

While people are gathering and sitting down waiting for the presentation to start, have this on screen and pose the question: What is this and why is it written this way?

Ask for feedback from the audience - get suggestions and then confirm.

It means 'accessibility'

It's a numeronym or numerical contraction.

11 = number of letters between the a and y.

Accessibility in digital ELT content development

- Understanding accessibility
- EAA & WCAG
- Alternative text
- Best practices for writing alternative text
- Practise time
- Q&A

We are going to be looking at accessibility today. Given the importance and magnitude of this area of content development, it is perhaps surprising that this is one of only two talks at IATEFL devoted to accessibility. Everyone should be talking about it, so lets get the ball rolling on that.

Outline agenda for the talk.

We'll start by looking at accessibility, what it is, why it's important and some of the benefits that arise from having accessible content.

We'll then briefly look at the European Accessibility Act and the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines to consider what they are and how they fit into the grand scheme of things.

And then we look at a specific area of accessibility - alternative text for images. We'll think about what it is, why it's used, how we write it and when it should be used.

Finally, we'll have some practise producing alternative text.

By the end of the session, you should have a good idea as to how to write alternative text for images.

Understanding accessibility

What is it?

People with disabilities can equally perceive, understand, navigate and interact with websites and tools.

... contribute equally without barriers.

The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C)

BUT accessibility is not about disability.

It is about people with **different abilities**.



Web accessibility means that people with disabilities can equally perceive, understand, navigate and interact with websites and tools. It also means that they can contribute equally without barriers (The World Wide Web Consortium, W3C).

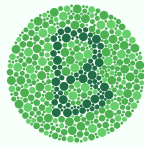
People of any or differing abilities. And that's an important point as accessibility is there to help everyone, including those with permanent and temporary disabilities.

Understanding accessibility

Importance and benefits



Vision issues
770



Colour vision issues
Men 80
Women 8



Hearing loss
180



Dyslexia
100

Improved user experience
Enhanced SEO and search visibility
User centred design
Social responsibility and brand reputation

To consider the importance of accessibility, let's consider some statistics.

EAA aims to make life easier for around 87m Europeans (almost 1 in 5) who have disabilities, including older people and those who have a temporary impairment.

For persons with disabilities, accessibility is a precondition for participation in society on an equal basis with others.

Let's imagine that we have a new online ELT course and it currently has 1000 people subscribed to it. How many of those people do you think would have vision issues (low/poor vision, blindness, cataracts, etc.)?

What about hearing loss?

Dyslexia?

Source: <https://design.education.gov.uk/tools/how-many-users/1000>

Do these figures surprise you? Certainly, the numbers for vision issues are much higher than the other categories but don't feel that those other categories are less important.

Providing accessible content to your users gives a better/improved user experience. There are also SEO and search visibility benefits. And it is also a socially responsible thing to do, while also protecting your brand reputation.

Understanding accessibility European Accessibility Act

- improving accessibility of products and services for people with disabilities.
- covers any digital learning platforms, educational websites and online educational resources that would be sold in the EU.



EAA has been around for a while now - published in 2019 but the main thing is that enforcement starts in June 2025.

The EAA is there to improve accessibility of products and services for people with disabilities, be it a temporary or permanent disability.

Also covers digital learning platforms, educational websites and online educational resources that would be sold in the EU.

So, this affects courses that are currently in production, potentially going live this year or next. But, more crucially, it also applies to a publisher's backlist of courses, assuming they are being sold within Europe (Spain, for example, is an important market for many publishers).

This is a significant amount of content for publishers to deal with considering the act requires companies operating within the EU to adapt their digital products and services to the accessibility standards by June 2025.

Member states were to incorporate the EAA into their own legal frameworks by 2022 and some have provided transition periods until 2030. France and Italy have both done that.

The EAA doesn't set out any specific enforcement or sanctions but does say that penalties would be "effective, proportionate and dissuasive."

Understanding accessibility

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)

- Level A: 30 basic standards
- Level AA: 20 intermediate standards
- Level AAA: 28 advanced standards (optional)



The EAA focuses on what needs to happen. Related to that and embedded throughout the EAA are the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, or WCAG. These focus on how to make your content accessible.

The guidelines seek to identify the various different areas where content developers can make their content more accessible to users.

There are three levels of conformance:

Level A includes 30 basic standards

Level AA includes 20 intermediate standards

and Level AAA includes 28 advanced (optional) standards

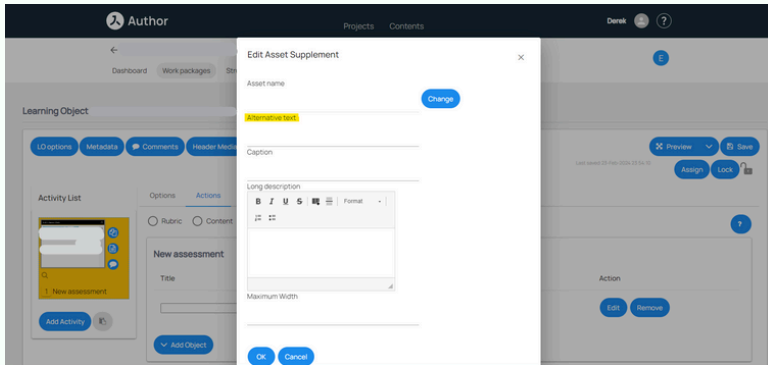
The standards are also categorised to ensure content is perceivable, operable, understandable and robust. What we'll be looking at shortly falls into the perceivable category.

