

Image descriptions

Carly Findlay

Melbourne Fringe

A note on language

At Melbourne Fringe, we say 'disabled people'. Many people in the disability community prefer identity-first language. This positions disability as part of a person's identity and belonging to a cultural group. Another preferred term is 'people with disability' – this term puts the person before the disability, and it acknowledges that disability is caused by societal barriers.

We use 'Deaf people' to refer to people who are culturally Deaf – that is, people who were born deaf, or became deaf early in life, and who use Auslan sign language to communicate.

More on language

We discourage the use of euphemisms like 'special needs', 'differently abled', 'handicapable' and 'diffability' because these create further stigma for disabled people.

More information on language can be found at [People with Disability Australia](#).

What are image descriptions?

Image descriptions describe what's in an image, particularly for people who are blind or have low vision, and who use screen readers.

Image descriptions don't have to be complex - they should be factual and concise, but if time permits, you can provide a lot of detail.

They should be done for **all social media posts**, not just disability or accessibility related content.

Eighteen per cent of Australians are disabled – eighteen per cent of your audience is disabled.

Why do we use image descriptions?

Image descriptions are a cheap and easy way to create accessibility.

They make social media and the wider internet more inclusive and accessible.

People who use screen readers, or who are unable to process images, are able to know what's happening in the photo.

Where are image descriptions used?

Image descriptions can be done in Facebook, Twitter and Instagram alt-text functions, or as captions on the posts.

If you write image descriptions in the social media captions – so everyone can access them - screen readers or not.

This is how to do image descriptions in alt text of social media platforms:
<https://www.digitalmaas.com/blog/social-media-images-alt-tags-complete-guide/>

Image descriptions can also be used as alt-text on websites.

What's in an image description?

A good image description can include:

- How many people are in the photo
- what people are doing and wearing,
- the expressions on their faces,
- whether the people are standing or sitting or lying down
- the background, colours,
- the colour of the sky,
- nature,
- how the photo is taken (is it a selfie, is it a top down photo?),
- is it an infographic with images and text?

Other things to include

- What is the text like – big, small, coloured, curvy, straight, bold?
- is there a logo?
- is there a border?
- is the photo set in day time or night time?
- are the subjects facing the camera or not?
- where are elements positioned in the image?
- is it an illustration, a painting, a sculpture, a performance?

Don't make the end user work to find the image description

It's important not to make the end user work to find the image description.

They should be included in the main post – where possible (sometimes Instagram's word limit means that I place image descriptions in the comments), or in the alt-text function.

Placing an image description in the comments, because you worry it takes up space in the main post says “you are an afterthought, image descriptions take up too much space in our main caption”.

It is best to embed access.



Image: Six pillars of Trades Hall, coming from dark grey concrete steps, supported by a horizontal lintel beam. 'Trades Hall' is written, raised above the lintel. In front of the beams is a person, standing side on, with their arm and fist raised in the air. The person is covered in lots of orange, pink and grey flags. The sky is blue. Next to the pillars is the We Are Fringe logo. We Are Fringe is written in big white capitalised text. The text appears to be moving (but is static) - 'WE ARE FR' slopes in a wave shape, and 'INGE' is straight.



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This morning. Japanese breakfast board for me, and fish wings and rice for Adam. Starting the day off right. | Image: a table full of food - fish wings and a bowl of rice, miso eggplant, tiny greens with sauce, sashimi, charred fish, pickled veg, potato salad, beans and mushrooms, miso soup, 62 degree egg and rice. Tea, coffee and water are on the side.

