Alt Text as Poetry Workbook

By Bojana Coklyat and Shannon Finnegan
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Welcome!

We're glad you're here!!

This workbook is a collaboration between artists Bojana Coklyat and Shannon Finnegan, supported by Eyebeam and the Disability Visibility Project.

Eyebeam "enables people to think creatively and critically about technology's effect on society, with the mission of revealing new paths toward a more just future for all."

The Disability Visibility Project "is an online community dedicated to creating, sharing, and amplifying disability media and culture."

We're excited for you to join us in exploring alt text and hopefully in the process work towards making online communities more accessible, fun, and welcoming.

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Section 1: Before You Start

Who we are and why we made this

This book was written by Shannon Finnegan and Bojana Coklyat. We are both disabled artists and activists. Shannon is sighted and Bojana lives with low vision. We met in New York City through mutual friends. We realized there was a lot of overlap between our interests and decided to jump into this collaborative project.

Both of us are interested in how communities can move towards better and more nuanced approaches to access. Instead of focusing on compliance and doing the minimum, what if we approach access creatively and generously, centering disability culture? How do we make spaces and experiences that disabled people not only *can* access but *want* to access?

Alt text is an essential part of web accessibility. It is a system of text descriptions built into websites, which makes visual content accessible to people who are blind, low vision, or have certain cognitive disabilities. Alt text has existed since the 1990s, but it is often overlooked altogether or understood solely through the lens of compliance. The resulting alt text is often written in a reluctant, perfunctory style, but it has tremendous expressive potential. This workbook reframes alt text as a type of poetry and provides exercises to practice writing it. We don't just want alt text users to be able to access visual content on the internet, we want them to feel a sense of belonging in digital spaces.

About [Bojana Coklyat](#):
I'm a disabled visual artist, activist and art access consultant. I researched access in cultural institutions as part of my 2019-2020 Fulbright grant in the Czech Republic. I have continued similar work as the Project Leader for the Mapping Virtual Access in Cultural Institutions project at the Museum Art

and Culture Access Consortium (MAC). Over the past several months, on behalf of MAC, I have been documenting approaches to access in NYC area cultural institutions during the pandemic.

I'm a smiley white woman with a chin-length brunette bob. I'm about 5-feet 6-inches, easing into my 40s and usually have my white cane with me when outside. Tonight, I'm wearing a typical outfit of late, a graphic black and white t-shirt, cherry red cardigan and black jeans.

About [Shannon Finnegan](#):
I am a multidisciplinary artist making work about accessibility and disability culture. I have done projects with Banff Centre, the High Line, Tallinn Art Hall, Nook Gallery, and the Wassaic Project. I have spoken about my work at the Brooklyn Museum, School for Poetic Computation, The 8th Floor, and The Andrew Heiskell Braille and Talking Book Library. In 2018, I received a Wynn Newhouse Award and participated in Art Beyond Sight's Art + Disability Residency. In 2019, I was an artist-in-residence at Eyebeam.

I'm a 5-foot-2-inch, blond, white person. I'm a fairly small person and I'm in my early 30s, though people often tell me I look younger. My disability affects my walking so I move with a slight wobble. I'm currently writing from home where I'm wearing a blue, gingham PJ-set.

<u>Who is this for</u>

We started this project with our immediate communities in mind: artists, art organizations, creative people of different kinds. Images of art frequently travel online, but we felt like a lot of pre-existing alt text guidelines didn't fit the needs of artwork.

Initially, we also focused on social media platforms (Instagram, Facebook, Twitter). Because of the way these platforms have been built, it is the responsibility of each user to make their content accessible. (More about that in the section *Alt Text and You*). These platforms have become important spaces for community building. The low adoption of alt text features creates major barriers for blind and low vision people to participate and feel a sense of belonging. So if you use social media, this is for you.

In the time since our first alt text workshops, we've received positive feedback from a variety of people outside our initially imagined audiences — teachers, writers, librarians, copywriters, and more. This is all to say that the audience for this practice is expansive. It may be relevant to your work or community in ways we haven't yet imagined. And even if the online circulation of images isn't a part of your life, we believe that alt text raises issues that are interesting to think about regardless.

This work is part of an ecosystem

This project is part of an elaborate and rich [ecosystem](#) of work around this topic. None of these ideas are new — disabled people have been asking for and producing thoughtful and creative approaches to alt text and description for a long time. And this work is only possible because of the thinking, writing, dreaming, and organizing disabled people have done to shape how we understand access in general. It exists alongside the important work about description that's being done by many other artists and thinkers.

