

Accessibility Updates in Office 2019

With the release of Office 2019, Microsoft made a few changes regarding alternative text and the Accessibility Checker. This handout will help you navigate these updates and know which new features are not recommended for use when creating accessible content.

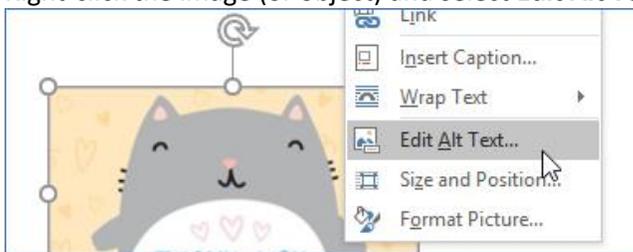
Alternative Text

There are now several ways you can access an image's (or object's) Alternative Text. This section provides you with information on each of the methods, as well as information on the new features that appear on the Alt Text pane.

Accessing the Alt Text Pane

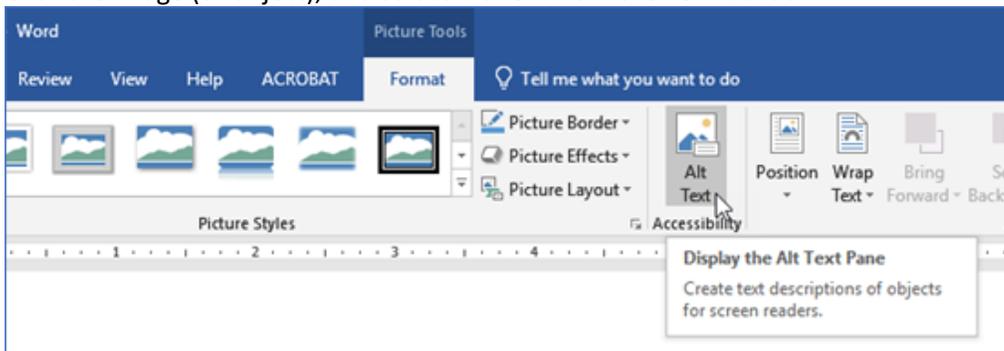
- **Option 1**

Right-click the image (or object) and select **Edit Alt Text** from the menu that appears.



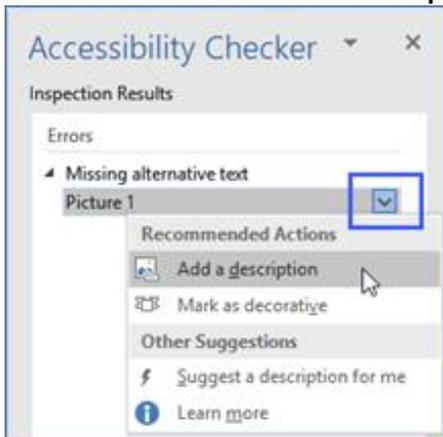
- **Option 2**

Click the image (or object), and select Alt Text from the **Format** tab.



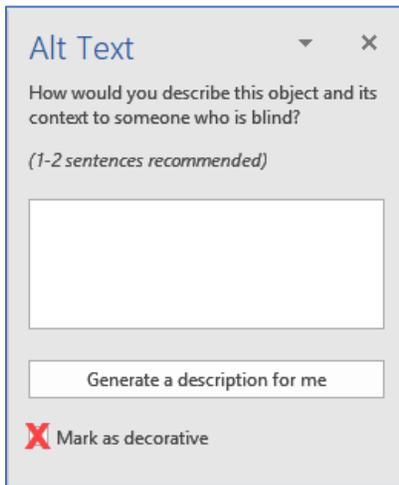
- **Option 3**

Run the Accessibility Checker, then click the drop-down arrow next to the image that's missing alternative text. Select **Add a description**.



New Alt Text Pane Feature: *Mark an Image as Decorative* (Not recommended for use)

In the third image above, there is a new option on the menu called *Mark as decorative*. This option is also found under the text box in the Alt Text pane. Unfortunately, the *Mark as decorative* option is not yet working properly, and selecting it is not recommended.