https://www.instagram.com/p/B8UsbMIAFI_/?igshid=1ei7sml1hhyg0

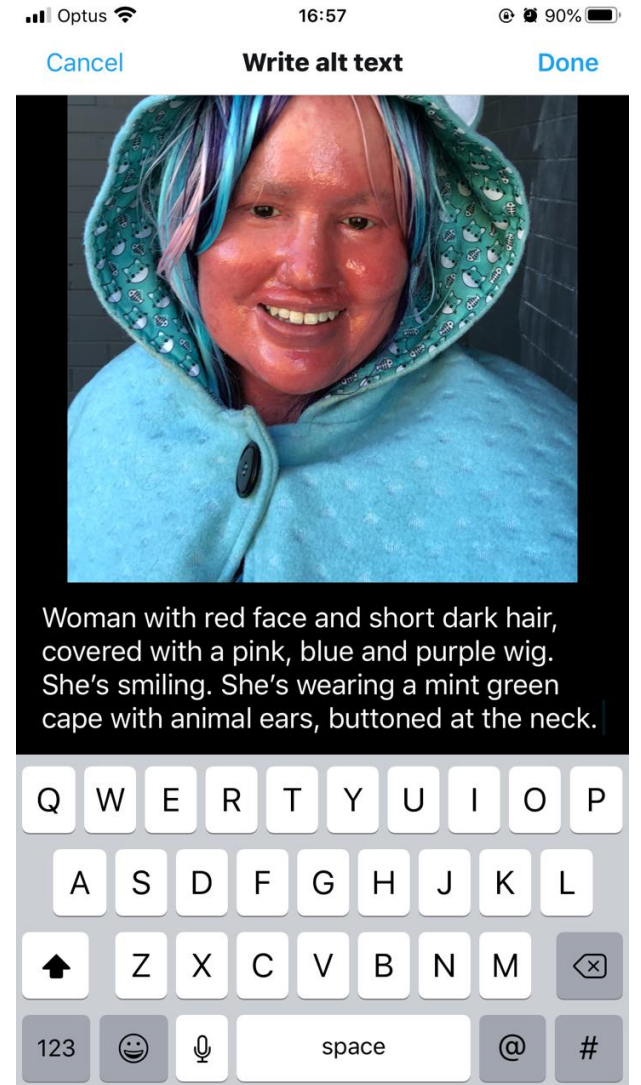
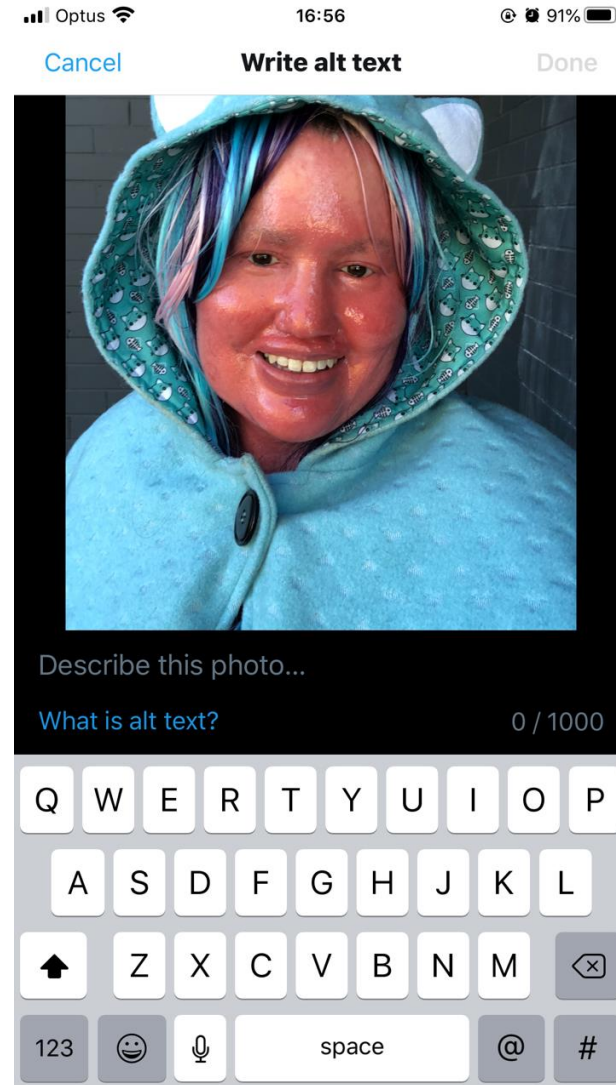
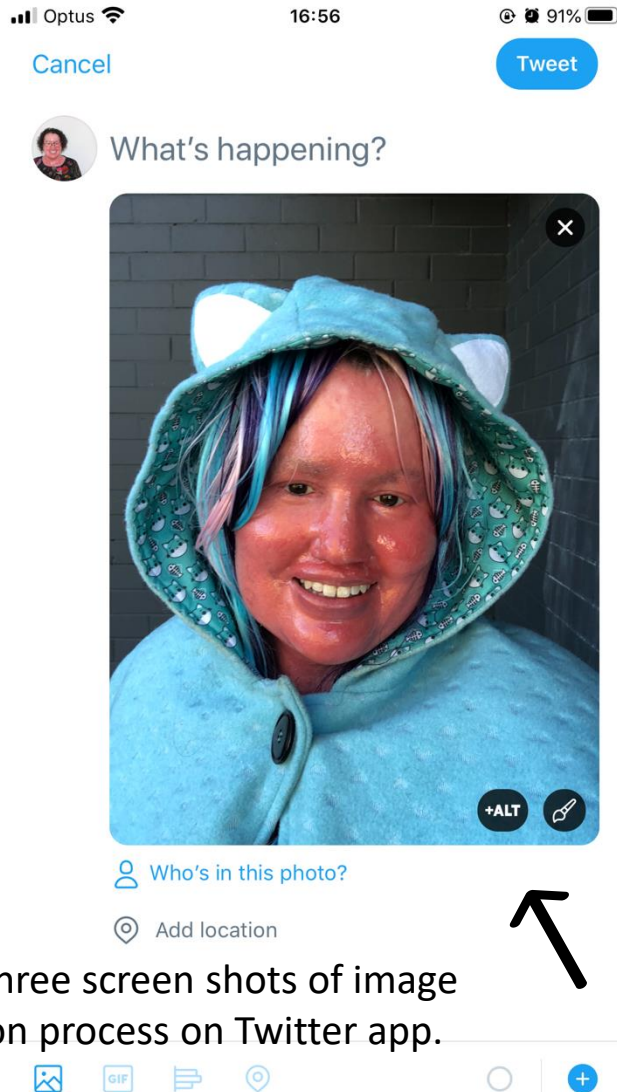
Image descriptions are a part of the social media process