These are a few on our radar, but certainly, there are many, many more:

- Aimi Hamraie
- Aislinn Thomas
- Amalle Dublon
- Amanda Cachia
- Aubree Penney
- Candystore
- Carmen Papalia
- Carolyn Lazard
- Chancey Fleet
- Constantina Zavitsanos
- Georgina Kleege
- Jerron Herman
- Jesse Darling
- Jordan Lord
- Joshua Miele
- Justin Allen
- Kayla Hamilton
- Kevin Gotkin
- Kinetic Light
- Krishna Washburn
- Liza Sylvestre
- Louise Hickman
- Madison Zalopany
- Park McArthur
- Pelenakeke Brown
- Rebirth Garments
- Thomas Reid

Intent

The purpose of this workbook is not to tell you how to write alt text. There are many existing resources that provide guidelines and how-tos (you can find a few listed in the *Tools* section).

Our primary intent is to put alt text on your radar (if it wasn't already), to get you thinking about it creatively, and to explore a few of the key questions that come up when translating images into text.

We hope these exercises make clear that, like all accessibility practices, writing alt text requires ongoing practice, learning, and collaboration.

The needs and wants of blind and low vision people in your community should take priority over a workbook like this. And certainly, if you are part of an organization or institution, you should be hiring disabled people (both for access work and throughout your organization including leadership roles).

We also want to note that our thinking about alt text is shifting and changing all the time. And of course, people have lots of different opinions about how to approach alt text. So take all of this with a grain of salt, seek out alternate viewpoints, and feel free to disagree.

How to get started

This workbook consists of:
- Reading that introduces alt text and alt text as poetry.
- A series of writing exercises.

These exercises are designed for pairs. You can do them on your own, but we've found participants learn a lot from reading someone else's alt text and having a chance to discuss the process.

For the exercises, you'll be asked to write on your own. Afterward, you can share your writing with your partner and discuss.

We estimate the full workbook takes between 1.5 and 2.5 hours. Feel free to break up the time, skip sections, or re-order things however you like.

Access note

The four exercises in this workbook involve a process of describing images. You'll select the images, so feel free to pick ones that best work for you in terms of contrast levels and image complexity. Each exercise involves writing 2–4 sentences. Work with your partner to set a pace that feels good to both of you. Also know that you don't need to finish writing in order to move into discussion.

So far, we've primarily conducted this workshop with sighted people. If you or your partner is blind or low vision, the exercises may need to be reconfigured. One option is to pair sighted and blind people and write the descriptions collaboratively. Another would be for blind people to take on a role that involves giving feedback and asking questions about the descriptions. Alternatively, you can eschew the describing entirely and instead use the exercise introductions as discussion prompts. Or you may have other ideas about how to make this material work best for you.

<u>What you'll need</u>

- **A partner**
  Alt text is not a neutral topic — what we see and how we name it is political. We recommend doing this workbook with a friend or peer. Someone you feel safe talking through disagreements with and who you trust to respect your boundaries (and vice versa).

- **A way to document your descriptions** — voice memos, speech-to-text tools, typing, handwriting, or whatever you prefer!

- **4 images**
  Don't spend too much time selecting these, just grab something that piques your interest and go with it. You can print these out or gather them on a computer/phone/tablet.

  - 2 images found online. If you don't have specific images you want to work with, we suggest choosing an artwork from an online collection. Here are a few of our go-tos:
    - [Studio Museum](#)
    - [NIAD Center](#)
    - [Walker Art Center](#)
    - [Partial Index of Published Architectural Rendering](#)
    - [Letterform Archive](#)

  - 1 photo taken by each partner (so 2 images total). If you have a phone that takes photos, pull up the last photo on your camera roll, or the last photo you posted to social media. Or you can take a photo in the moment. It just has to be a photo you take.

  - 1 headshot from this Google Drive [folder](#).

Section 2: Reading

<u>What is alt text</u>

Alt text (or alternative text) is a written description of an image posted online. Alt text can also be added to images embedded in digital documents (PDFs, Word documents, Google docs, presentations, etc).

It has multiple uses, but we are focused on its role as an essential part of web accessibility. Alt text allows visual content to be accessible to people who are blind, have low vision, or have certain cognitive disabilities.

