



Cal OES
GOVERNOR'S OFFICE
OF EMERGENCY SERVICES

Integrating Accessible Social Media Content within Emergency Communications



**A Guide for Reaching the
Whole Community**

2025

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
Purpose	4
Background	4
CREATING ACCESSIBLE SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS	5
Web Content Accessibility Guidelines.....	5
Plain Language	6
Hashtags	6
Shorten Links for Thumbnails	7
Alternative Text	8
Captions	9
Inclusive Emojis.....	10
Text Accessibility	13
Text Accessibility	15
Video Accessibility	15
ACCESSIBILITY OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS.....	17
INSTAGRAM	17
FACEBOOK	21
X (Formerly Known as Twitter)	26
LINKEDIN.....	32
TIKTOK.....	36
YOUTUBE	37
HELPFUL RESOURCES	40
Free Online Electronic Accessibility Courses.....	41
Annex 1: Disability Integration Mandates	42

Executive Summary

The California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) is committed to promoting the mission of inclusive emergency management. A foundational cornerstone of emergency management is providing individuals, including people with disabilities and access or functional needs, with equal access to life-saving information. This is necessary to ensure all Californians are empowered to maintain their health, safety, security, and independence before, during, and after disasters.

This guidance is intended to provide local jurisdictions, Public Information Officers (PIOs), Crisis Communication Specialists, and emergency managers with the knowledge and best practices needed to create and post accessible social media content that can be accessed using assistive devices such as screen readers.

This document also outlines resources, tools, and training courses emergency managers can utilize to develop a better understanding of methods for creating accessible electronic Microsoft documents, PDFs, and forms.

Purpose

To ensure emergency managers, including Public Information Officers, understand the importance of electronically accessible information and have the technical knowledge to create social media content that can be accessed by the whole community.

Background

Information posted by emergency managers on social media platforms is intended to address the needs of all individuals. However, when social media posts lack the technical requirements needed to be electronically accessible, individuals using assistive devices and technologies are unable to understand, or act on, the information being provided.

The lack of inclusive, electronically accessible emergency management-related information creates fundamental gaps in how jurisdictions communicate with the whole community and negatively impact the degree to which individuals with access and functional needs can plan, prepare, respond, and recover from disasters.

To develop successful communication strategies, jurisdictions should plan in partnership with the access and functional needs community. One effective method of doing so is to develop, or utilize an existing, AFN Advisory Committee.

Creating Accessible Social Media Posts

Social media has become a standard platform for sharing emergency-related preparedness, response, and recovery information. All information posted on social media should be done using accessible formats and is subject to the same accessibility requirements as other electronic content.

Social media content managers and communication specialists can reach the largest audience possible, including individuals with access and functional needs, by following key best practices.

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines

To maintain compliance with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and to ensure accessibility of all electronic content, California promotes the best practice of utilizing the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\), Level AA](#), as established by the Web Accessibility Initiative of the World Wide Web Consortium.

The WCAG guidelines center around the following [four principles of accessibility](#), which lay the foundation necessary for anyone to access and use web content, including social media posts:

- 1 Perceivable:** Content must be perceivable visually, audibly, or by touch (e.g., Braille applications).
- 2 Operable:** Users must be able to interact with the interface (i.e., navigation menus, search bars, or forms on a website) without encountering barriers.
- 3 Understandable:** Content must be readable and presented to appear and operate in predictable ways, including providing input assistance to help users avoid making mistakes.
- 4 Robust:** Content must remain compatible throughout system updates or improvements to assistive technologies.

Plain Language

To be accessible, social media posts should use [plain language](#), which is writing designed to be understood as quickly and clearly as possible. Plain language considerations include the use of an active voice, short sentences, step-by-step instructions, and the avoidance of complicated terminology or jargon.

Plain Language Phrase

"Use"
"Take advantage of"
"Taking the initiative"
"We will"

Jargon Language Phrase

"Utilize"
"Leverage"
"Proactive approach"
"We endeavor to"

Hashtags

Camel Case for Hashtags

One of the most powerful tools for making posts more readily discoverable is to add a hashtag (represented by the # symbol) to the front of a word or phrase.

To ensure accessibility when using hashtags, words should be grouped together without spaces or commas. The first letter of each word should be capitalized to be pronounced correctly by assistive technology devices, such as screen readers – a technique known as **Camel Casing**. Screen readers will automatically insert a space after each word in the camel case, making the overall meaning easier to understand.



Figure 1. Incorporating hashtags and camel case on the term "Access and Functional Needs".

Keep your Hashtags Short

Short hashtags are easier to remember and give you more room for content in cases where space is limited.

Shorten Links for Thumbnails

When a link is included within a social media post, the platform typically generates a thumbnail with an image, title, or summary that previews the information readers will receive if the link is clicked on.