Make image descriptions writing part of crafting a social media post.

Write your caption, and then spend some time writing the image description.

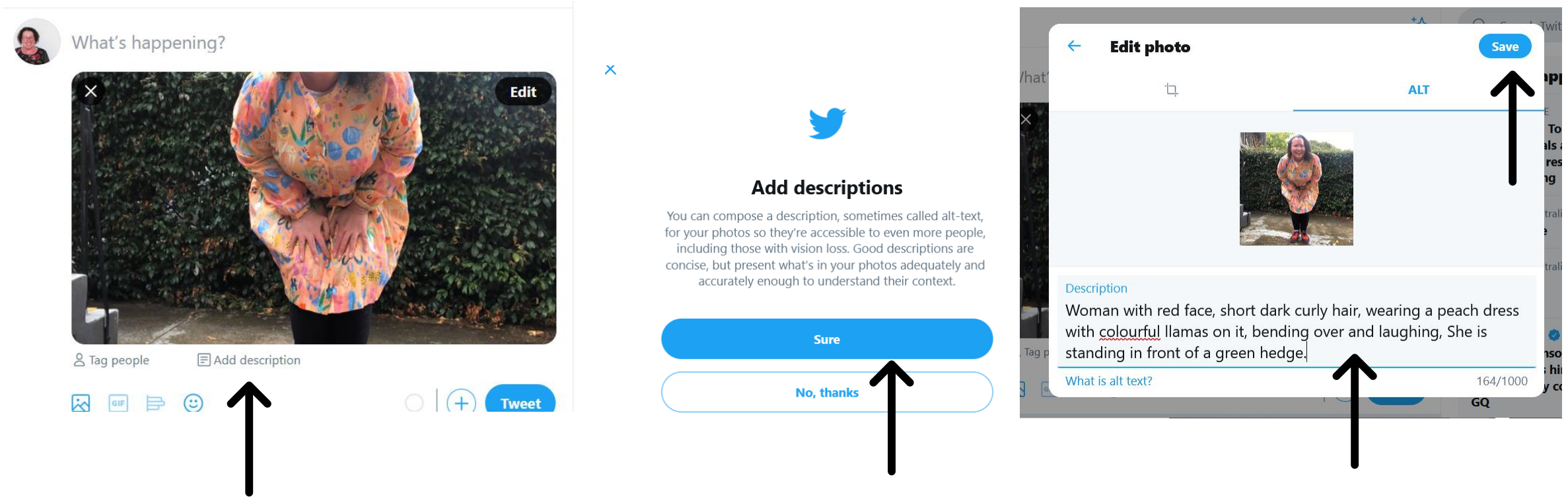
Once you get the hang of it, image descriptions should only take a few minutes.