Blind people often use software called screen readers to access digital displays. The screen reader outputs the text on the screen to a synthetic voice or refreshable braille display. On a website, a screen reader might readout options in the navigation bar, followed by the title, the first paragraph, the second paragraph, etc. When a screen reader encounters an image, it's unable to "read" it. So instead, it looks for the alt text — an associated description of the image, embedded in the code. This is how alt text functions as a non-visual alternative to an image.

<u>Alt text and you</u>

Alt text is not visually displayed on a website, so if you aren't a web developer or a screen reader user, you mostly interact with alt text by writing it and adding it to your images through designated form fields during the image upload process. When you include alt text with your images, you contribute to making the internet a more accessible place.

You have the option to add alt text to your posts on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. Depending on the platform you use, it may be possible to add alt text to your personal website or blog (and if the platform doesn't include a field for entering alt text, you can usually work around that by including an image description in the caption or somewhere else adjacent to the image). It is important to note that alt text is only one part of web accessibility. Don't assume that because you've added alt text a website is fully accessible.

You may be able to influence the accessibility practices where you work or volunteer. Even if the organization's website or social media aren't directly your responsibility, it's worth asking questions about accessibility practices to make sure that people are aware of alt text.

If you are looking for instructions about how to add alt text to a specific platform, you should be able to find a step-by-step guide by searching online. For example, search "how to add alt text to twitter."

Writing alt text

[Wikipedia's Style Guide](#) offers these questions to ask yourself when writing alt text:
- Why is this image here?
- What information is it presenting?
- What purpose does it fulfill?

Though alt text is usually thought of as part of the nuts and bolts of a website, it has tremendous expressive potential. How to translate visual information into text is a complex and interesting task.

That said, when thinking about its expressive potential, it is important to stay rooted in alt text as an accessibility practice. When writing alt text, work in a way that centers the experience of someone who has limited or no access to the visual information in the image.

A note about alt text vs. image description

In this workbook, we use alt text and image description interchangeably to refer to a description of an image, but it is important to note that they have slightly different meanings.

Alt text is a type of image description, but not all image descriptions are alt text.

From Rooted in Rights' Digital Accessibility Basics: "Alt text is a type of 'hard-coded' metadata associated with an image that exists as HTML. It is most often included in an 'Alt text' field when uploading an image."

"Image description" is a more general term — it refers to any description of an image, including one that is included in the body of a post or the caption field of an image.

You may also have heard the terms "audio description" and "verbal description." "Audio description" is audio-based and usually refers to the description of visual information in the context of video, film, television, or live performance. For example, movie theaters may offer headsets for audio description. "Verbal description" usually refers to longform description in a museum context. For example, a "verbal description tour."

Alt text, image description, audio description, and verbal description are a related set of practices. While this workbook is focused on alt text, our approach could also be adapted to other forms of description.

<u>Artists for alt text</u>

We have been particularly interested in artists that are involved in the description of their own work, either by writing the description themselves, or otherwise orchestrating the description process. Some people feel artists are not good describers of their own work — that they describe in ways that align with their intent rather than the impact (intended or not) of what they've created. This can certainly be true, and it may make sense for an artist to bring in collaborators or editors to mitigate this tendency with another point of view.

We feel that artists bring an interesting perspective to the description process and can help make the description feel like an integral part of the creative work rather than simply an add-on. As Georgina Kleege advocates in her book, More than Meets the Eye: What Blindness Brings to Art, an artist's process can be a valuable source of information for the description.

We also feel cautious about suggesting that artists describe their own work because most are already so under-resourced. It is often not possible for an artist to take on the role of access worker without support structures in place (compensation, support for their own access needs, training, etc). Importantly, we do believe that artists who work visually should acknowledge that this creates barriers for certain audiences to engage with their work. If it is important to the artist that people who are blind and have low vision are part of their audience (and it should be), then they might need to be part of creating that access.

Depending on an artist's identity and the circumstances of when and how they present their work, they have different levels of agency, power, and resources. When working with organizations and institutions, artists can

sometimes leverage their power to ask for access. Institutions are sometimes more responsive to artists' requests than they are to those of their own access workers.

One example that we've been thinking about is when an artist sends an image to an organization or institution to be used in marketing or promotional materials. These images usually travel with a standard set of text-based information (photographer credit, title, year, materials, dimensions, etc). By also sending alt text with this information, an artist may prompt discussion within the organization about their digital accessibility practices and whether or not they have a place or infrastructure for that alt text.

