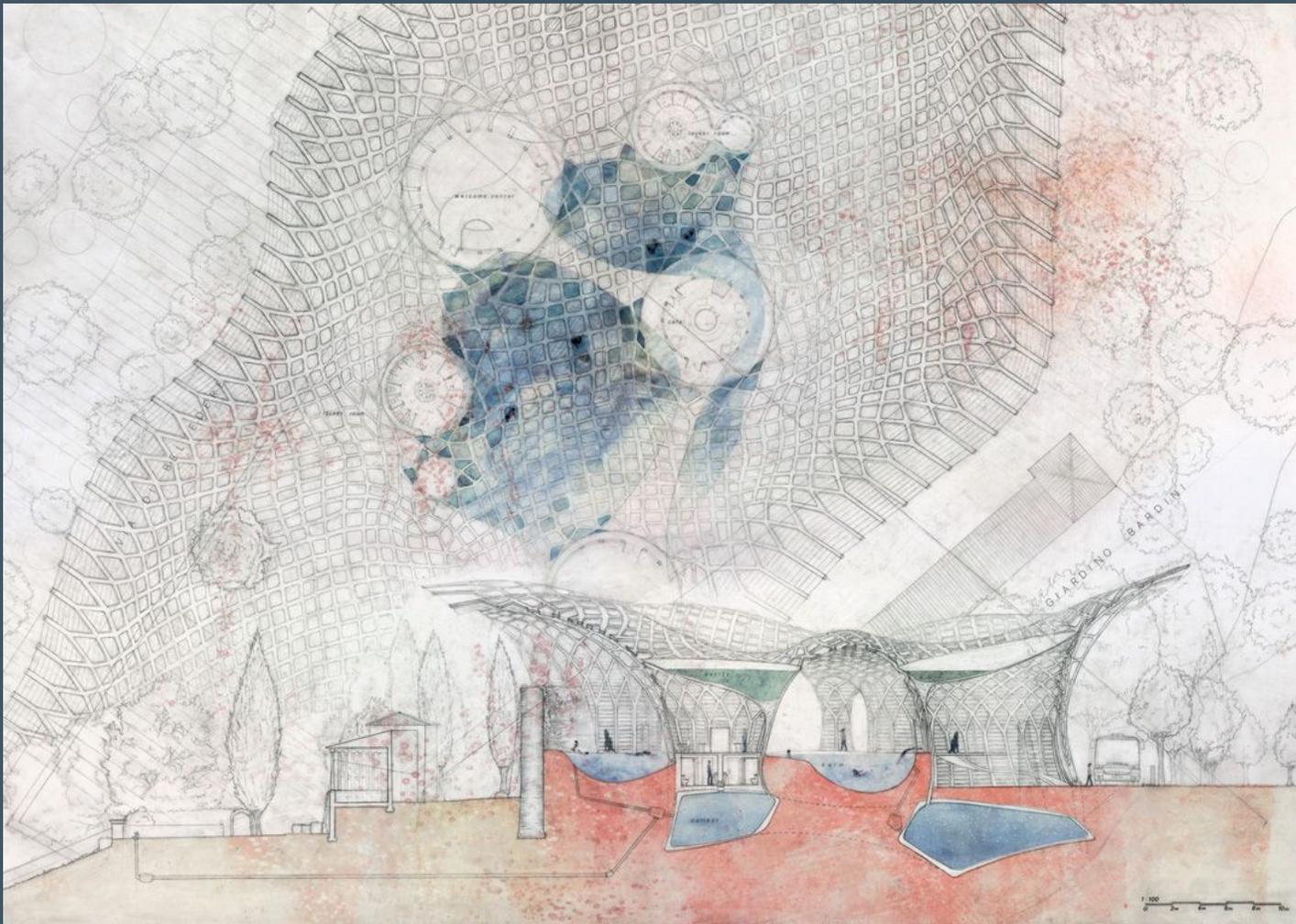
Specific Strategies for Architecture

- Distinctive features, such as if the house is on wheels or if the stairs to a structure are woven around a ramp.
- Any text or relevant signs in the image
- If available, the city/country the structure is located in, i.e the Gateway Arch is in St. Louis, Missouri.
- The scenery/time of day, if it alters the appearance of the structure, i.e. a building that is lit up at night or a crowd in front of a door.
- The name or description of the architectural style, if available and/or relevant.
- Any other interesting features such as a slanted roof or stained glass windows.

