Journal Author Guide to Alt Text for Images

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Introduction

Alt text (alternative text) is a textual description of the visual content and function of an image. It conveys the key elements to readers who use assistive technology such as read-aloud screen readers, meaning that everyone can equitably access and understand visual content. It also enhances content discoverability because alt text is indexed by search engines.

Alt text is a legal requirement. Elsevier cannot publish content without it.

We create draft alt text descriptions using AI, and ask authors, as human subject matter experts, to review these descriptions to ensure their accuracy. For more information on how to do this, see the sections Checklist for proofing alt text and What you will see in the proofing tool.

Depending on the complexity of the image, the description may be split into two parts: short alt text and long alt text.

In Elsevier's PDF format journal articles, image descriptions are accessed by assistive technology that allows people with accessibility needs to read. Images in HTML articles may also display a long alt text description on the page, beneath the image.

For more information about alt text and how it appears in Elsevier content, watch: Alt text for images in Elsevier journals, books and online learning resources.

To see how assistive technology such as screen-reader software reads the alt text for an image, see this example on ScienceDirect.

Terminology

Short alt text: A concise description of the image in up to 200 characters. All Elsevier images that communicate information have short alt text. This description is only visible to users of assistive technology and does not appear on the page.

Long alt text: Many of the scientific images published in Elsevier content are too complex to describe meaningfully in 200 characters. In these cases, the short alt text introduces the image and the long alt text provides a complete description. The long alt text is a literal translation of the image, conveying all elements that are important to understand its intent and meaning.

Figure caption: Visible text that puts the image in the context of the rest of the text. It may briefly describe the image and/or its purpose but is generally not as visually rich as alt text. Each image has a figure caption alongside the alt text.

Together these text elements work together to give a complete description of the visual.

Key information about alt text

- Elsevier alt text starts with the marker 'Alt text begins.' and ends with 'Alt text provided by Elsevier.'
- Alt text should not repeat the caption or content from the surrounding text, unless necessary for clarity.
- The alt text does not replace the figure caption, and the caption cannot replace the alt text.
- Labels or other text within the image will be spelled out in the alt text.
- Alt text does not include assumptions or interpretations; however, it does highlight abnormalities, trends and other important lessons.
- Acronyms and initialisms that may be read out accidentally as a single word by assistive technology include a space between each character, such as "A D D" for "attention deficit disorder".

Checklist for proofing alt text

Before proofing the alt text in your article, see the Alt text example below, which shows the different focuses of the short alt text, long alt text, and figure caption

Imagine that you are visually describing the image over the phone to somebody who needs to understand it. In the proofing tool, you will need to correct:

- ✓ Inaccuracies;
- ✓ Missing important visual information that is shown the image;
- ✓ Irrelevant content – coverage of something that does not appear in the image.

If you have any questions while reviewing the alt text, please contact your Journal Manager.

What you will see in the proofing tool

Each image in the proofing tool will feature either short alt text or both short alt text and long alt text. In the example below these appear above the image, but they may be placed below the image in some proofing tools.

You will be asked to review the alt text(s) for each image and make corrections if they are required.

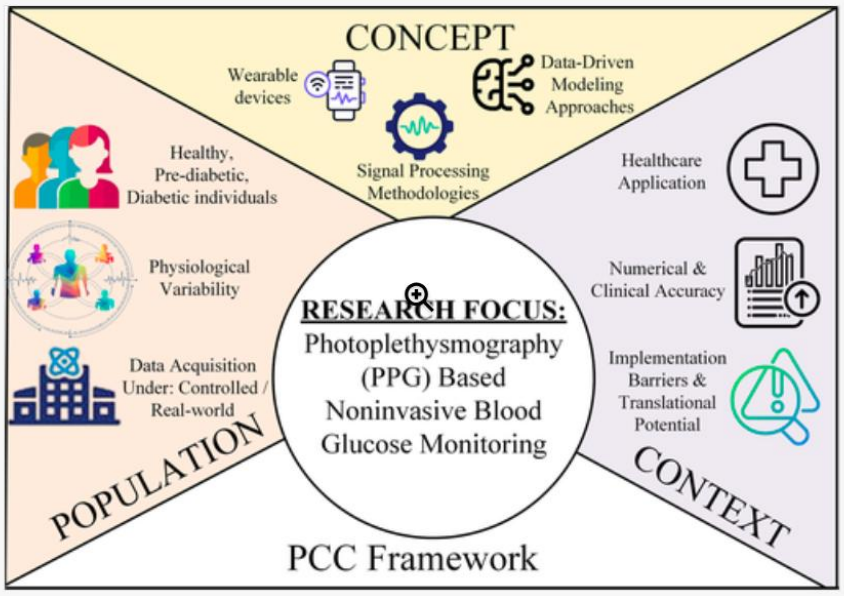
A Checklist for proofing alt text is above to guide your review.