Why think of alt text as poetry?

Framing alt text as a type of poetry allows us to approach it with some of the ideas and strategies that have been developed by poets.

That said, we're not interested in producing alt text poetry that exists outside of making the internet more accessible. We recognize that others have used alt text and code as inspiration and media for poetry, but for us, increasing website accessibility remains the first and most important condition of alt text's poetic potential.

Here are three ideas from the world of poetry that we have found to be particularly helpful when writing alt text:

1. Attention to Language
Simply by writing alt text with thought and care, we shift the process. What words are we using? What are their connotations? What is the tone of our

writing (the way in which we're doing the writing)? What is the voice (who the reader hears)? How do these align with, or contrast, the tone and perspective of the image?

2. Word Economy

People who are new to description have a tendency to over-describe images. While there are times for long and lavish descriptions, alt text usually aims for brevity. For most images, one to two sentences will do. Poetry has a lot to teach us about paring down language to create something that is expressive, yet concise.

3. Experimental Spirit

We have so much to learn from poetry about being more playful and exploratory in how we write alt text. We are not interested in experimentation for experimentation's sake — we want a kind of experimentation that moves towards better and more nuanced accessibility for alt text users. There are lots of complex and interesting questions that come up when translating visual information into text. We need to try out different ways of doing this, learning from each other's strategies and techniques.

Alt text as translation

Writing alt text is also related to the field of translation. It can be thought of as a translation of visual information into text. These are a few things we think alt text can learn from the field of translation:

1. Information is both lost and gained.

Alt text won't describe all of the information in the image, but the act of describing also adds information.

2. There is no single correct answer.
If you ask ten people to describe an image, you will get ten different descriptions. The same person might describe an image differently based on what's on their mind or what context they are writing for. Better understanding the variety of ways to describe an image is part of the ongoing work of honing our craft as describers.

3. It always involves creative decisions.
Every time you describe an image you are making creative decisions — what you describe, the order in which you describe it, the language you use to describe.

Examples

Here are a few examples from Instagram of poetic alt text.

Dealth Valley National Park
@dealthvalleynps
Twisted wood branches in the foreground with an arc of stars in the sky above a dark distant mountain.

Candystore
@agaywhitemale
Candystore, a white non-binary body, stands on a urinal wearing black boots, black jeans, a black leather jacket, a black faux leather hat from a gas station stuck with a black raven's feather, a shadow cast over half shimher face, sibylline.

Madison Zalopany

@mzalopany

A screenshot of me being very impressed by my nephew Harry's new hat. The hat is a plastic green roof taken from a doll's house.

Justin Allen

@justnalln

A sea of purple aster flowers, with round yellow centers and thick manes of straight thin lavender petals, like purple daisies.

People who are new to alt text often feel like they are learning a totally new skill, but in fact, most of us engage with description all the time — talking on the phone, in literature, hearing about a friend's travels, in art history and art criticism.

As one example, this is from Donald Judd's 1959 review of Yayoi Kusama's first solo exhibition in New York and it is quite descriptive:

"[There are] five white, very large paintings in this show. The space is shallow, close to the surface and achieved by innumerable small arcs superimposed on a black ground overlain with a wash of white. The effect is both complex and simple... The total quality suggests an analogy to a large, fragile, but vigorously carved grill or to a massive, solid lace."

Here is another example from *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy:

"...a silver-framed black-and-white wedding picture of Chacko and Margaret Kochamma. It was snowing a little. The first flakes of fresh snow lay on the street and sidewalk. Chacko was dressed like Nehru. He wore a white churidar and a black shervani. His shoulders were dusted with snow. There was a rose in his buttonhole, and the tip of his handkerchief, folded into a triangle, peeped out of his breast pocket. On his feet he wore polished

black oxfords. He looked as though he was laughing at himself and the way he was dressed. Like someone at a fancy-dress party.

Margaret Kochamma wore a long, foaming gown and a cheap tiara on her cropped, curly hair. Her veil was lifted off her face. She was as tall as he was. They looked happy. Thin and young, scowling, with the sun in their eyes. Her thick, dark eyebrows were knitted together and somehow made a lovely contrast to the frothy, bridal white. A scowling cloud with eyebrows."

Section 3: Exercises

Okay! Time to practice!