Assistive technology will only read the link, not the description or title of the web page included on the thumbnail.

View the example below of the link: <https://www.caloes.ca.gov/>.

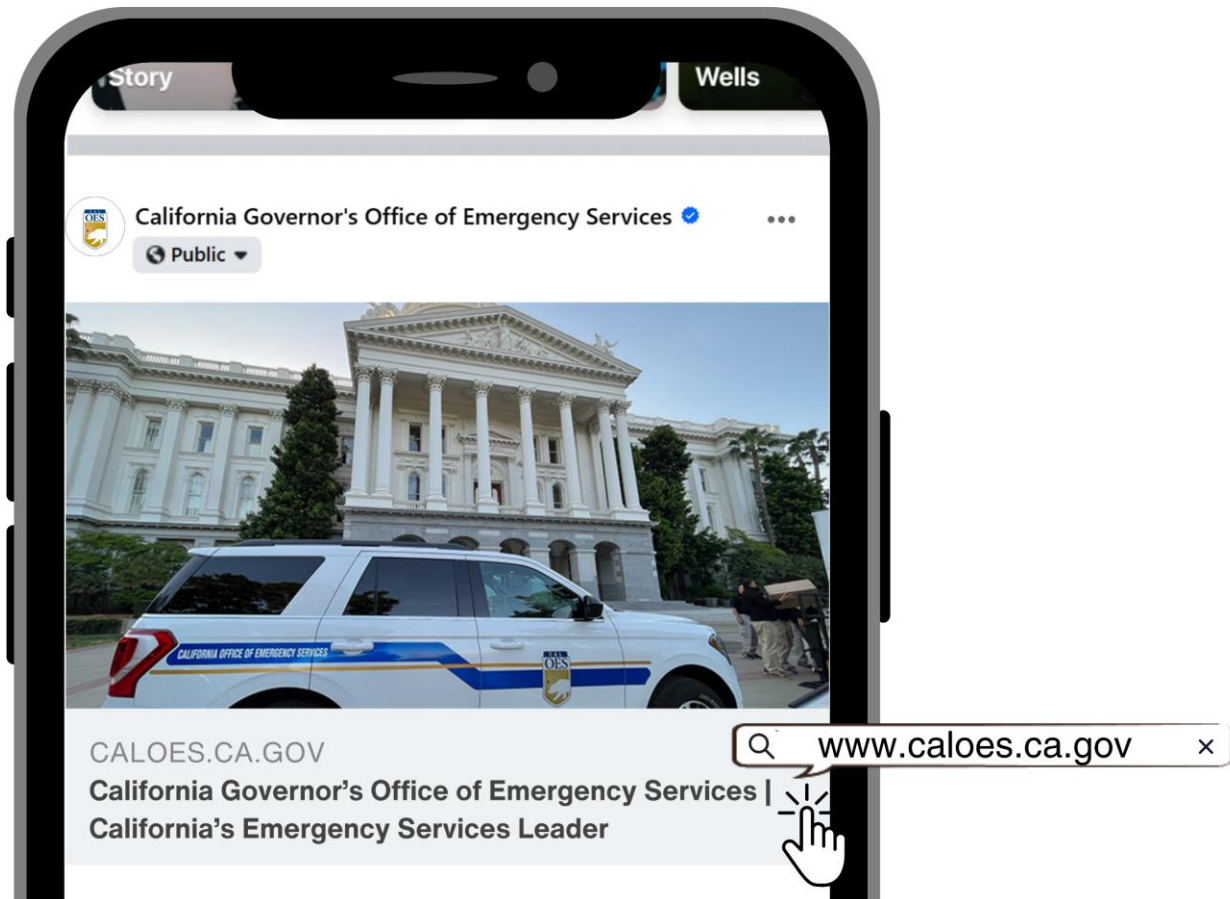


Figure 2. An automatically generated thumbnail on Facebook, which appears following the inclusion of the link “<https://www.caloes.ca.gov/>.”

To increase the accessibility of links posted on social media platforms, the following should be taken into consideration:

- Shorten the link (i.e., the URL) using tools like [Bit.ly](https://bit.ly) or [Rebrandly](https://rebrandly.com) for more space within the post.
- Make links distinguishable by more than just color by adding “[URL]” before the link.
- Label links as “[PIC],” “[VIDEO],” or “[AUDIO]” before the URL to inform screen reader users on what to expect before opening the link.

Alternative Text

Alternative text or Alt Text, is an important feature in social media accessibility that provides textual descriptions of an image or visual elements. These textual descriptions make social media content accessible to people with visual disabilities or those using assistive technologies.

Screen readers not only verbalize written content, but they also convey information to users regarding the images contained in social media posts. Embedding alt text to describe the pictures, charts, graphs, or maps contained within electronic content ensures screen readers and other assistive technologies can accurately convey the meaning of images.

