



# Alt Text Best Practices

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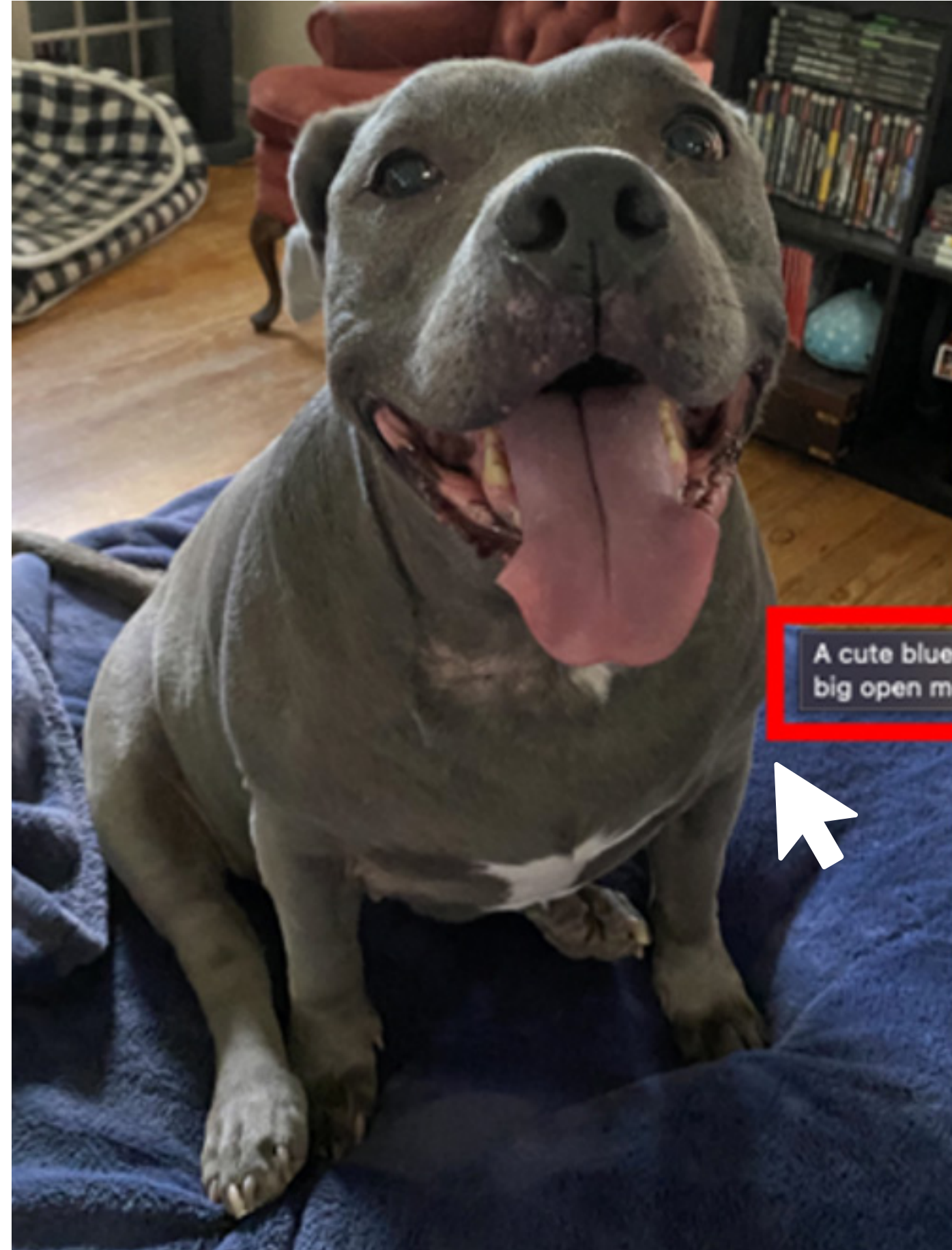


WRIGHT STATE ONLINE

Presented by: **Jessi Witt**



## ALT TEXT BEST PRACTICES



A cute blue-grey Staffordshire Terrier dog with a big open mouth and a happy expression.

