# Writing Great Alt Text

CUNY SCHOOL OF LABOR AND URBAN STUDIES
THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Digital content often uses images and figures to convey meaning or add visual appeal to a page. In most situations, it is important to add alternative text to visual components for those using screen readers or anyone else who is unable to access them.

## Deciding whether to add Alternative text

Adding alt text to images is appropriate **except** when the image is decorative. Ask yourself these questions:

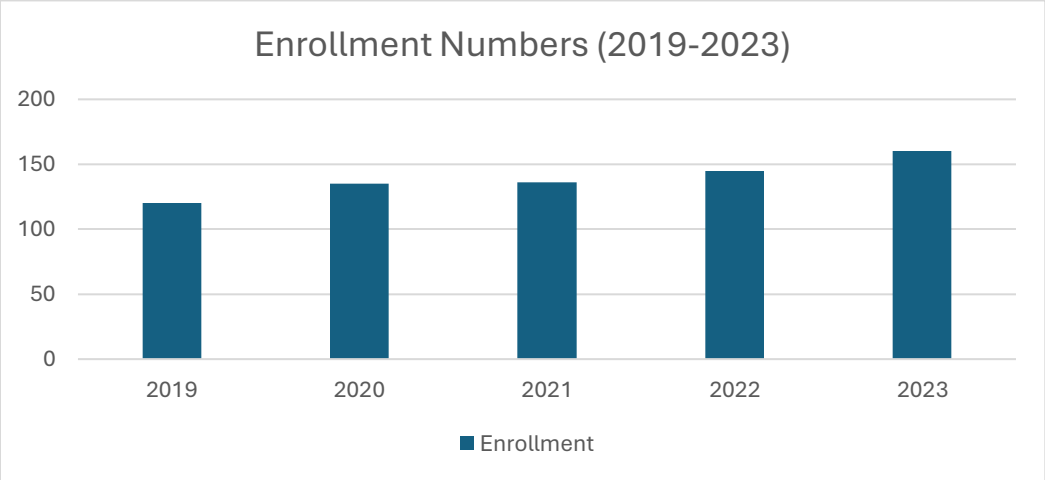
1. Is the image functional? (Buttons, Links)
2. Does the image provide information?
3. Does the image contain text?
4. Is the image a complex figure? (Graphs, charts)

If you answered yes to any of these questions, the image requires alternative text. Otherwise, mark the image as decorative.

## Context over description

Your alt text should be no more than 2-3 sentences long. If it exceeds that length, you may be adding too many details.

When adding alt text to images, your goal is to convey the meaning you want your audience to get not to describe every detail in the photo.




*Not ideal: blue bar chart titled "Enrollment Numbers (2019-2023)" with "Year" as x-axis and "Enrollment" as y-axis. Year 2019 had 120 enrollees, year 2020 had 135 enrollees, year 2021 had 145 enrollees, etc.*

*Ideal: Bar chart showing enrollment steadily increasing from 2019 to 2023.*

## Images containing text

In general, it's a good idea to include at least some of the text in an image in the alt-text description. If the text in the image exceeds 2-3 sentences, it is better to include a brief description or summary in the alt-text, while repeating the image text elsewhere on the page.




*Alt Text: Flyer for CUNY SLU's "Teaching Labor History with Union Buttons" presentation.*

Adjourning text body: Join us September 15 for Teaching Labor History with Union Buttons. Hear Isaac Silver, the archivist and educator behind Buttons of the Left, discuss how historic labor materials can be preserved, studied, and used to teach in today's political moment. This free, in-person event takes place from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. on SLU's 18th floor.