

Remediating Alternative Text for PowerPoint Art

Bob Brown
College of Computing and Software Engineering
Kennesaw State University
Bob.Brown@kennesaw.edu

It is often convenient to use PowerPoint shapes, drawings, and other “art” to produce illustrations for teaching or other purposes. When such an illustration consists of two or more elements, it is possible to group them and assign alternative text to the group. However, accessibility devices may fail to recognize such a group and accessibility checkers may call out individual elements as lacking alt-text. Conversion to PDF often works as expected but sometimes produces either no alt-text at all or a series of “nested element” errors. The solution is to convert the PowerPoint art to a high-quality image and assign alt-text to the image.

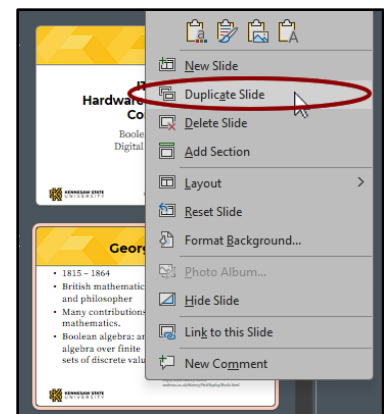
That solution is a five-step process that can often be completed in a very few minutes for each slide. The steps are:

1. Copy the slide to be remediated
2. For each illustration, select all the illustration’s components and use PowerPoint’s “Save as picture” to generate a high-quality image
3. Delete the PowerPoint art from the slide copy, then insert and position the generated image
4. Copy the alt-text from the original slide or write alt-text
5. Move or delete the original slide, leaving the copy with image in place.

For many of you, that’s enough information. Just in case, here are the details. What follows assumes you are editing the slide set in the Normal view.

Copy the slide to be remediated

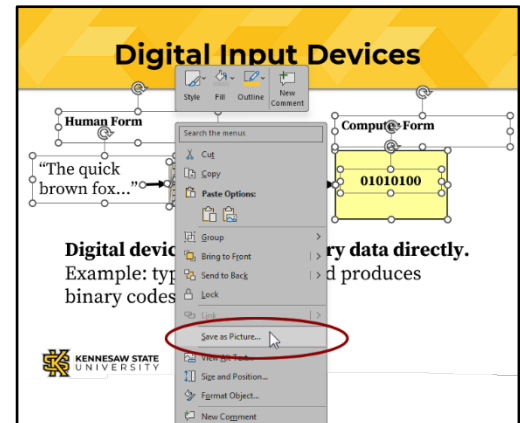
In the slides pane at the left, right-click the slide to be remediated and select “Duplicate Slide.” There are three reasons for doing this. If something goes wrong, you can easily start over. If you’ve already written alt-text for the PowerPoint art, it will be deleted when you delete the art after making an image. Finally, you may want to save that original PowerPoint art in case you decide to edit it. You will work only on the copy and remove the original slide from the flow of the slide set in the last step.



For each illustration, select all the illustration's components and use PowerPoint's "Save as picture"

Establish a place to put your pictures and a naming convention before you begin or you may end up with a tangled mess. I make an "images" directory below the directory holding the slides to be remediated. I name each image the same as the name of the slide set, a hyphen, and the slide number where the image will be. If one slide has two or more images, I suffix A, B, C, etc.

If you have grouped the elements of an illustration, you can select the group by right-clicking. An element is selected when it's outlined by a solid, not broken, line. If you get a broken line, right-click on the line to complete the selection process. Right-click on the selection line and select "Save as Picture."



If the elements are not grouped, select one, press and hold the control key, and select the others. Finally, right-click on the selection line and select "Save as Picture." By default, the generated image will be a PNG file with transparent background.

Beware! If you have assigned alt text to a group of elements and you ungroup them, PowerPoint removes the alt-text. Since you're working on a copy, the alt-text should be preserved in the original slide.

Delete the PowerPoint art from the slide copy, then insert and position the generated image

Working on the copy, delete the PowerPoint art, then choose Insert > Pictures > This Device. browse to the location of the generated image and double-click to insert.

You may need to crop or resize the generated image. You can do this with PowerPoint or with an image-editing program.

To crop an image in PowerPoint, right-click the image and select "Crop" from above the context menu. To resize an image maintaining the aspect ratio, select one of the corners and move the mouse inward or outward.

Finally, if necessary, move the mouse cursor to the image, press and hold the left mouse button, and drag the image to the proper position.

Copy the alt-text from the original slide or write alt-text

If you had already written alt-text for the original slide, it was deleted when you deleted the PowerPoint art from the copy. On the original slide, select the grouped items, copy the alt-text, and paste it into the remediated slide.

If you had not already written alt-text, now's the time. There's a plethora of online articles on how to write alt-text if you need advice. I learned to write alt-text by playing the original Colossal Cave Adventure text game. The game starts like this:

You are standing at the end of a road before a small brick building. Around you is a forest. A small stream flows out of the building and down a gully.

That's everything you need to know and very little that you don't. You get the idea.

Move or delete the original slide, leaving the copy with image in place.

There are several ways to deal with the now-unneeded original slide. There are advantages and disadvantages to each.

1. **Delete it.** That's the quickest, but you won't be able to easily edit the art and re-create the picture. In the slides pane at the left, right-click and select "Delete Slide."
2. **Leave it there but hide it.** In the slides pane at the left, right-click and select "Hide Slide." If your slides are numbered, the numbers will skip, and it may not be clear to others who may use the slide deck in the future what's going on. You could add a note in the speaker notes pane explaining why the slide is there.
3. **Move it to the end of the set and hide it.** My own slide sets always end with a slide inviting questions, so I don't depend on "running off the end" to know when to stop. I click the original slide in the slides pane and drag it to the end of the presentation, then hide it. These hidden slides are preceded by a hidden slide explaining that they're the source of the images in the visible slides. However, a slide show won't end automatically.
4. **Save a copy of the slide set before deleting.** You could save the whole set as a copy, then delete the duplicates from the original set. This has the disadvantage of separating the sources from the images.