Figure 12.1

Alt-Text – Short Description: Visualization of the P C C Framework, its three categories of relevant studies, and the research focus.

Alt-Text – Long Description: The P C C Framework features the three categories of relevant studies, Concept, Context and Population, and the overarching research focus at the centre. The Research Focus reads: Photoplethysmography (P P G) Based Noninvasive Blood Glucose Monitoring. The three categories, listed clockwise from the top, read as follows. Concept: Wearable devices, Data-Driven Modeling Approaches, and Signal Processing Methodologies. Context: Healthcare Application, Numerical and Clinical Accuracy, and Implementation Barriers and Translation Potential. Population: Healthy, Pre-diabetic, and Diabetic individuals.

View High-Res Image



Population–concept–context (PCC) framework for PPG-based noninvasive blood glucose monitoring.

Alt text example

The following example demonstrates how the short and long alt text work together with the figure caption and the surrounding text that cross-references the image to provide a full visual description:

1. The caption introduces the figure;
2. The cross-referencing text provides a reference point;
3. The short alt text introduces the figure to people using assistive technology;
4. The long alt text gives a detailed visual description.

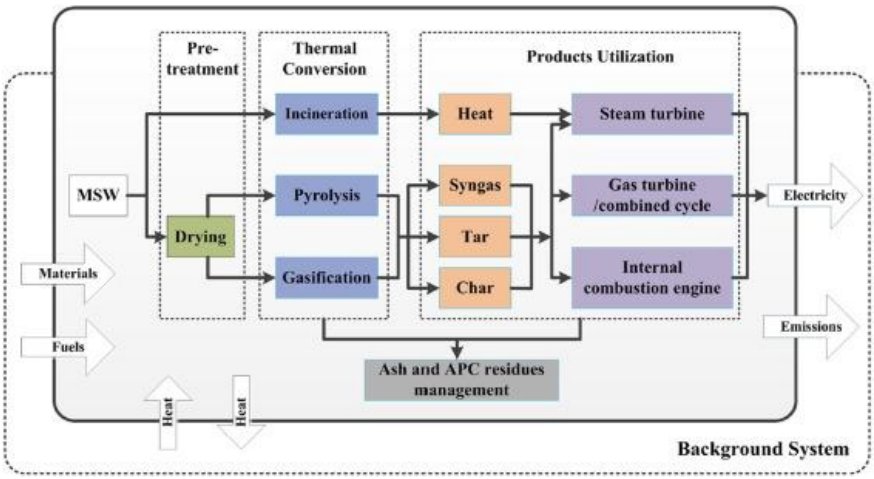


Figure caption: Figure 5.3. Example of an LCA for incineration, pyrolysis and gasification.

Cross-referencing body text: LCA study applications are linked to the definition of the objective and scope, which is one of the stages of the study, as indicated previously. Many studies use the LCA to compare between different technologies for the use of waste energy, or between the use of energy and other forms of waste management, while in some cases the LCA was applied to advance specific processes in the treatment units, in order to optimize energy use (Fig. 5.3).

Short alt text: Alt text begins. A flowchart illustrating the thermal conversion of municipal solid waste into energy and byproducts through incineration, pyrolysis, and gasification. Alt text provided by Elsevier.

Long alt text: Alt text begins. The flowchart illustrates the conversion of municipal solid waste (MSW) into energy and byproducts using thermal conversion methods, structured into three main sections: Pre-treatment, Thermal Conversion, and Products Utilization. In the Pre-treatment stage, municipal solid waste undergoes drying to prepare it for further processing. The Thermal Conversion section presents three distinct pathways: incineration, pyrolysis, and gasification. Incineration primarily produces heat, while pyrolysis and gasification yield syngas, tar, and char. In the Products Utilization section,

heat from incineration drives a steam turbine for electricity generation, syngas from pyrolysis and gasification is used in gas turbines or combined cycle systems, and tar and char are utilized in internal combustion engines. Additionally, the chart addresses the management of ash and air pollution control residues, byproducts from the thermal processes. Arrows trace the movement of materials, energy, and emissions through the system, and a dotted border outlines the background system, highlighting the integrated nature of the entire process. Alt text provided by Elsevier.

Contact for queries

If you have any questions while reviewing the alt text for your images, please contact your Journal Manager.