**Alternative text**, or “**alt text**,” is a description of an image embedded directly into the website or document containing said image.

This description is **read aloud using screen reader applications** or **can be viewed by hovering your cursor over the image**.

# A screen reader can't interpret an image.

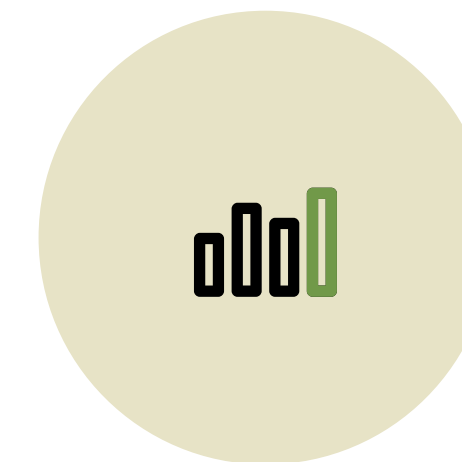
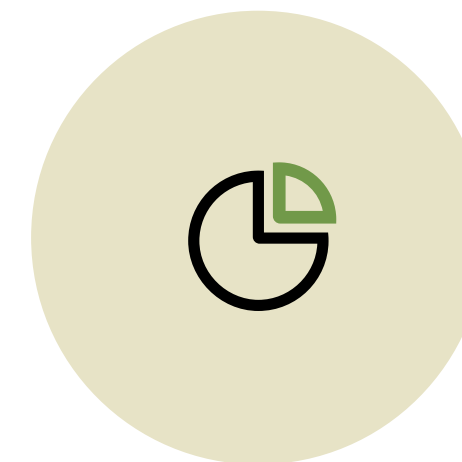
- Also used by braille displays.
- Can tell there is an image but can't tell you what is depicted.
- You must add your own description that a screen reader will speak aloud when it encounters images.
- Alt text can also add context to shared images for students not using assistive devices.



# Faculty must include alt text for all still images in their lecture content.

This includes:

- *Photos*
- *Illustrations*
- *Charts*
- *Graphs*



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**Physical, in-classroom handouts must also have alt text**, written in plain text under the image.

You can write alt text for animated .gif images in your course, but to keep in line with other WCAG requirements, it's best to avoid using .gifs in your materials.





# Guidelines

**The goal of alt text is to give students who cannot see the images the same experience as students who can.**

- Consider why you included the image and what you want to convey, then describe the image as succinctly as possible.
  - Keep alt text short and think of how it will help someone using assistive devices accessing your material.
  - Don't rely on AI.
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# AI Generated Alt Text



**Microsoft AI:** “A person standing next to a mannequin.”

## Issues:

- Nothing to help visualize the person in question
- Identifies the item as a mannequin rather than a ventriloquist puppet
- No mention of the many other ventriloquist puppets surrounding the woman
- Fails to mention the puppet's head is removed
- No details on the puppet's dapper clothing



# AI Generated Alt Text



**Microsoft AI:** “A person sitting on a bench next to a statue of a person.”

## Issues:

- No description of person
- No description of statue
- Sitting on the statue’s foot, not a bench
- No reference to scale
- No mention of background/surroundings
- Not evocative of anything visually



# Alt Text Tips

- **Do not begin alt text with “an image/picture of...”.**
  - Screen readers will identify when an image is on the screen before reading the alt text, making this redundant.
- If relevant, you can indicate if the image is a logo, illustration, textile art, cartoon, etc.
- Use present tense and active verbs.
- You may include the perspective or point of view of the image.
- End the alt text sentence with a period.
- Be mindful of character limits.




# Simple Images


Poor alt text: “*A dog.*”

- Too brief
- Not descriptive
- Not helpful for visualizing

Better alt text would be **more descriptive**, to create a better visualization for the learner.

## EXAMPLES:

A close-up view of a brown, black, and white Boxer dog with her lip stuck in her teeth, making a goofy smile. 

A white and grey Pitbull dog outside on a deck. Her ears are back in an expression of guilt and her white paws and snout are covered in dirt. 