Adding alt-text on Twitter app



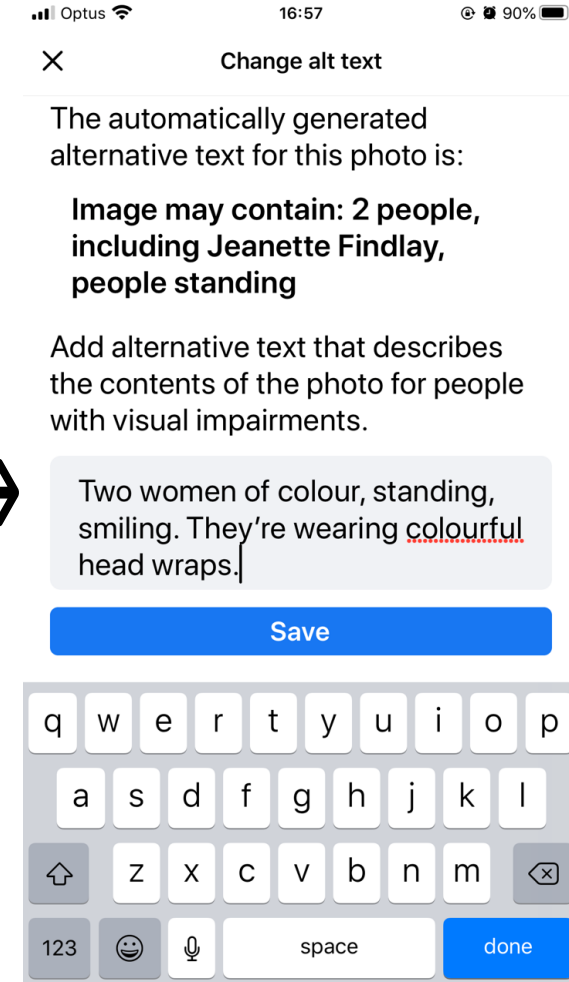
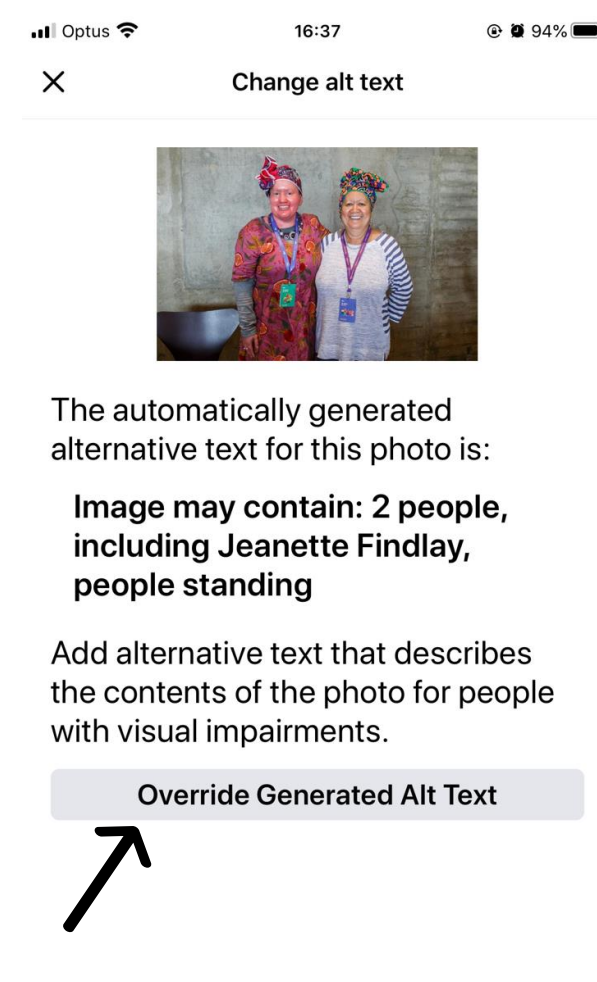