Writing Exercise 1: Warm-Up

This exercise is adapted from "Audio Description as a Pedagogical Tool" by Georgina Kleege & Scott Wallin published in Disability Studies Quarterly.

This is designed to be a warm-up so don't worry about getting things right — just write down whatever pops into your head.

- Pull up one of the images you found online. (If you haven't selected images yet, refer back to *What you'll need*.)

- You and your partner should work with the same image, but as you follow the next steps, write your own responses rather than doing so collaboratively. We suggest this because it is helpful to surface the ways we all see and interpret images differently, and how that impacts our approach to image description. Later, you'll share your writing with your partner, compare and contrast what you wrote, and discuss.

- List things (objects, people, stuff, nouns) that are present in the image or related to the image.

  Aim to write 5 words, but if you are on a roll, write as many as come to mind.

- List descriptive words or adjectives that describe the image, a part of the image, or your response to it. How does it make you feel? What's the mood of the image? What associations do you have?

  Again, aim to write 5 words, but if you are on a roll, write as many as come to mind.

- Share your writing and discuss with your partner:
    - Are there words you both wrote down?
    - Are there words on your partner's lists that surprised you? Or made you notice something about the image?
    - Any other general thoughts or things you noticed about the process?

Writing Exercise 2: Subjectivity and Audience

Many people have advocated for describers to be as objective as possible, allowing the person engaging with the description to make their own subjective interpretation.

However, there has been a lot of push back on the idea that objectivity should be a central goal of description. Objectivity is an incredibly elusive concept — where is the line between fact and interpretation? As Georgina Kleege writes, do we say "smile" or do we say "lips turned up at the corners"?

The pretense of objectivity plays into existing power structures. "Objectivity" often validates the perspective of white, cis, middle- and upper-class men while marking other perspectives as "subjective."

Furthermore, it is unclear if an "objective" approach produces quality descriptions. Trying to be an objective writer often leads to language that is precise and technical. The resulting writing can be difficult to understand, or starkly contrast the tone of the image.

- For this exercise, you'll need a photo that you've taken. If you have a smartphone, pull up a photo there — it can be the last photo on your camera roll or the last photo you posted to social media.

- Describe this image as though you are a complete stranger who has stumbled across it for the first time. Pretend that you've never seen it before and have no context for the image.

- Describe the image again, this time from your own perspective, as though you were describing it to your best friend.

- Share your writing and discuss with your partner:
    - Are the descriptions you wrote similar or different? In what ways?
    - Is there anything you noticed when writing in those two different modes?
    - Do you like one description better than the other? Why?
    - Is there a middle ground between these approaches?

Describing an image is an inherently subjective process — as you write, you are drawing on your own ways of seeing and making sense. However, a description should aim to provide a clear understanding of the image to an intended audience. People who use alt text are not a monolith. They want different things from an image description and they interpret language in different ways. When describing, think through who you are speaking to. It's probably similar to how you would speak to your audience when writing for a website or social media account as a whole. What tone makes the most sense for this audience? What do they already know or have context for? What jargon, slang, shorthand, and vocabulary is relevant?

An issue with how alt text currently exists is that its author is often unattributed. Because we know that the description's author impacts the description, transparency around authorship and process is something to explore. Depending on the scale of your operation, there are different ways to approach this. One option is to include information somewhere on your website about who writes the alt text and what guidelines and processes they use to write it.

Clear authorship also opens up options around using the first-person voice when writing alt text and other phrases that signal the subjective nature of the process:
- "X reminds me of…"
- "X stands out to me"
- "If I guessed, I would say it's…"
- "I think it looks like X, but after reading about the work, I learned it's Y."

<u>Writing Exercise 3: Structure, Length, Priorities</u>

This exercise is about how we might structure and prioritize information in an image description. It is important to consider that someone using a screen reader may only listen to or read the beginning of the description before skipping to the next thing.

The structure of the alt text may also be important for impact. If you remember this example: "A screenshot of me being very impressed by my nephew Harry's new hat. The hat is a plastic green roof taken from a doll's house." Here Madison is using the structure of the information for comedic effect — she starts by saying that she is impressed with the hat and then reveals that it is the roof of a doll's house. It's good to think of the structure of information as another aspect of creative control.

- Pull up one of the images you found online. (If you haven't selected images yet, refer back to *What you'll need*.)

  A reminder: you and your partner should be working with the same image, but as you follow the next steps, write on your own rather than responding collaboratively.