## SIMPLE IMAGE ALT TEXT EXAMPLE



A close-up view of a brown, black, and white Boxer dog with her lip stuck in her teeth, making a goofy smile.





## SIMPLE IMAGE ALT TEXT EXAMPLE

A white and grey Pitbull dog outside on a deck. Her ears are back in an expression of guilt and her white paws and snout are covered in dirt.





## SIMPLE IMAGE ALT TEXT EXAMPLE



A close-up view of a brown, black, and white Boxer dog with her lip stuck in her teeth, making a goofy smile.



A white and grey Pitbull dog outside on a deck. Her ears are back in an expression of guilt and her white paws and snout are covered in dirt.



# Complex Images

If you need more than 120 characters to provide an adequate description of the image, then also include a longer description in the document's visible text.

Determine the essential details needed to convey the more complicated image.

Charts and graphs often need longer descriptions.







## COMPLEX IMAGE ALT-TEXT EXAMPLE

*Apparition of Face and Fruit Dish on a Beach*  
by Salvador Dali

A surrealist oil painting with dreamlike, chaotic imagery and optical illusions. A fruit bowl that also looks like a face sitting on a table is the most prominent object.

A surreal oil painting, with a cup of pears sitting in the foreground on a table. A person's face and a woman's back are visible in the cup's stem, with the face's eyes made of objects from the midground. The midground is chaotic with many humanoid figures. In the background, sandy dunes create an optical illusion that also looks like a dog. The color palette is mostly warm with a lot of brown and splashes of blue evocative of bodies of water.





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# Describing People

- Work with info you know rather than making assumptions about identity.
  - If using stock photography, the photo credit may give useful details.
  - Capitalize names of racial or ethnic groups (e.g., Black, White, Sioux, Vietnamese).
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# Inclusive Language

Language and its meaning changes constantly, in many different contexts. Words have power and can negatively impact marginalized communities.

The American Psychological Association (APA) has a [guide to inclusive language](#) that may serve as a guide if needed.

Focus on **person**-first or **identity**-first language.

- “Wheelchair user” rather than “wheelchair-bound”
- “Person who was/is enslaved” or “enslaved person” rather than “slave”

# Decorative Images

For some images, alternative text would not add meaning and might be redundant. These “decorative” images could include screen shots in a tutorial where the alt text wouldn’t add anything that’s not already in the main text, or accent images to decorate your document.

Ask yourself if it would be a waste of time for someone with a screen reader to listen to a description of an image. If so, you can skip the alternative text and mark the image as decorative.

It may be tempting to mark most images as decorative, but it’s necessary to take inventory and consider why each image was included.



# Charts and Graphs

Conveying the visual information of charts and graphs can be challenging depending on their complexity. A link or attribution for the source should be included with any charts/graphs added to your material.

## **Important information to include:**

- Chart/graph type
- Type of data
- Reason for including the chart/graph

The following examples provided by:

