Writing effective Image Descriptions for course content

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What we’ll cover today...

Consider inclusivity and accessibility in the online classroom

Learn how to write an effective image description

Become aware of a few key considerations: context, length, language

Go over a little how-to in Ektron (Ryerson’s Content Management System for online courses)

Familiarize ourselves with some useful resources
### Barriers to education

**Highest level of educational attainment by disability status for adult Canadians aged 15 to 64 (PALS, 2006)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>People with Disabilities</th>
<th>People w/out Disabilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Below High School Diploma</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Diploma or equivalent</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade Certificate or equivalent</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Diploma or equivalent</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University degree or above</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Inclusive Classrooms

Inclusive classrooms foster a diversity of voices and experiences, enriching discussion and shaping how all students interact with and think about the course material and each other.
Changing legislation

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) is legislation that came into effect in Ontario in 2005.

The AODA outlined the procedure for the development of accessibility standards in order to achieve “accessibility for Ontarians with disabilities with respect to goods, services, facilities, accommodation, employment, buildings, structures and premises”.
AODA

The AODA’s integrated information and communication standard says:

- All **new** websites and web content must conform with **WCAG 2.0 Level A** by January 1, 2014 (including ‘significant refreshes’ to websites/content)
- All websites and web content must conform with **WCAG 2.0 Level AA** by January 1, 2021.

The WCAG 2.0 requires text alternatives be provided for any non-text content (i.e. image descriptions). All online courses will need to comply.
AODA

It also states: “Every obligated organization that is an educational or training institution shall do the following, if notification of need is given: Provide educational or training resources or materials in an accessible format that takes into account the accessibility needs due to a disability of the person with a disability to whom the material is to be provided…”
Accessibility features for visually impaired students

Providing accessible content for visually impaired students is especially necessary because it’s been overly neglected, even in relation to other disabilities:

“Although overall the findings suggest that .... the needs of students in all groups are relatively well met, those of students who are totally blind, those with multiple disabilities, and those with low vision were met least well...”

Why images matter

“It is believed that up to 80% of what children without visual impairments learn is through visual clues”

Project IDEAL (2011)

Removing images is not the way to remove barriers to accessibility; taking away visual content weakens the learning experience of other students.
So what exactly is an Image Description?
Descriptions vs. Captions

A caption is a heading, a footer or a title that provides an explanation for an image.

Photo by David Reville
Descriptions vs. Captions

An image description provides a text alternative to an image. It describes images as though it can’t be seen.

Photo by David Reville

A photograph of the Rockwood Asylum in Kingston, ON. A large, drab grey five storey institution. In the foreground of the image is a wet road leading to front entrance of the building. There are a few trees in front of the building.
So what exactly is an Image Description?

Image descriptions aren’t complicated, but sitting down to write one makes you realize there is a little more to writing them than you think…

Here’s an example. How would you describe the following image?
Describe this image
How about this image?
Do all images need descriptions?

A study was conducted in London, England (Petrie, Harrison and Dev, 2005) to find out how visually impaired web users thought images online should be described. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with legally blind participants using JAWS screen readers.

A majority of the participants agreed that not all images should be described.
Images that DO need descriptions:

- Artistic or instructive images
- Diagrams and charts
- Buttons (i.e. Search buttons) Because how can you know where it’s going to take you, until you click on it?
- Products for sale (i.e. textbook covers)
Images that DON’T need descriptions:

• Uninformative or decorative images (added only for aesthetic value, not content)

• Bullets or Spacers (filler images)

• Logos (relevant information should be elsewhere)

• Images that are already described in text
When there is no description needed...

A null or empty string ALT text (ALT = “” ) should be used for images with no informational value.

This ensures that screen readers skip over the image.
Writing an image description
Writing an image description

What is the image’s purpose?

What is it telling us?

Why is it there?

What is else being said on this page and what unique information is this image providing?
Consider the Context

The most useful information is usually context dependent.

On a retail website, would the description “Women’s jeans” be enough to make you want to buy them?

How much information might a shopper looking to purchase a pair of jeans need? Useful information might include the colour, style and cut of the jeans.
Module 02 – Great and Desperate Cures

- Learning Objectives
- Introduction
- Trepanation: The Very First Great and Desperate Cure?
- Bound, Hand and Foot, with Chains of Iron
- Early Aversion Therapy
- I Was Put in a “Merciful and Humane Apparatus”
- Straitjackets
- The Spread Eagle Cure

The Somatic Cures: the Early 20th Century
- Insulin-coma Therapy (Insulin Shock)
- Methazol Shock
- Electroshock
- Lobotomy
- Other Kinds of Surgery
- The Torture Lab
- Conclusion
- Afterword

Activities
- Discussion Board
- Assignment: Book Review
- Required Readings
- Further Reading and References

Threats

There were other ways to restrain patients, ways that didn’t involve being strapped down. One of them was called the Utica crib. There are several autobiographies in which the Utica crib makes an appearance.