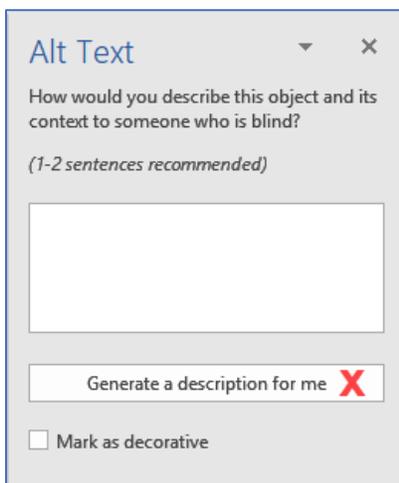


What *should*—but unfortunately does NOT—happen when this option is selected is the image should be completely ignore and skipped over by assistive technology. Instead, when this option is selected, assistive technology notices the image, and because there is no description in the text box, the assistive technology reads the image's dimensions. This information is not very helpful to someone using assistive technology, as the student or user will clearly know there's an image present but is unable to access the information provided by the image. This could become a source of frustration for the assistive technology user.

Note: When using a decorative image, the recommendation is to always write a brief alternative text.

New Alt Text Pane Feature: *Generate a description for me* (Not recommended for use)

There's one more new feature called *Generate a description for me* that is available in the Alt Text pane. This option uses artificial intelligence to generate an alternative text for the image. The technology is in its infancy and is not very accurate (right now, this option is good for a chuckle...for example, the cat in the first picture above was identified as a clock).



Microsoft Accessibility Checker

Retooled Errors, Warnings, and Tips

The errors, warnings, and tips offered by the Office 2019 Accessibility Checker have been modified. The Accessibility Checker:

- **no longer recognizes URL hyperlinks as inaccessible hyperlinks.**
*Many URL hyperlinks are inaccessible as per WCAG expectations; however, they are no longer recognized as an error by the Accessibility Checker. **It is important to conduct a “human” review of the content** to ensure all URL hyperlinks are converted to succinct, descriptive hyperlinks.*
- **no longer indicates an “error” when headings are out of order.**
*Rather than an “error”, this is now a “tip”, which may seem to diminish the importance of logical heading structure; however, proper page structure continues to be a **very important accessibility consideration**.*
- **no longer recognizes a missing header row in a table as inaccessible.**
*Assigning a row heading to the first row of a table is a WCAG expectation as it provides information on the structure of the table and the relationships of the content within it. As mentioned above, **it is important to conduct a “human” review of the content** to ensure all tables are given a header row.*

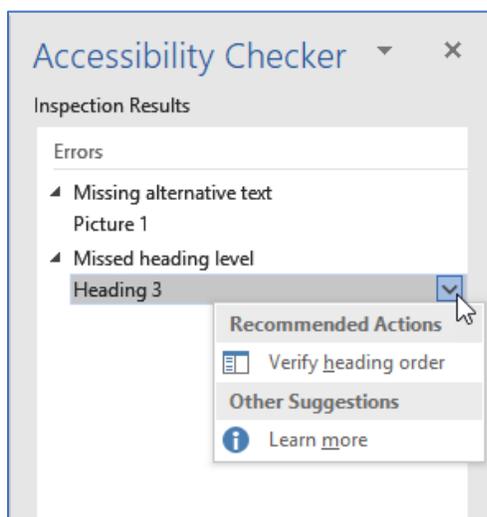
With these updates, it is very important to self-check your content to ensure accessibility compliance.

[Durham Tech’s Digital Accessibility checklists](#) are helpful resources.

Making Corrections from the Accessibility Checker Pane

The Office 2019 Accessibility Checker makes it a little easier to make certain corrections because a few editing options have been made available from within the Accessibility Checker pane.

Often, a drop-down arrow is offered with each Error, Warning, or Tip allowing the correction to quickly be made or accessed from within the pane.



More information about the updated Accessibility Checker can be found on [Microsoft’s Improve Accessibility with the Accessibility Checker](#) page and on their [Rules for the Accessibility Checker](#) page.