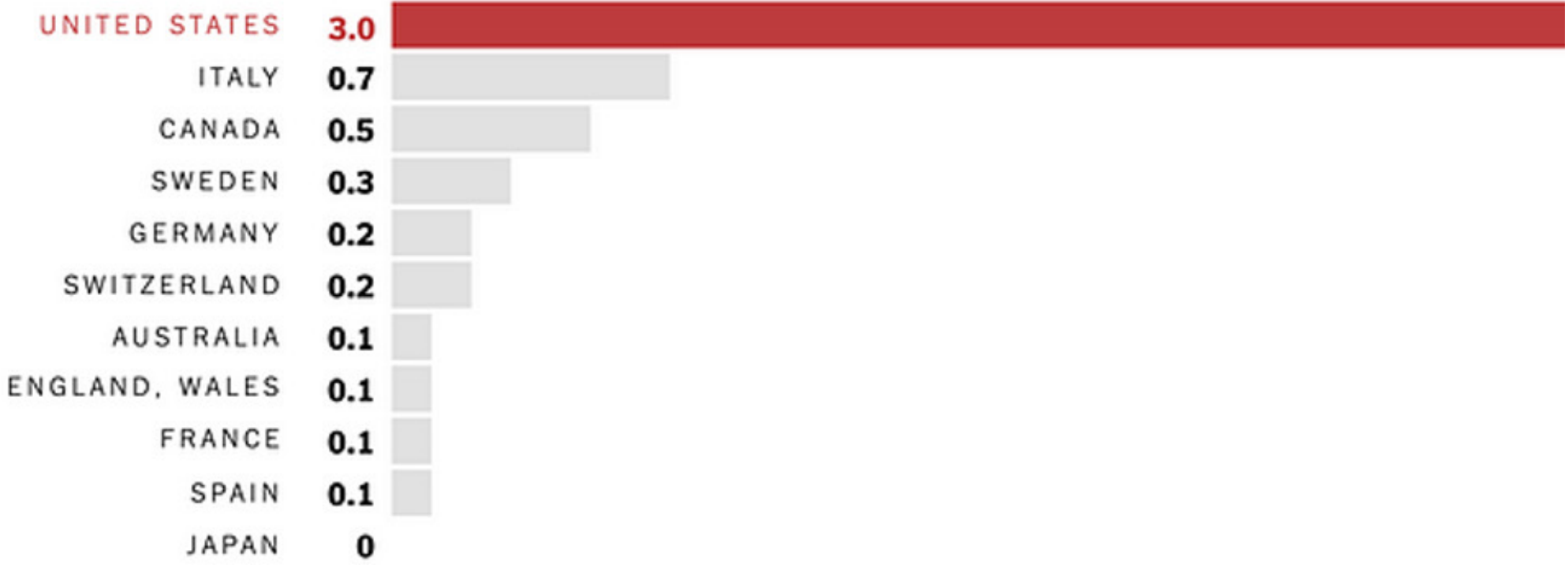
<https://medium.com/nightingale/writing-alt-text-for-data-visualization-2a218ef43f81>



# SIMPLE CHART ALT TEXT EXAMPLE

## Gun murders per 100,000 people

America's private arsenal is six times as lethal as Canada's, and 30 times worse than Australia's.



The New York Times | Sources: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (gun murders); Small Arms Survey (guns per 100 people) | Murder data for U.S., Canada, Sweden, Switzerland, Australia and Spain from 2015 and latest available for other countries; 2007 data for guns per 100 people.