- Write a single sentence to describe the image. The sentence should capture whatever you think is most important about the image.

- Now write a second sentence about the second most important thing in, or about, the image.

- Write a third sentence about the third most important thing.

- Share your writing and discuss with your partner:
    - Did you and your partner structure your description in similar or different ways?
    - Are there things your partner prioritized that you don't think are as important? Or vice versa?
    - Any other things you noticed or thought about when you were writing?

Writing Exercise 4: Identity and Representation

This exercise is a chance to think more about describing people.

Lots of information about identity and positionality is communicated visually, but that information is often filtered through guesswork, interpretation, and bias. As describers, how do we acknowledge visual cues about positionality without making assumptions about how a person identifies? How do we decide what information about a person is important to understanding the image? How do we respond to the fact that many people have made intentional and specific choices about language related to their identity, but we may not know them or the choices that they've made?

Shannon, one of the authors of this workbook, found this description by @dealthvalleynps:
"a man gives the peace sign on an expansive salt flat with desert mountains in the background"

In the image, the person is seated in a wheelchair. As a disabled person, Shannon felt like not mentioning the person's wheelchair in the description was jarring. It felt like a type of erasure. But lots of other identity markers also go unmentioned including the subject's approximate age and that they present as white. Additionally, we don't know if the author of the alt text knows this person's gender identity, or if they made an assumption. Upon reflection, Shannon also thought about their own bias around who they imagine in a national park, which is rarely a wheelchair user. Noting the wheelchair in the description may feel important to them because of their own internalized ableism and failure to imagine disabled people in those spaces.

This is all to say that this is a nuanced topic and one we think is important for more people to be thinking and talking about, instead of avoiding or glossing over it.

With all this in mind:

- Describe yourself as you are today in 3–5 sentences. What would be important for your partner to know if they couldn't access visual information about you? If it is helpful to work from an image, take a quick selfie, and describe that.

- Select a random headshot from this Google Drive folder.

  Again, you and your partner should be working with the same image, but as you follow the next steps, write on your own rather than responding collaboratively.

- Describe the person in the headshot in 3–5 sentences.

- Find the corresponding description for your headshot in this [Google Doc](#).

  This description was written by the person in your photo. (All these headshots are from a previous version [disabledlist.org](#), when it was a directory for creative disabled people. Everyone featured on the site described their own headshot).

- Discuss with your partner:
  - Chat about the process of writing these descriptions.
  - Were there things you felt comfortable describing about yourself that you didn't feel comfortable describing about someone else? Or vice versa?
  - What are some of the ways your identity and your politics impacted your approach to these descriptions?
  - In disability spaces, people are often asked to self-describe images of themselves. What are some pros and cons to this approach?

For reference, these are some strategies that we've heard about when describing people. All have limitations and drawbacks.

- Always have people self-describe
- Have people self-describe with an editorial process (If needed, the editor can raise questions like, "X seems like an important part of the image to me. Why did you choose not to describe that?")
- Do research about how someone self-identifies.
- Avoid using identity categories and instead focus on specific attributes ("This person has shoulder-length hair and is wearing orange lipstick.")
- Use language that is clear about when an assumption is being made ("To me, this person presents as white.")

In disability communities that we are part of, we've witnessed a move towards self-description. Some of the pros to this option are that people have agency over the language used in relation to themselves. They control what information is shared. But self-description is not a silver bullet. There are still drawbacks to this approach. One is that people unfamiliar with image description as an access tool may have difficulties with self-description simply because it's a new skill. Another is that sometimes, people don't describe parts of their identity that, due to power structures, they are able to consider (consciously or unconsciously) as the "default." For example, white people not describing their whiteness. An editorial process can help mitigate these issues. But depending on the power dynamics of the collaboration, editing can put people with marginalized identities in a position where they feel like they need to explain or justify their description, or pressure disclosure.

Like other areas of description, describing people is a practice that requires ongoing thought, re-evaluation, and accountability.

This is the end of the exercises!! Thank you for trying this out!!

We hope you feel a little more knowledgeable about alt text, have lots of new questions, and will continue practicing and learning about description.

If you have time, take a minute to jot down some of the key things that you've learned, ideas you have, and questions you want to explore.

Section 4: Going Forward

Keep in touch

We welcome feedback on this workbook. Feel free to get in touch!
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Bojana Coklyat: bojanacoklyat@gmail.com

Alt Text Study Club

Alt Text Study Club is an evolving container for things that we think might encourage the ongoing study and practice of alt text writing.