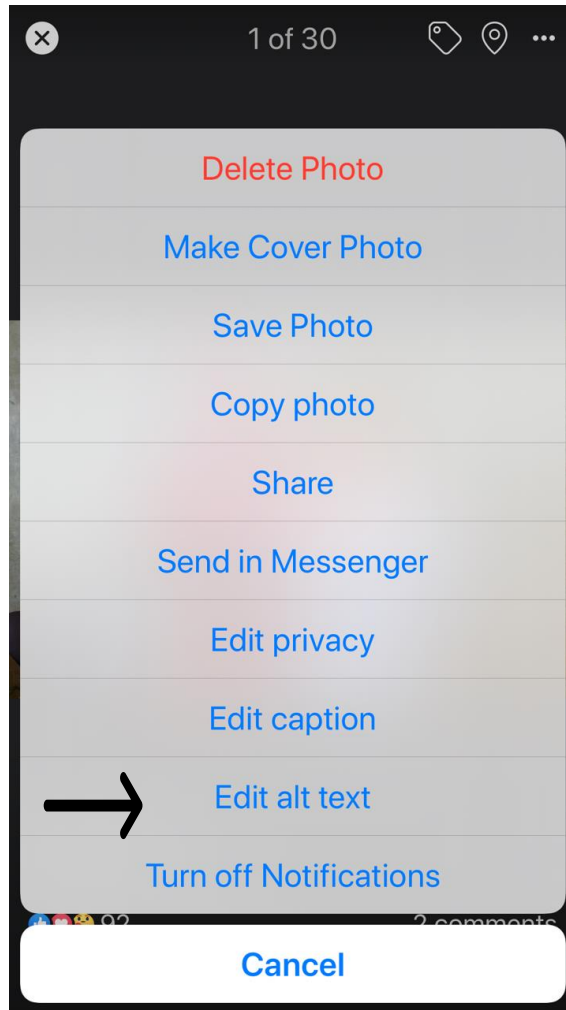
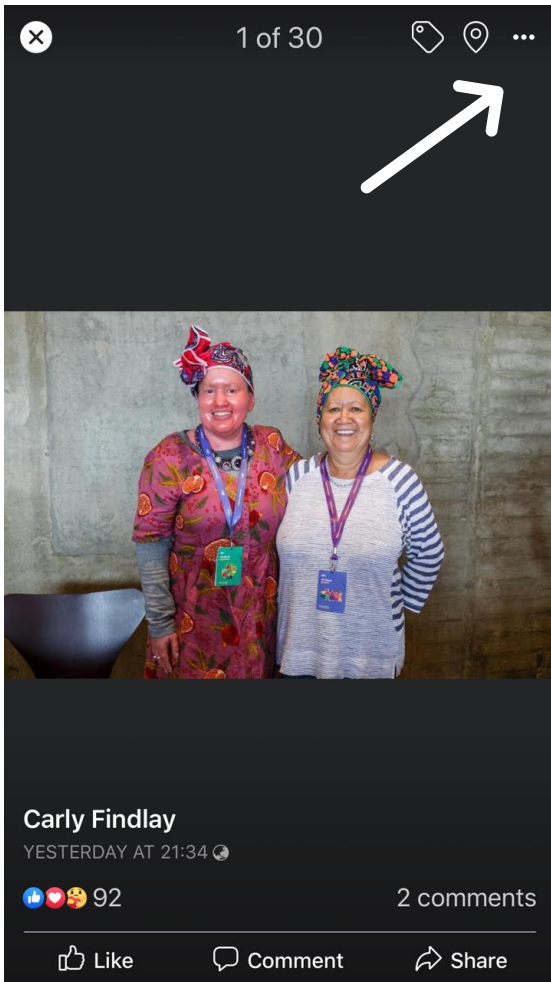
Images: three screen shots of image description process on Twitter app.