Here are some helpful tips for writing alt text:

- Aim to capture the information being conveyed by the image.
- Avoid writing "image of..."; simply write what the image conveys.
- Avoid using all text if the image is for decoration only.
- List the organization's name when providing alt text for logos.
- Keep the alt text brief.
- Provide additional explanations for charts, graphs, and maps.
- Use human testing to validate the alt text by having others review it.
- Describe visual aspects without making assumptions about what could be happening in the image.
- Imagine describing the image to someone over the phone.

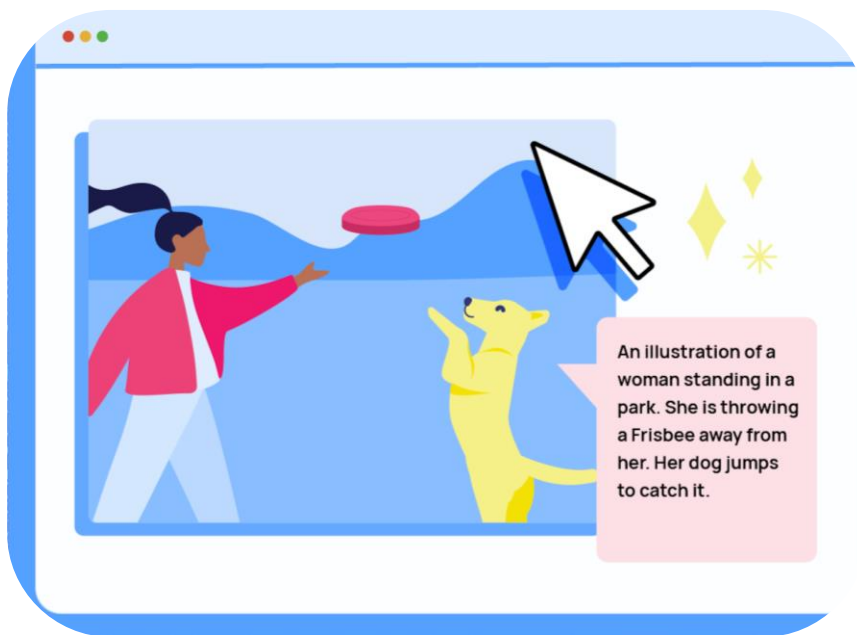


Figure 3. A cursor hovers over an illustration of a woman standing in a park. She is throwing a Frisbee, and her dog is leaping to catch it. A text box appears underneath the cursor, providing a description of the illustration.

Captions

Accessible social media posts use captions (called “subtitles” in some areas) to make content understandable by people who are deaf or hard of hearing. Captions are synchronized with video audio and are usually shown in a media player when users turn them on. There are different types of captions:

- **Closed Captions (CC):** Captions that the viewer can turn on or off.
- **Open Captions:** Captions that are permanently visible on the screen and cannot be turned off.
- **Live Captions:** Real-time captions that are generated during live events or broadcasts, typically through automated speech recognition technology.
- **Audio Description Captions:** Captions that describe both spoken content and visual elements.

