Alt Text Quick Reference

The one question

What would someone miss if they couldn't see this image?

1 Decorative or meaningful?

- **Decorative:** there for visual interest, teaches nothing. Mark it as decorative (or leave alt text empty).
- **Meaningful:** conveys information the learner needs. Write alt text.

2 What does the alt text need to describe?

- **Where something is:** "Submit button in the lower right corner"
- **What something looks like:** "Yellow warning triangle with an exclamation point"
- **How to do something:** "Cursor dragging the file into the Uploads folder"
- **A relationship, pattern, or structure:** "Invoice organized into three sections..."
- **A comparison:** "Same slide twice: left has a heading, right doesn't"
- **What it does, if it's a button or link:** "Next," not "Right arrow"

3 Keep it focused

- Aim for under 150 characters.
- If the body text already explains it, keep the alt text brief.
- Very complex image, or need more than 150 characters? Keep the alt text brief and add a caption.

Avoid

- Starting with "image of" or "photo of"
- Details that don't matter for learning, like appearance (unless it's the point)
- Repeating the caption word for word
- Abbreviations, acronyms, and emojis
- Images of text. If you can't avoid one, put the text in the alt text.

Check your work

- Hide the image and read the alt text. Does it make sense on its own?
- Read it out loud. Does it give you the information you need?
- Watch for sneaky structure. Screenshots carry menus, tabs, sections, and layouts.