MULTI-REGIONAL CLINICAL TRIALS

THE MRCT CENTER OF BRIGHAM AND WOMEN'S HOSPITAL and HARVARD

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)

Accessibility

Accessibility 101: How to Write Alt text and Map Participant Journeys
Q&A follow-up

1. Q: For Data Standards, have the regulatory agencies have any discussion on this and when should we expect any change? (because, if it is not in the guidance, nothing will be changed!)

    A: The White House office of Science and Technology recently formed a Disability Data Interagency Working Group (DDIWG). They put out a Notice of Availability and Request for Information on Federal Evidence Agenda on Disability Equity. Comments were due July 15: https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2024/05/30/2024-11838/notice-of-availability-and-request-for-information-federal-evidence-agenda-on-disability-equity#:~:text=The%20Federal%20Evidence%20Agenda%20on%20Disability%20Equity%20will%3A,or%20in%20Federal%20program%20participation

    There has also been some discussion around the use of the American Community survey vs the Washington Group Disability Measures (there is a short set and expanded set of questions), which will likely continue: https://www.ncd.gov/letters/2023-12-19-ncd-letter-to-census-on-proposed-change-to-disability-questions-in-american-community-survey/ and https://www.science.org/content/article/census-bureau-scraps-proposed-changes-disability-questions and https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1936657423001358?via%3Dihub

2. Q: Do Google suite tools have alt text/accessibility features, similar to Microsoft office?

    A: There are some tools in Google: https://workspace.google.com/marketplace/app/accessibility_checker_for_docs/452529936240; https://it.umn.edu/services-technologies/how-tos/google-docs-use-accessibility-checker ; https://sparkbox.com/foundry/lighthouse_chrome_website_accessibility_audit_website_accessibility_checker ; https://about.google/belonging/accessibility-resources/ ; and https://edu.google.com/intl/ALL_us/why-google/accessibility/

3. Q: How does alt text handle gender? For example, the person may appear to be a woman, but may not identify as such.

    A: Sometimes there is a default alt text that comes up when a picture is imported. In addressing gender, we have an 'LGBTQIA+ inclusion by design in clinical research' working group who advocate for gender-neutral approaches. For instance, use terms like "they" or describe individuals as "a person" or "a family" to maintain inclusivity. Instead of using gender-specific pronouns like "he" or "she," opt for neutral terms such as "the participant" or "the researcher."

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4. Q: I'm curious about your recommendations for the verb tense of alt text? Present tense, past tense, using -ing verbs?

   A: When writing alt text, the key is to capture the essence of the visual content in a clear and effective manner. It's less about which tense—whether present, past, or using -ing verbs—and more about ensuring the alt text accurately conveys the message intended by the image. The priority lies in communicating the content effectively for users.

5. Q: What were possible correct answers? Left wondering and unsure, unclear.

   A: There is no specific correct answer. We advise only that the Alt Text follow the principles that we outlined and that the text is responsive to the context. In the webinar resources we will list examples from the chat that you may find helpful.

6. Q: What did you advise to avoid re description of people? Was it assumption of emotional state? Would "smiling person" be better than "happy person".

   A: It's a good example—using "smiling person" is more appropriate than assuming emotional states like "happy person." It's important to avoid descriptions that could be seen as derogatory or presumptive, such as labeling someone as "disgruntled" or "upset." When describing physical attributes, it's crucial to use respectful language. When interacting with individuals with disabilities language preferences vary widely – as outlined in our [Accessibility by Design toolkit]. Some prefer person-first language (e.g., "a person who uses a wheelchair"), while others prefer identity-first language (e.g., "an autistic person"). These preferences can differ based on individual and community perspectives, so it's crucial to discuss language preferences with the community or individuals you're working with. In alt-text, it's critical to accommodate these preferences based on community feedback. It's always appropriate to ask individuals directly about their preferred language when interacting with them.

7. Q: Do you have recommendations for alt text for pictograms, such as on medication bottles? We want to create an inclusive experience so people who cannot see the images can envision the graphic, however our text is long when we describe the image and the meaning. For example, an icon of a caregiver giving medicine to a baby with an X over it, meaning do not give this medicine to babies. In this case, should we just provide the meaning, and not the description?