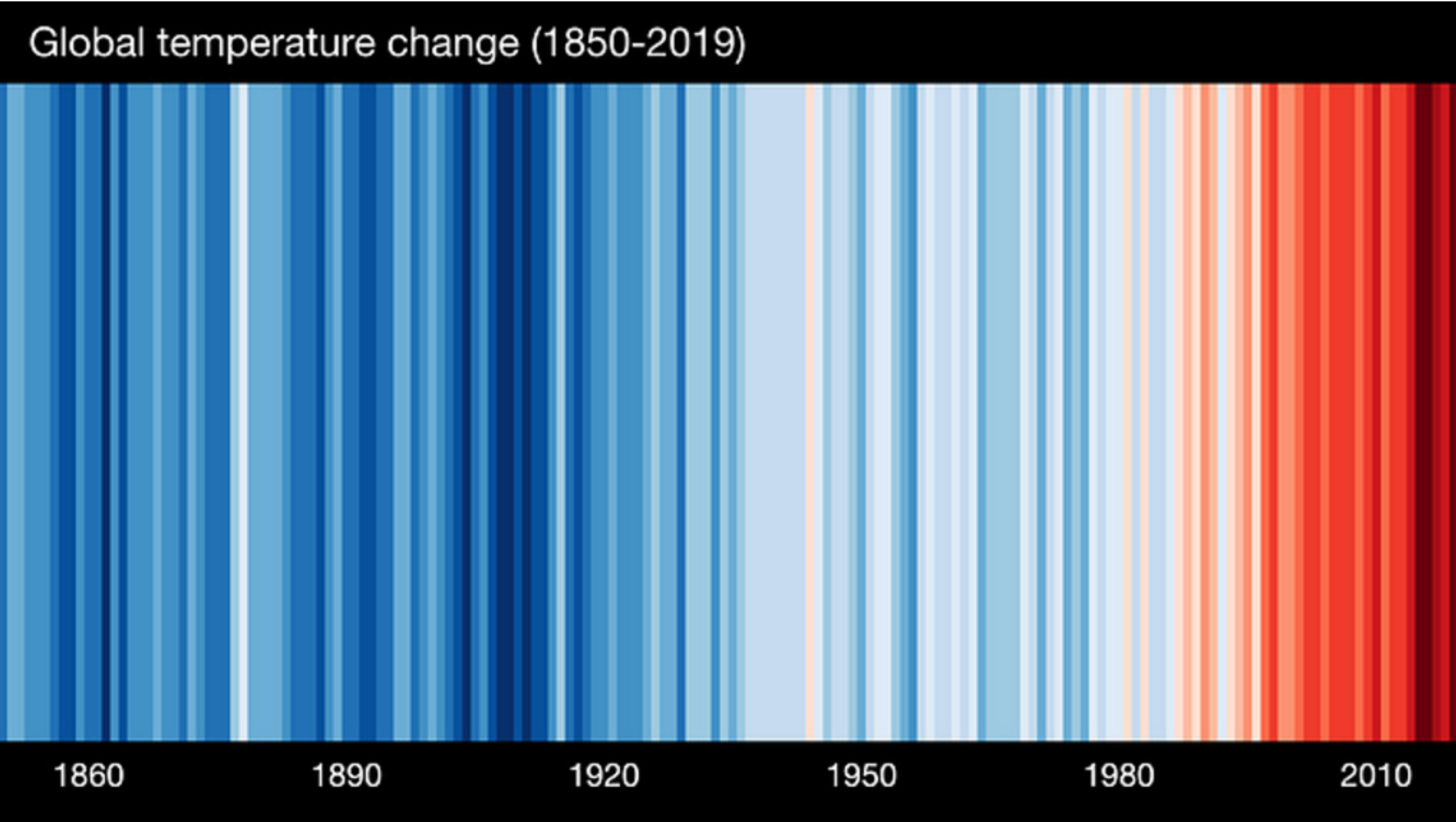
## Example alt text for this chart might read:

“A bar chart of gun murders per 100,000 people where America’s murder rate is 6 times worse than Canada, and 30 times Australia.”