In 1880, Clarissa Lathrop, an unmarried teacher of about thirty years of age, was brought to the New York Lunatic Asylum by her mother and sister; Lathrop spent two years there. She subsequently wrote a book about her experience. She’s one of the five women profiled in The Writing on the Wall: Women’s Autobiography and the Asylum; the others are Elizabeth Packard, Lydia Smith, Jane Hillyer and Zelda Fitzgerald.

In the asylum, “Lathrop begins to live her worst fears of powerlessness. She is forced to take medication, forbidden to communicate with the outside world, abandoned by her family and threatened with physical restraint, such as the “Utica crib” which both infantilized patients with its name and appearance and terrorized them with its threat of cramped, humiliating confinement.”

For Lathrop and others, “[t]he asylum represents that point at which women, while they may hold a certain amount of moral power within the home, are reminded of where the power really lies. Both the name and the use of the notorious and controversial restraining device, the Utica crib, a box in which the patient was locked beneath wooden slats, reinforce the infantilization of women.”

The second half of the 19th century is sometimes described as the golden age of the asylum: restraints were abandoned and the inmates were dealt with kindly. Clearly the talk didn’t match the walk.
Use simple, plain language.

The order of the words matters. Put the most important information at the beginning of the description.
Guidelines

While context matters, some elements in an image generally require describing, including:

- Objects, buildings, people
- What’s happening/the action
- Purpose of the image
- Colours in the image
- Location
- Emotions, atmosphere
Describing the subjective

Everything is relative. Describing images makes you aware of your own subjectivity.

Try to stick to known facts.

What can you say that couldn’t (easily) be disputed?
Describing the subjective
How long is too long?

General rule of thumb: try for a balance between quality and quantity.

In HTML, you can always use LONGDESC (and ALT-text) to provide a longer description, should people choose to find out more about the image.

In Ektron, we need to learn to balance both in one description.

Somewhere between a few words and less than 150 characters.
An example in length
A) Skull.
B) Photograph of a skull.
C) Photograph of a human skull.
D) **Photograph of a trepanated human skull.**
E) **Photograph of a trepanated human skull. There is a hole near the top of the skull.**
F) **Photograph of a trepanated human skull. There is a hole near the top of the skull. #3 is placed in front of the skull.**
G) Photograph of a trepanated human skull. There is a hole near the top of the skull on the right side. #3 is placed front of the skull.
H) Photograph of a trepanated human skull on a table. There is a hole near the top of the skull on the right side. #3 is placed front of the skull. One tooth is missing.
Inserting image descriptions into Ektron
After signing into the content management system in Blackboard (Ektron), right click on the image that needs describing. Select “Edit”
Trepanation: the Very First Great and Desperate Cure?

A Portuguese doctor performed the first lobotomy in 1935. There is evidence, however, that suggests that psychosurgery may be as much as 8000 years old. All over the world, skulls with holes in them have been unearthed. Careful examination has shown that the holes were made deliberately and that, generally, the patient survived the operation. What was the operation for? To let the demons out, of course.

I understand that there are Neolithic cave paintings that depict the holes being drilled. But the cave paintings leave vexing questions unanswered. Were there mad-police who dragged people off to the surgeon? Did the early neurosurgeons get consent forms? I doubt it. Did the early neurosurgeons have empathy? I doubt it. This is a modern, 21st Century story. It's hard to look at these words without a shudder.
Right click on the image again and select "Set Image Properties"
Trepanation: the Very First Great and Desperate Cure?

A Portuguese doctor performed the first lobotomy in 1915. There is evidence, however, that suggests that psychosurgery may be as much as 8000 years old. All over the world, skulls with holes in them have been unearthed. Careful examination has shown that the holes were made deliberately and that, generally, the patient survived the operation. What was the operation for? To let the demons out, of course.

I understand that there are Neolithic cave paintings that depict the holes being drilled. But the cave paintings are much older than the operation itself. Perhaps the operation was the only way to deal with the problem.

Photograph of a trepanated human skull. There are many such skulls. Would you let a surgeon do the operation on you if you were in pain? Would you let your doctor do it on someone else? Did the early neurosurgeons get consent forms?

Dragged people off to the surgeon? Did the early neurosurgeons get consent forms? Would you let them do the operation on you? Would you let your doctor do it on someone else? Did the early neurosurgeons get consent forms?
In Word or Adobe...

It’s just as easy.


Check out this great resource for a step-by-step instruction on how to insert image descriptions in Word .doc or .docx files and Adobe .pdf files.
Other Resources

- The World Wide Web consortium’s (W3C) Web Content Accessibility Guidelines: [http://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG/](http://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG/)
  These are the guidelines that websites in Ontario will need to follow in order to comply with the AODA.

Thank you!
References


References


Images courtesy of the course Mad People’s History (CDST504).