Alt text on Twitter desktop



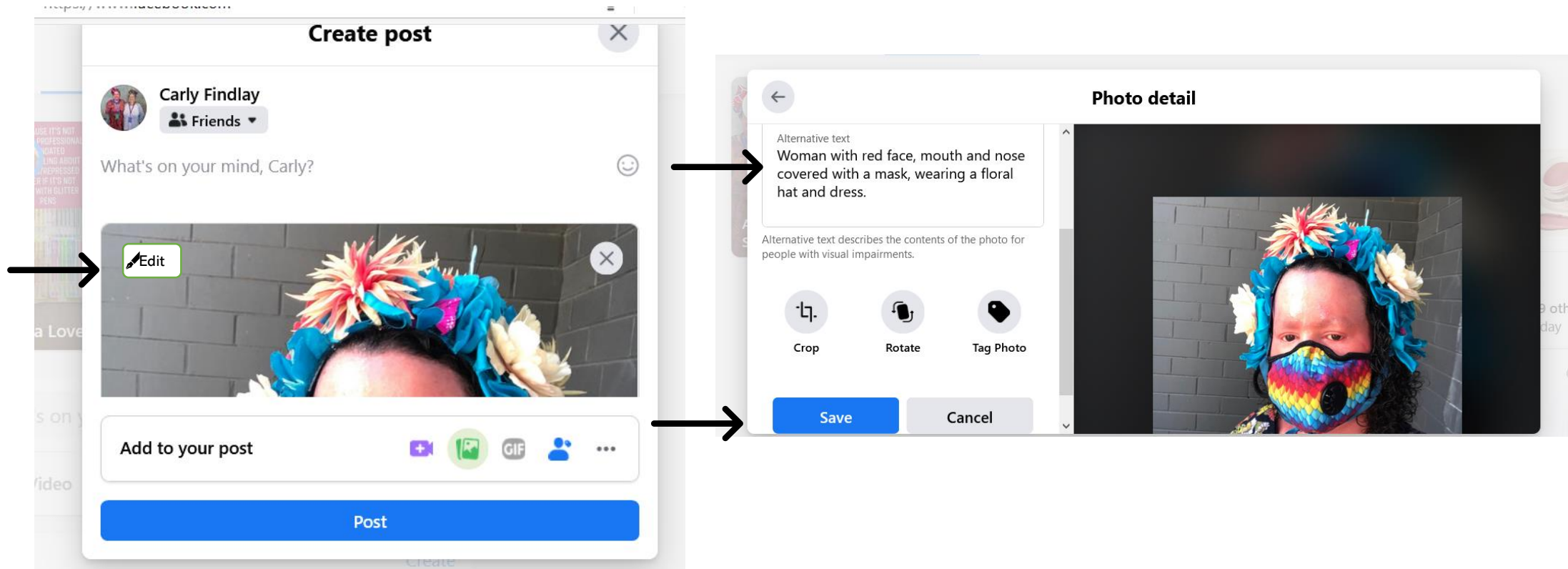
Images: three screen shots of image description process on Twitter desktop.

Adding alt-text on Facebook app



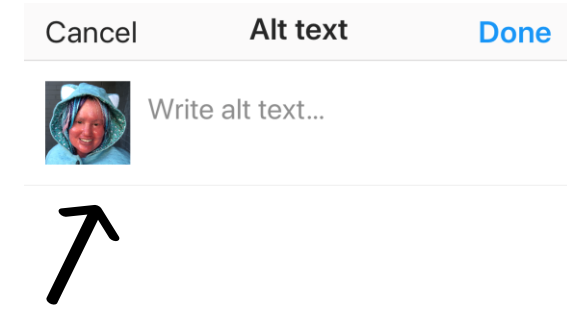
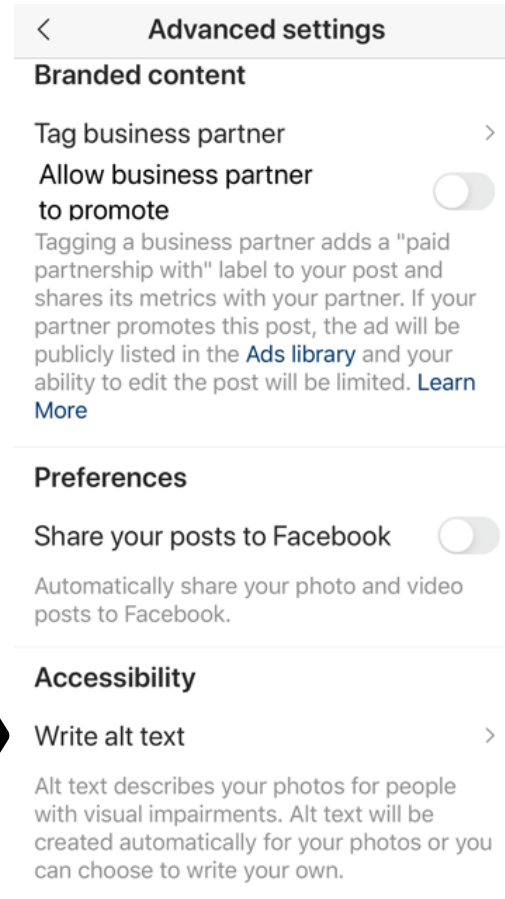
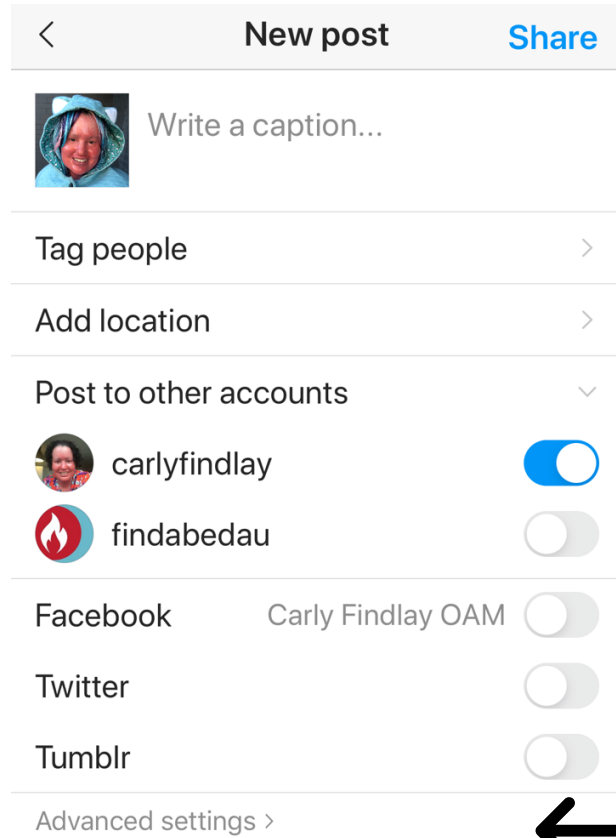
Images: four screen shots of image description process on Facebook app.