   A: Considering this specific message, yes, the meaning and description is important. This alt text description would be applicable to people with low vision since the X on the bottle is likely flat. If you are targeting people completely blind, you could use and reference tactile/ Braille stickers on the bottle indicating do not give this to child. Generally speaking, pictures are often used to convey a message that could be a few sentences or a paragraph. In this case consider balancing the need of using a pictogram and instructions vs. a pictogram as instructions. An alternative could be giving the instructions using words on the page/slide "Do not give the medication you receive from your doctor to any child or infant," then the pictogram you are using becomes a reinforcer for people who can see and hear.

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8. Q: How can you see alt text?

   A: Alt text is used by screen reading software. The alt text is "hidden" in the image but read out loud by the software. When editing/inserting alt-text for an image, it is visible on the screen, but after editing/inserting the Alt Text it is "hidden".However, if the context specifically requires highlighting gender, such as discussing "women in research" for diversity initiatives, it may be appropriate to specify genders. Overall, inclusivity in imagery is crucial, encompassing diverse gender identities and responsive representation. The approach is dependent on context and the message that one is trying to get across.

9. Q: Are there any training courses you would recommend?

   A: For Alt Text here are some additional resources:

   Microsoft. Add alternative text to a shape, picture, chart, SmartArt graphic, or other object. Available from: https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/add-alternative-text-to-a-shape-picture-chart-smartart-graphic-or-other-object-44989b2a-903c-4d9a-b742-6a75b451c669#:~:text=Add%20alt%20text&text=Right%2Dclick%20the%20object%20and,Select%20Alt%20Text

   Perkins School for the Blind. How to write Alt Text and Image Descriptions for the visually impaired. Available from: https://www.perkins.org/resource/how-write-alt-text-and-image-descriptions-visually-impaired/

   DisabilityIN. Creating Accessible Social Media Content: GAAD Toolkit. Available from: https://disabilityin.org/resource/creating-acce

10. Q: What are some of the 'opportunities' to better provide accessibility on the last example of the watch and monitor?

    A: First, there may be different ways to measure fitness/endurance, such as six-minute push test for people who use wheelchairs, rather than a six-minute walk test. Researchers should take care to be inclusive in the outcome measures and methodology to assess the outcome measures. Secondly, participants may feel more comfortable using their own devices, on which they may have already set up options for accessibility. We also suggest that you work with people with disabilities and/or companies led by people with disabilities, to test different apps or software to see which are the most accessible, how they may need to be adapted, or whether a new format must be developed.

11. Q: Will screen readers skip images which are marked as decorative, does it say "decorative image," or something else?

    A: It depends on the screen reading software that is being used. For instance, iOS has great accessibility features, there are other free software options with similar options and capabilities. JAWS (screen reading software) will usually skip over it, because the screen reading technology doesn't want to clog up the system and overwhelm the user.

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12. Q: In developing countries situation may be very difficult.

   A: Yes. You are entirely correct. The World Bank, UNIEF, the WHO and others have programs working on accessibility in low- and middle-income countries.

   The University College London International Disability Research Center is a good resource: https://www.ucl.ac.uk/epidemiology-health-care/research/epidemiology-and-public-health/research/ucl-centre-humanitarianism-and-social-inclusion-5

   And there are numerous articles about the topic, although there is still far too little action. Here is one: https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanam/article/PIIS2667-193X(24)00028-0/fulltext

   This company provides one of the most commonly used free screen reading software programs. It is available in more than 50 languages. https://www.nvaccess.org/about-nv-access/

13. Q: What are issues with PDFs?

   A: Screen reading software uses information (not visible) within the PDF to help the person using the screen reader navigate the content of the document. PDFs are often lacking the information the software needs. Adobe has some accessibility features and an accessibility checker which you will need to enable. Within Adobe, you can edit the reading order using what Adobe calls tags for the document and set up alt text for images. https://helpx.adobe.com/acrobat/using/touch-reading-order-tool-pdfs.html Using the reading order tags is especially useful when a document does not have a linear layout for reading.

   Another issue with PDFs is headers and footers within the document are often read aloud because it is the next section of text on the screen. This is often unnecessary and distracting, this can be addressed by using the correct tag. Most often, PDFs start as Microsoft Word documents before being converted. Microsoft Word uses headings (text and tables) to help with document navigation. When these features within Word are used, they do translate to the converted PDF.

14. Q: For those with sensory issues, some speech patterns can be difficulty. For example, vocal fry, using umm, or tsk after speaking. I think this is often forgotten.

   A: Yes, this is true. Until this year we had also been providing a written transcript of the webinars, so that we could remove vocal tics and unclear language. But we have found that the closed captioning is getting much better at automatically removing these, so we have been testing that with our audiences to see if the additional transcript, which is time-consuming to edit, is necessary.