Specific Strategies for Architecture

- **What to exclude:**
 - Specific measurements for every part of the building, unless they are otherwise shown in the image.
 - Mundane details such as the exact number of stairs or windows, unless this information is significant.
 - Irrelevant background information in the image, such as if the sky is blue.
 - Facts that are not related to the image, such as the population of the city the building is located in.

Example



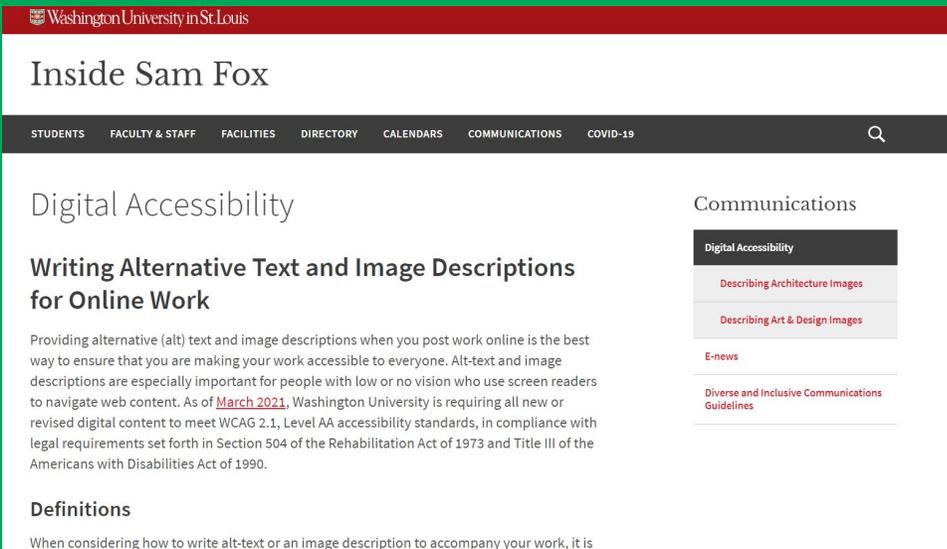
Section drawing and site plan of a spindly, arched pavilion structure that covers two pools of water in a park.

Delicate watercolor section drawing and site plan rendered in pale blues, pinks, and beige that depicts a graceful pavilion and water features.

Small Group Practice

Work in teams to come up with image descriptions and alt-text for images that will be posted on the SFS website.

Thank You! Questions?



The screenshot shows the Washington University in St. Louis website. The header includes the university logo and name. Below the header is a navigation bar with links for STUDENTS, FACULTY & STAFF, FACILITIES, DIRECTORY, CALENDARS, COMMUNICATIONS, and COVID-19. The main content area is titled "Inside Sam Fox" and features a section on "Digital Accessibility". The article title is "Writing Alternative Text and Image Descriptions for Online Work". The text discusses the importance of alt-text and image descriptions for accessibility, mentioning a requirement starting in March 2021. A sidebar on the right lists "Communications" with sub-links for "Digital Accessibility", "Describing Architecture Images", "Describing Art & Design Images", "E-news", and "Diverse and Inclusive Communications Guidelines".

Washington University in St. Louis

Inside Sam Fox

STUDENTS FACULTY & STAFF FACILITIES DIRECTORY CALENDARS COMMUNICATIONS COVID-19

Digital Accessibility

Writing Alternative Text and Image Descriptions for Online Work

Providing alternative (alt) text and image descriptions when you post work online is the best way to ensure that you are making your work accessible to everyone. Alt-text and image descriptions are especially important for people with low or no vision who use screen readers to navigate web content. As of [March 2021](#), Washington University is requiring all new or revised digital content to meet WCAG 2.1, Level AA accessibility standards, in compliance with legal requirements set forth in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

Definitions

When considering how to write alt-text or an image description to accompany your work, it is

Communications

- Digital Accessibility
- Describing Architecture Images
- Describing Art & Design Images
- E-news
- Diverse and Inclusive Communications Guidelines

[insidesamfox.wustl.edu/
communications/digital-accessibility](https://insidesamfox.wustl.edu/communications/digital-accessibility)