[#AltTextStudyClub](#)
We created this Instagram hashtag to link people who have done a workshop with us or used this workbook. The idea is to hashtag Instagram posts with image descriptions or alt text in order to learn from each other.

[On our website](#)
This is a blog of notable image descriptions and our thoughts about them. In the future, it may also include interviews and other writing about description.

<u>A note about Alt Text as Poetry with groups</u>

We are excited about this information being shared. If you know of a group (students, colleagues, friends, etc) that would be interested in this material, this workbook can be adapted into a workshop.

We've adapted this workbook into a workshop with groups ranging from 6–30 people. An advantage of doing this with a group is that you have more perspectives in the mix for the discussions.

Some notes about adapting this workbook to a group workshop:
- You can use the workbook as a loose script for a workshop. Depending on the group, you may want to adjust, skip, or edit some of the text. We fully support modifying this material!
- We usually use a set of slides when we do the workshop. In the spirit of non-visual communication, we avoid using images in the presentation. Instead, the slides feature some of the denser segments of text, so that people who want to read along can do so. Alternatively you could provide printed or digital copies of the workbook.
- We made a set of worksheets for workshops. They are available as [a PDF](#) and as [a Word Doc](#).
- When planning for an in-person group, we recommend printing out a selection of images ahead of time. Also have these on hand digitally in case there are participants who prefer that format.
For exercises 1 and 3, you can use any images. We often select images that are relevant to the group (for example, if we are doing the workshop with dancers, we pick photos of dance).
- If you choose to do this with a group, it is important to communicate with the group about the accessibility of the workshop — both the host venue and the workshop structure and content. If you are new to

thinking about accessibility in relation to event planning, we recommend reading these [suggestions from Sins Invalid](#).

- Alt text is not a neutral topic, so the workshop will be impacted by power disparities in the room. Spend time thinking through who could be harmed in this setting and plan ways to mitigate. For example, if the group is not familiar with the distinction between gender identity and gender presentation, you will need to build in more information about that before describing people. And, of course, stay flexible and responsive to feedback.

- *More than Meets the Eye: What Blindness Brings to Art*
  By Georgina Kleege
  This book was foundational to this project and is a wealth of knowledge about the relationship between blindness and visual information.

- [Web Accessibility in Mind](#)
  Web AIM is a non-profit focused on expanding web accessibility. Their guide to alt text is a great overview.

- [Art Beyond Sight's Verbal Description Training](#)
  Art Beyond Sight's training is geared toward longform description and focused on art. It includes lots of techniques relevant to describing images online.

- Museum Guidelines
  [MCA Chicago](#)
  [Cooper Hewitt](#)
  MCA Chicago and Cooper Hewitt have both shared their description guidelines. They are an interesting reference point, especially if you are working to develop guidelines for a large organization.

- [Alex Chen's *How to write an image description*](#)
  A short guide with lots of helpful info. Alex also created [Access Guide](#), a great introduction to digital accessibility more broadly.

- [Rooted in Rights Accessibility Guide](#)
  Rooted in Rights is a Seattle-based organization that has done extensive work around creating and promoting accessible media practices.

- [Accessibility in the Arts: A Promise and a Practice](#)
  By Carolyn Lazard, Commissioned by Recess
  "Accessibility in the Arts: A Promise and a Practice is an accessibility guide geared toward small-scale arts nonprofits and the potentially expansive publics these organizations serve. It details specific ways in which disabled people are excluded from cultural spaces and offers possible solutions to those barriers. Moving away from historical and juridical definitions of accessibility, this guide considers the unique capacity of small scale arts organizations to meet the needs of disabled communities. It engages principles of disability justice to think through what can urgently be done to create more equitable and accessible arts spaces."

- [Access is Love](#)
  By Mia Mingus, Alice Wong, and Sandy Ho
  Access is Love includes a resource list with a bunch of great readings and guides about accessibility. They also have a list of 10 ways to start creating and expanding access.

- Browser extensions/add ons
  [For Firefox](#)
  [For Chrome](#)
  Most devices have a built-in screen reader that you can turn on to check out alt text as you move around the web. It takes some time to learn how to use a screen reader, so another option is these browser extensions that visually surface the alt text. It's an easy way to read other people's descriptions and get a sense of how few images are described at all.

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