



## Accessible Content Core Skill 4: Alternative Text

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Alternative text (alt text) is used to describe the essential information in images, tables, charts, diagrams and other graphics. Alt text allows people who use screen reader to understand images and other graphics. It is important to get in a habit of adding alt text to all images and other graphics.

What you include as alt text depends on how you are using an image or graphic. Here are some different types of images with examples of appropriate alt text:

- [Informative Images](#)
- [Complex Images](#)
- [Functional Images](#)
- [Decorative Images](#)

### Informative Images

Images or pictures that visually represent information should include alt text that describes the image as a whole. Here is an example using the YRDSB logo.



Alt Text

Title ⓘ

Description

The standard alt text when using the YRDSB logo is: “Logo for York Region District School Board (YRDSB) in black and red”.

This alt text describes the image as a whole. You do not need to write out what the actual logo looks like or how the words are positioned within the logo.

## Functional Images

Images that are used as links or buttons are known as functional images. They should include alt text that describes the function or action of the image.



This same image (above) of the YRDSB logo has different alt text as a functional image that hyperlinks to the YRDSB home page. The new alt text describes the function that the image performs: “York Region District School Board (YRDSB) home page”.

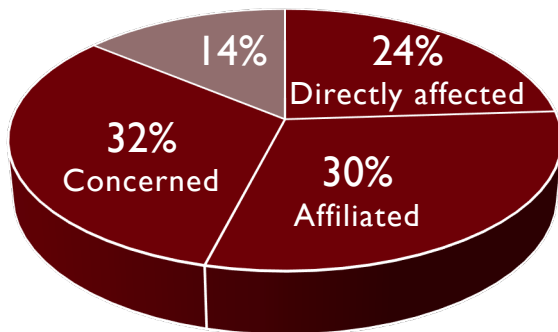
## Complex Images

Charts, tables, diagrams and other informational graphics are complex images that need alt text. Include a brief description of the chart or graph as alt text, and then describe the chart or graph in more detail in another place (e.g., in the text before and/or after the chart or graph).

Here is an example of alt text with additional descriptive text of two comparative charts in the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan:

**Descriptive text before charts:** The wider impact of disability was examined in a 2019 study by the Angus Reid Institute in partnership with the Rick Hansen Foundation. The study found that 86% of Canadians are impacted by disability in some way – either directly affected (24%), affiliated through a family member or close friend with a disability (30%), or concerned (32%) about how disability will affect them in the next 5 to 10 years.

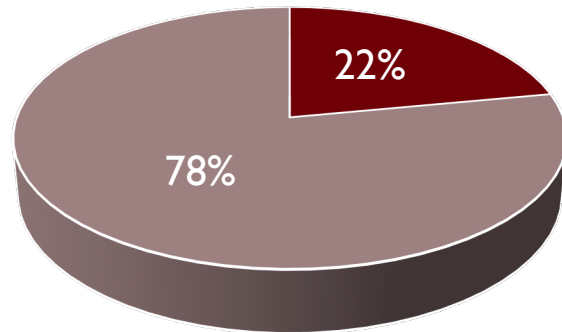
**Relationship to Disability in Canada (2019)**



- Affected by disability in some way
- Unaffected by disability

**Alt text:** Pie chart showing percentage of Canadians with some relationship to disability (source: Angus Reid Institute).

**Disability in Canada (2017)**



- Canadians with disabilities
- Canadians without disabilities

**Alt text:** Pie chart showing percentage of Canadians with and without disabilities (source: 2017 Canadian Survey on Disability).

**Descriptive text after charts:** The 2019 data also highlights the importance of accessibility by showing how disability does not only impact people with disabilities, but affects almost everyone. Only 14% of Canadians believed that they have no relationship or concerns when it comes to disabilities issues based on findings from the 2019 Angus Reid Institute study. While recognizing that 22% of Canadians have a disability, it can be more impactful to also state that disability affects 86% of Canadians either directly or indirectly.

## Decorative Images

Certain images or graphics only provide visual decoration to a page, such as line breaks. Decorative images should still have some form of alt text (e.g., “decorative line”) or what is called a “null text alternative” (`alt=""`) when creating content in HTML. This lets people who use screen reader to know an image is there.

Just like the use of colour, decorative images have a place. But you should always consider whether any image or other non-text element adds value to your content in a meaningful way.

Visit the Web Accessibility Tutorial on [Images Concepts](#) to learn more about the alt text required for different types of images.

## Do...

- Add alternative text (alt text) to all images and other graphics that describes the information, not the image.
- Add alt text that describes the action of the image for functional (or linked) images.
- Add alt text and a detailed description for complex images like charts or tables.

## Don't...

- **Don't** forget to add alt text to all images and other graphics!
- **Don't** describe what the actual image or graphic looks like as alt text.