It's not necessarily the case that you need to achieve all 50 standards at levels A and AA in order to finally say that your content is fully compliant and accessible. There may be some standards that are not necessarily relevant to your particular situation. For example, if your content contains no video then there are a number of standards that will not be relevant. Similarly, there are other standards relating to the provision of sign language although there are alternative standards that could be implemented instead.

Consequently, it is important to audit your existing catalogue of courseware to determine what assets you have in place and what elements of your content might need to be amended in order to make them more accessible. It may be that you're already ticking off some of those standards.

Alternative text: What is it?

According to the Royal National Institute of Blind People, Alt Text is used to describe images that appear on websites and social media so that visually impaired users can hear a summary of what is in those images.



One asset that is frequently used both in print and digital ELT is photographs. This is one of the first guidelines that comes up in the WCAG standards and one which certainly impacts ELT publishing and digital content development. But, as we saw earlier, it is also one that can have a positive impact on many users.

The WCAG standard is alternative text descriptions for images. It comes under the category of content that is perceivable. And it is a level A (basic) standard.

ELT online courses use lots of images so including this standard in your accessibility road map would be an excellent idea.

So, what is it?

Alt text = description of an image. It allows visually impaired people to hear a summary of what is in the image.

The text description should be equivalent to the image itself, or as close as possible.

Content authoring tools like Avallain will typically have a field in the asset's edit window where alt text can be added.

Alternative text: Why use it?

The Colosseum in Rome, Italy.



Horse heads.

vs

The Kelpies sculpture of two mythical horse heads in Falkirk, Scotland.



It's important for accessibility reasons: screen readers can detect and read out loud the text description of an image. So, the meaning of the image is conveyed to the user. Basically, the text is a replacement for the image.

And the description is important when trying to convey meaning. Consider the first image of the Colosseum in Rome. It may well be enough to describe the image as The Colosseum in Rome. However, in the second photo, describing it as 'horse heads' may conjure up a very different image than if the description is 'The Kelpies sculpture of two mythical horse heads in Falkirk, Scotland.'

If the image doesn't load for some reason, the alt text would be displayed in its place.

Alt text is used by search engines to improve search results. Useful for marketing departments.

Alternative text: How to describe a photo?



1. A gorge.
2. An image of a deep gorge.
3. A deep gorge with a river running through it.
4. An image of a deep gorge in Iceland with a river running through it.

So, how do you describe a photo so that the important meaningful information is conveyed?

Let's have a look at an example.

Here are 4 possible descriptions of this image. Which is best.

#1 doesn't give enough information.

#2 and #4, 'an image' doesn't need to be said in the description as the screen reader will automatically announce that the asset is an image.

#3 is the best one although could be improved.

It's best to try and keep your descriptions short. A couple of sentences max, a few words may be sufficient.

Use proper grammar and punctuation.

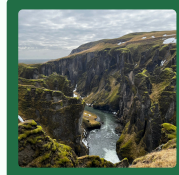
Try and keep it simple. Avoid any jargon if possible. That's probably easier in an ELT setting as we're grading the language for our students anyway.

Alternative text: When to use it?



Fjaðrárgljúfur gorge in Iceland

Which photo shows a gorge in Iceland?



Do you need to provide alt text descriptions for every photo?

Not necessarily.

1. Images with caption text do not also need to have alt text. It would be repeated by the screen reader.
2. Images that are purely decorative also don't need to have alt text - 'ambience' or 'eye candy' images. This doesn't tend to happen in digital content but could in eBooks.
3. Images that are used in assessment as, for example, answer options don't need alt text if that would give the answer away.

It is useful to keep this in mind if reusing images because alt text may be appropriate in the image's first use but not in its subsequent use as the image's purpose may have changed.

Alternative text: Best practice

- Think about the purpose of the image. Is it informational (ie provides context) or decorative? It might change if you're reusing it.
- Don't use 'image of'.
- Use proper grammar and punctuation.
- Keep it as short as possible.
- Use plain language and no jargon.
- Either caption the image or use Alt text, not both.

Let's have a quick recap on the main points to consider with Alt text before you try this out.

Alternative text: Time to practise



Divide the room into two. Those on the left side of the room will focus on the left image and those on the right will have the photo on the right.

Work in pairs or groups of three.

One person provides the alt text description of the photo, like the screen reader would.

The other person is going to have their eyes closed and will try and imagine the image.

Then all come together, look at the images. Those who had their eyes closed, what did they correctly imagine? What was different? Was anything missing?

Q&A

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<https://www.refreshingpublishing.com/refreshing-publishing-guides.html>



Refreshing Publishing Guides

Issue 1: Improving digital accessibility

Issue 2: Alternative text





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Designing refreshing digital learning experiences