Adding alt-text on Facebook desktop



Images: two screen shots of image description process on Facebook desktop.

Adding alt-text on Instagram



Images: two screen shots of image description process on Instagram.

Image descriptions can be used above thumbnails in links

When posting external links on social media, a thumbnail photo often appears.

You can write an image description above this thumbnail.

People with Disability Australia (PWDA) are very good at this.



People with Disability Australia

30 April at 09:51 · 🌐

"As the weeks go on, it is becoming clear coronavirus is not an equal opportunity pandemic."

"More disabled adults said they were "very worried" about the effects of coronavirus on their lives than non-disabled adults (45.1% compared with 30.2%). Nearly two-thirds of disabled people said coronavirus-related concerns were affecting their wellbeing, from loneliness and problems at work, to worsening mental health."

Read more here:

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/apr/29/coronavirus-disabled-people-inequality-pandemic>

[Image Description: two people, one of them using a wheelchair, move along a pier facing away from the camera]



<https://www.facebook.com/370395603656/posts/10157467087868657/>



People with Disability Australia



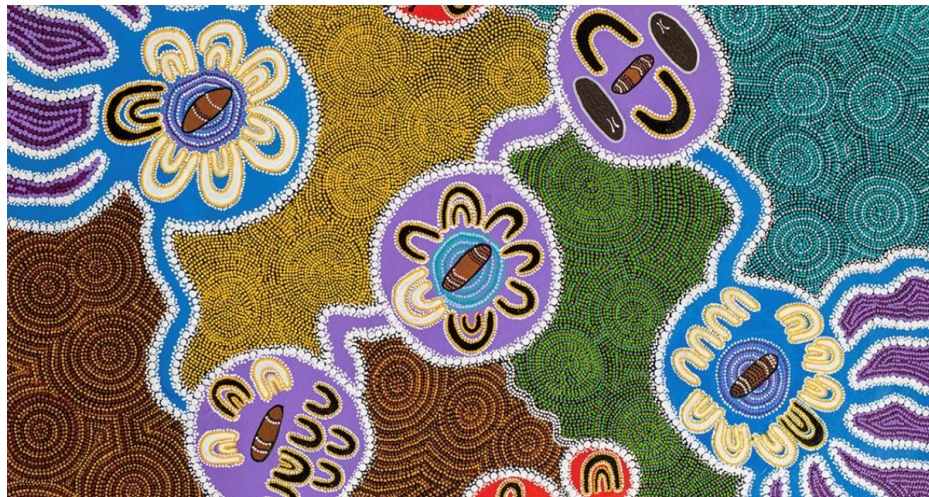
Thursday at 13:22 · 🌐

"To get to play some small part in this whole process is huge for me and I hope the artwork encourages all Australians with a story to tell about violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of people with disability, to come forward."

Uncle Paul, a Wiradjuri Elder and artist has memorialised the Disability Royal Commission, depicting it as "a safe space for storytelling."

