

Word 2013 & 2016: How to Make Figures Accessible

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Introduction

Photos, drawings, charts, graphs, and other figures in our documents can add value to our communications, but we must be sure the information contained in them is available to people with disabilities. Just three easy steps are all that's necessary:

1. Position the figure properly
2. Add alt text
3. Include a caption

Making figures accessible in Word is easier than ever. On the right side of the Productivity tab is the Pictures group. This is where you can conveniently insert and position your figure, add a border, and add alt text.

How Do I Position a Figure?

Select the figure, click **Layout**, and choose the **In Line with Text** option. That's it.

How Do I Add Alt Text?

With the figure selected, choose the **Alt Text** option from the Pictures section. A task pane will appear on the right hand side, from there select **Layout and Properties**. Click **Alt Text** and the **Alt Text** dialog box will open. There are two boxes in this window: **Title** and **Description**. Leave the **Title** box empty and add a brief description of your figure in the **Description** box. *Do not begin your alt text with "This is a photo (or image, etc) of..." The screen reader will let the user know that there is an image.

Note: If your alt text is longer than the maximum characters just say "description of image is in the text" and insert the necessary information in the text. This allows those using a screen reader to understand the information you want conveyed to every reader when they see the image.

If your document originated in an earlier version of Word, it will open in the **Compatibility Mode** and the process will be the same.

Adding Text Behind a Figure

Another option comparable to adding **Alt Text** is to add text behind an image or figure. Screen readers will read that text. To do that:

1. Write a brief description of the figure near where the image is located. Then select the figure.
2. Go to the **Pictures** group in the Productivity tab. In **Word 2013** click **Layout**. In **Word 2016** click **Position Objects**.
3. Go down to **More Layout Options**. Once clicked, a menu will appear.
4. Select **Text Wrapping** in this alternate menu.
5. Choose **In Front of Text**.
6. The menu will disappear and from there you will have the option to move the picture over the text description.

Is a Picture Really Worth a Thousand Words?

Sometimes figures are extremely important to the content of a document. They provide nonverbal information to readers. As the document author, you must decide whether a picture contains information that will be useful to the reader of the document.

If the information in an image adds meaning to the document, explain the figure succinctly but accurately in the alt text. However, if an image is there merely for decorative purposes and does not add meaning to the text, type a pair of quotation marks (“”) or a space in the alt text field. This lets the reader know that the alt text was not forgotten.

If you add a very complex image, such as a graph or chart, it may not be possible to describe the picture in a few words. If that is the case, it may make sense to repeat the information from the image in the page text that follows the image. Everyone who reads the document can then focus on the important information found in the image, including assistive technology users. For example, if a graph of quarterly earnings is followed by a paragraph that describes the earnings report, then the alt text for the image might just say "Quarterly earnings, details follow in page text."

If you are in doubt about how to manage the alt text for a complex image, contact an agency accessibility specialist for help.

Would a Caption be Helpful?

Yes! Alt text is only valuable to a person using a screen reader. Captions, on the other hand, are useful for everyone. Even if the document is printed, captions are still there to give some insight about the figure. We highly recommend their use anytime there is a figure in your document.

To add a caption to your figure, select the **Caption** tool from the **Tables** group of the **Productivity** tab. Enter the caption information in the proper field. In the **Label** field, select **Figure**.

Recap

Making figures accessible is really very easy.

1. Position the figure to be in line with text.
2. Add a concise description if the image is meaningful—or a pair of quotation marks with no content (“”) for decorative images.
3. Add a caption to all images.

This concludes our module on how to make Figures accessible.