# COMPLEX CHART ALT TEXT EXAMPLE

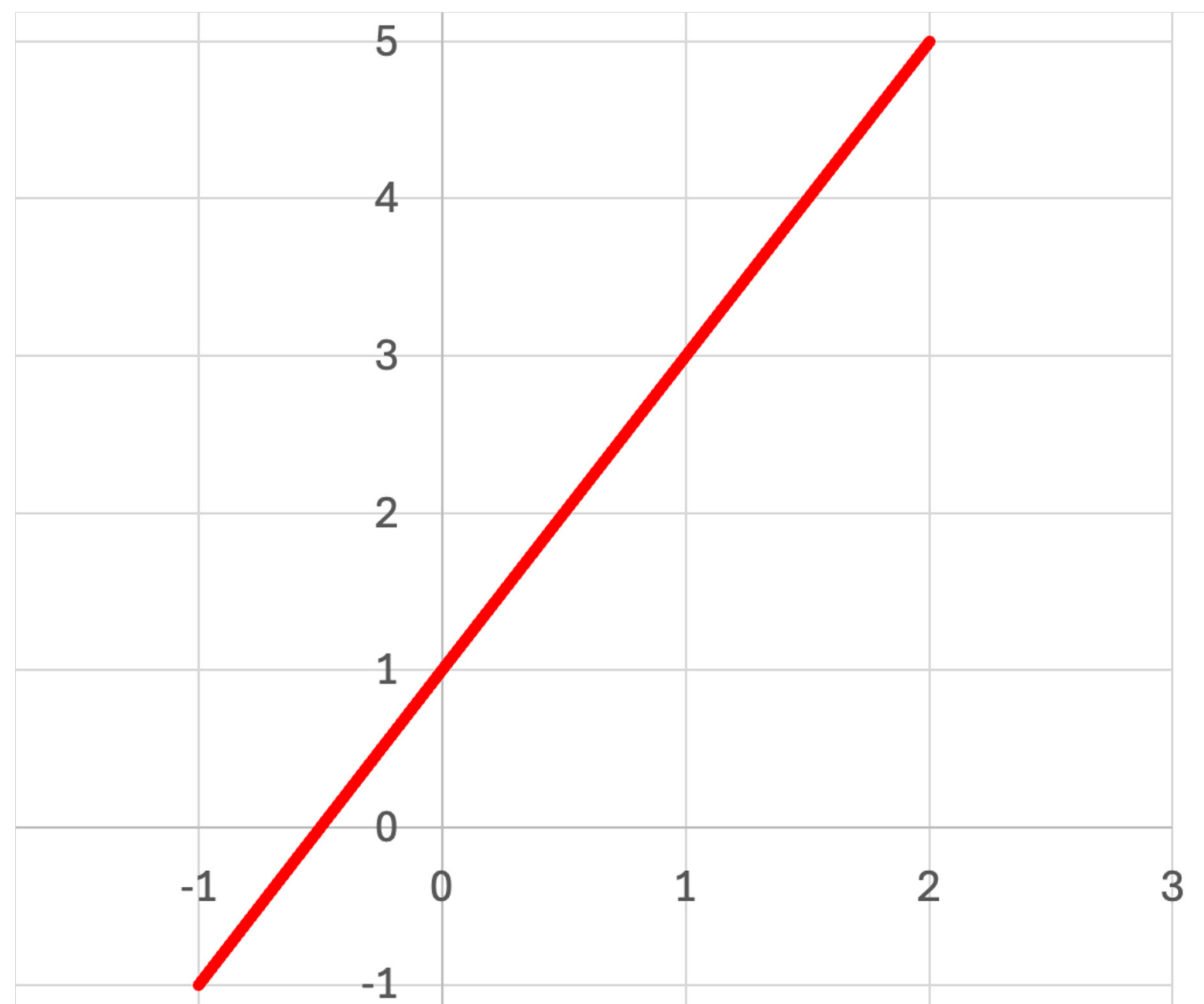


**This chart is harder to describe.  
Example alt text might be:**

“Colored stripes of chronologically ordered temperature where they increase in red to show the warming global temperature.”







# Avoiding Alt Text “Spoilers”

**Option 1:** Graph of the linear equation  $y = 2x + 1$ .

**Option 2:** A linear graph containing the points (-1, -1), (0, 1), (1, 3), and (2, 5).

**Option 3:** A linear graph crossing the y-axis at 1 with another point on the line 2 units up and one unit to the right.



## Credits:

Inclusive device by Михаил Решетников. Image Source: AdobeStock\_524987274.jpeg

Braille display product photo. Image Source: HumanWare Store website [https://store.humanware.com/media/catalog/product/cache/af31f082d815f0cbf68dfc31e7356880/b/r/brailiant\\_bi\\_20x\\_-dsc00749-lr.jpg](https://store.humanware.com/media/catalog/product/cache/af31f082d815f0cbf68dfc31e7356880/b/r/brailiant_bi_20x_-dsc00749-lr.jpg)

Salvador Dalí, Spanish, 1904–1989, “Apparition of Face and Fruit Dish on a Beach, “1938, oil on canvas; 45 x 56 5/8 inches/Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund, 1939.269

Rosa Parks sitting on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, 1956. Underwood Archives/UIG/REX/Shutterstock.com

American Psychological Association. Inclusive Language Guide. APA Website. <https://medium.com/nightingale/writing-alt-text-for-data-visualization-2a218ef43f81%E2%80%8Bhttps://www.apa.org/about/apa/equity-diversity-inclusion/language-guidelines>

Cesal, Amy. Writing alt-text for data visualization. Medium. <https://medium.com/nightingale/writing-alt-text-for-data-visualization-2a218ef43f81https://www.apa.org/about/apa/equity-diversity-inclusion/language-guidelines>

