

Digital Accessibility for Canvas PDF Files

Overview

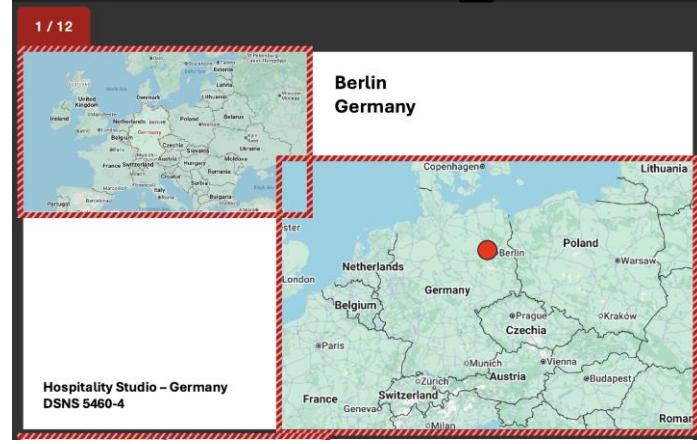
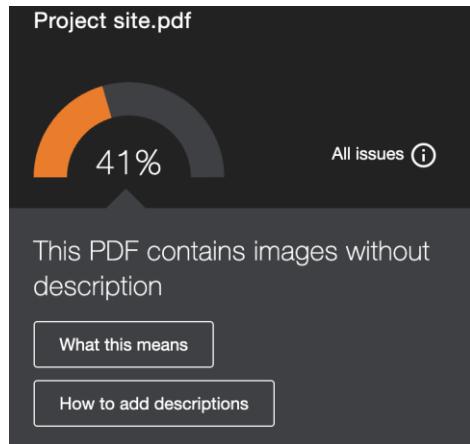
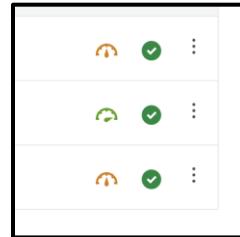
Screen readers used by people with low vision or blindness announce images using alternative text (alt text). Alt text is a short description added to an image so the meaning is available to someone who cannot see it.

Resources:

- [What is Alt Text?](#)
- [Why Alt Text Matters](#)
- [When to Use Alt Text](#)
- [How to Write Effective Alt Text for Visuals](#)
- [Examples of Good vs. Bad Alt Text](#)

1) Find Files That Need Fixing in Canvas

In Canvas, look for the accessibility indicator next to your file. Items marked in red and yellow need attention. Select the red and yellow accessibility meter to open the feedback panel and review what must be fixed.



In the example above, you need to add descriptions to the items in the red boxes. (maps of Europe, in this case) The descriptions are called “Alt-Text.”

2) Two Options to Add Alt Text

Choose the approach that matches your source file:

1. Option A: Locate the original PowerPoint file and add alt text there.
2. Option B: Open the PDF in Microsoft Word and add alt text, then re-save as a PDF.

After you add alt text, replace the file in Canvas with the updated version so students receive the accessible copy.

3) How Detailed Should Alt Text Be?

Alt text can be brief when an image is simple, but it should still communicate what matters for the course content.

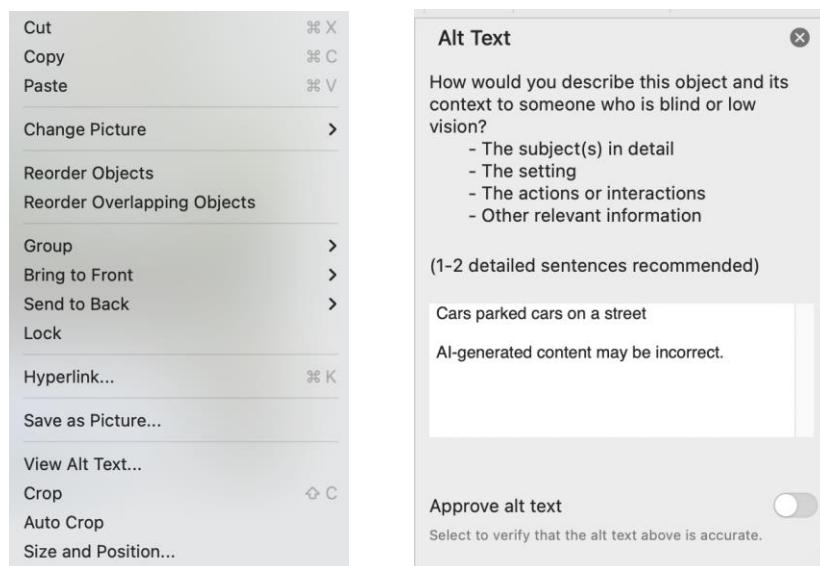
Examples:

- Map of Europe
- Map of Germany

If a map includes important highlights (for example, a marked city or a color-coded region), include that key information in the alt text or provide a longer explanation in nearby text.

4) PowerPoint: Add Alt Text

3. Open the PowerPoint file.
4. Right-click the image.
5. Select “View Alt Text.”
6. Edit the text (or review AI-generated text, if offered).
7. Select “Approve alt text” when the description is correct.
8. If the image is decorative, select “Mark as decorative” (no alt text needed).
9. Close the Alt Text pane and save the file.



5) Microsoft Word: Add Alt Text to a PDF

To edit a PDF in Word:

10. Open Word.
11. Go to File → Open and select the PDF file (Word will convert it to an editable document).
12. Right-click an image and select “View Alt Text.”
13. Add or edit the alt text (same process as PowerPoint).
14. When finished, save the file as a PDF.

Resources:

- [Adding Alt Text in Microsoft Word](#)
- [Adding Alt Text in Microsoft PowerPoint](#)
- [Adding Alt Text in Microsoft Excel](#)
- [Adding Alt Text in Microsoft Outlook](#)

6) Guidelines for Writing Alt Text

Do

- Be concise (ideally under 200 characters; roughly 2-3 detailed sentences).
- Describe the purpose or meaning of the image, not every visual detail of the image’s appearance.
- Put essential information first.
- Use punctuation and plain language.
- Tailor the tone to match your audience.
- Focus on what’s important for understanding the content. Think: what would someone need to know to understand the image?
- Test by imagining how you’d describe the image to someone who cannot see it.

Avoid

- Starting with “Image of...” or “Picture of...” (screen readers already announce it’s an image).
- Including file names or internal descriptors (e.g., “image1_0002.png”).
- Repeating surrounding text.
- Over describing decorative or irrelevant details (e.g., background color, outfit) unless contextually necessary.
 - More detailed descriptions would be considered image descriptions, which serve a different purpose and are used in addition to alt text.