<https://nit.com.au/wiradjuri-elder-paints-disability-royal-commission-as-safe-space-for-storytelling/>

[Image Description: the stunning artwork by Paul Constable Calcott titled "Respectful Listening"]



<https://www.facebook.com/370395603656/posts/10157493042008657/>

Describing people's appearances

I often include specifics of people's appearance – describing myself as a woman with red face and short dark curly hair. I'll describe others as a white person, as a person with fair skin, or a person of colour, and I mention a mobility device if relevant.

You could ask people how they want to be described – confirming skin colour, size, gender, mobility device etc.

You could add a statement about image descriptions on your consent form, asking them to state how they want to be described.



Image: head shot photo of a woman with red face and short dark curly hair, wearing a colourful dress with jellies printed on it, smiling. An icecream brooch is pinned to her dress.

What about text based images?

Screen readers will not pick up on text based images - like posters, memes or screen shots of texts.

You should include the text on those images in the image description. For screen shots of text based content, copy the text from the source before you post the screen shot on social media.

Online OCR is a great tool to get the text, too. Visit www.onlineocr.net. You can upload the screenshot into the website, and it will process the text to be edited, copied and pasted into a social media caption. Don't forget to check over and edit the text that Online OCR spits out - sometimes it's not always correct.



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**BECAUSE TONIGHT
IS THE NIGHT WHEN
BECOMES**



Daylight saving ends overnight. Don't forget to change your clocks (or rely on your computers and phones to).

Image: text "because tonight is the night when 2 becomes 1". The 2 and 1 are represented by analogue clocks - at 2.00 and 1.00.

Under the text is a group of 5 women standing in a city street at night, dresses in 90s clothes. Sporty, Scary, Baby, Ginger and Posh forever. ❤️

PS: Dare you not to have this stuck in your head all week. 😍

<https://www.instagram.com/p/B-juO6-AWzD/?igshid=1wr4x5e2pp9cq>



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Describing art

Pumpkin by @yayoikusama_ at @agsa.adelaide ❤️ Image: a large bronze and black sculpture that depicts a pumpkin. It's detailed with different textures and black dots. Framed paintings hang in the background.

<https://www.instagram.com/p/B8nxsjCgW2-/?igshid=1klfjq9bl8h7j>



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I saw @sowetogospelchoirlive at @adlfringe just now. It was spine tingling - like nothing I've ever experienced before. I cried a little, and smiled so wide. So uplifted and happy. A lot of the show was dedicated to Nelson Mandela, and I wish #FestivalMum @jeanettefindlay was there to see it with me. I met Mary who sang in the choir and sold CDs afterward. GO SEE THEM! | Images: a series of photos and videos of a choir on stage, singing and dancing. They're wearing bright clothes. (Ticket given to me because of work)

<https://www.instagram.com/p/B8IUHg8AKrs/?igshid=1co80hzs1vm3j>

Using humour in image descriptions



calbowilson



Waaaaait a minute, that's not my usual barista.

[#barnaclemakesaplayforthecoffeemachine](#)

(Image: Barnacle the cat sitting up tall on the coffee machine that Pirate the cat usually occupies. This is unprecedented. Barnacle is a [#coffeecat](#))

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CADC-eLAZV9/?igshid=13mjtq5ikek86>

Describing what's happening in videos

You can describe the video clip in the same way you do an image description – describe what is happening.

This is an example of me captioning a short video on my Instagram:

<https://www.instagram.com/p/B-dc83SApR1/?igshid=4yu0nvz1awha>

Contact Description Victoria for Audio Description:

<https://descriptionvictoria.com.au/>

You could also add captions to the video to make it accessible to Deaf and hard of hearing people.

Bonus tips

Capitalise the first letter of each word when using hashtags. This allows screen readers to pick up each word. For example: #MelbourneFringe, #IndependentArtist #WorkFromHome

It's important to caption videos too.

Clipomatic is a great app for Instagram stories - <https://www.apalon.com/clipomatic.html>

Video editing programs like iMovie work too.

More info on image descriptions

Harvard University: <https://accessibility.huit.harvard.edu/describe-content-images>

Perkins Learning:

<https://www.perkinselearning.org/technology/blog/how-write-alt-text-and-image-descriptions-visually-impaired>

My blog on image descriptions

<https://carlyfindlay.com.au/2018/05/14/whats-with-the-image-descriptions-on-my-social-media-posts/>

Have a go!



More info on Access at Melbourne Fringe

Producers Guide to Access

<https://melbournefringe.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Producers-Guide-to-Access.pdf>

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