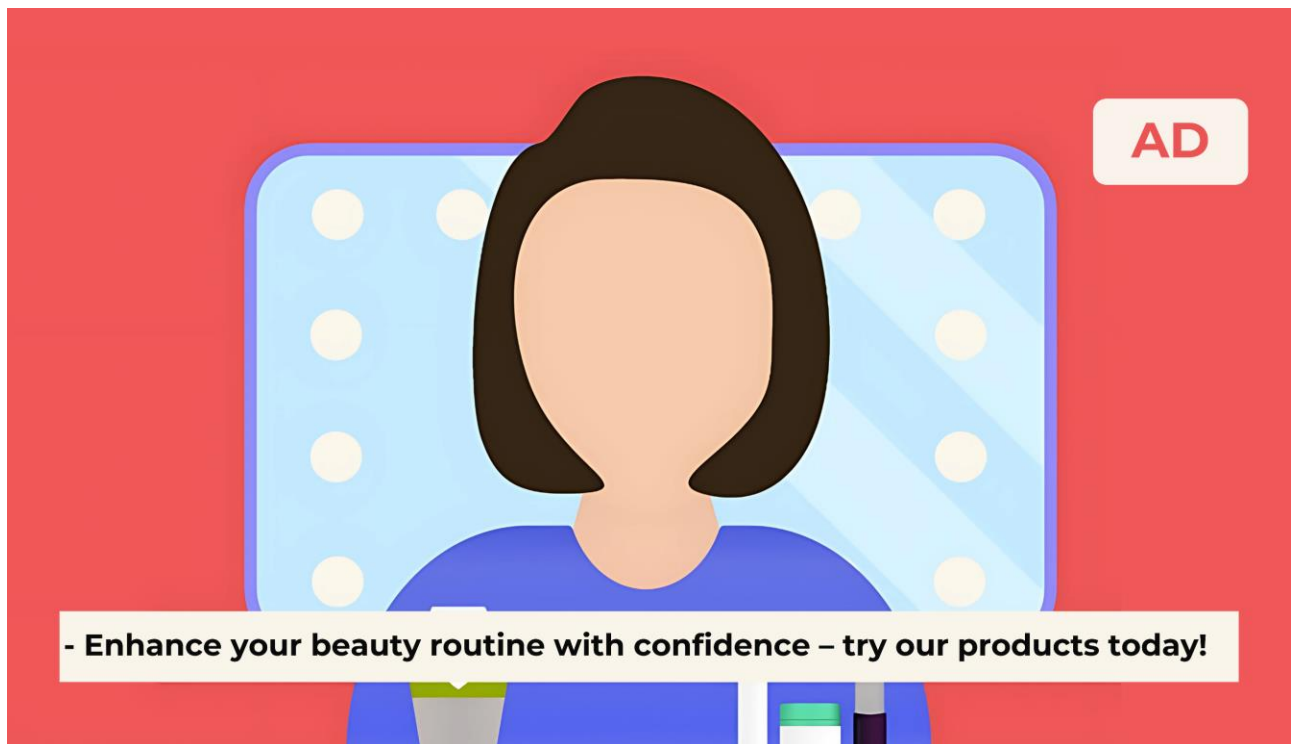


Figure 4. Illustration of a video interface featuring an advertisement and captions.

Inclusive Emojis

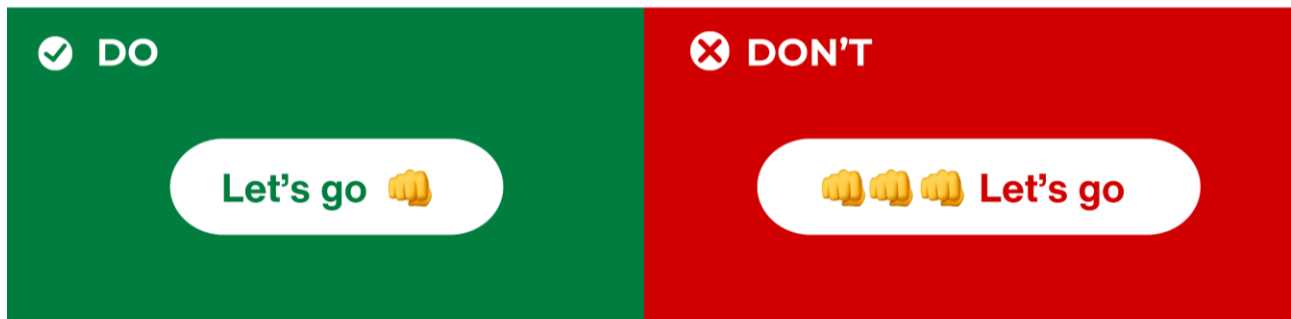
Emojis and icons are graphic representations used to convey mood, emotion, or emphasis. To ensure posts are accessible, social media managers should incorporate the following helpful tips when using emojis:

Do not use emojis to replace words. Using an emoji to replace a word changes the message, which increases the likelihood of misinterpretation and makes it more difficult to understand the intended meaning. This is because screen readers can only interpret emojis through their alt text descriptions.



Text comes first – Do not put emojis before important messages or calls to action.

Emojis should always come after text, never before. Putting emojis before text makes it difficult for individuals using a screen reader to understand the message.



Use clear emojis that are widely known to all audiences. Avoid using ambiguous emojis that are open to broad interpretation. Depending on a reader's background, an emoji can convey various meanings. Factors such as age, culture, or nationality can impact how someone might interpret the meaning of a broad or ambiguous emoji. This means an emoji could be understood in a way entirely different from the original intent, leading to confusion or miscommunication.

✓ DO	✗ DON'T
 Hello/Hi	 Peace or Goodbye?

✓ DO	✗ DON'T
 Like/Approve/Yes	 Pray or Thank you?

Do not use emoticons. Emoticons are a manipulation of symbols and punctuation marks. Screen readers interpret emoticons like punctuation marks. Individuals using a screen reader might mistakenly understand the misinterpretation as grammatical errors or typos in a given message.

✓ DO	✗ DON'T
	:)

Moderation is key. Embrace emojis, but don't go overboard. Using multiple emojis can cause assistive technology to read the same description multiple times.

✓ DO

"I'm heading back to Colorado tomorrow after being down in Santa Barbara over the weekend for the festival." 🎉

✗ DON'T

"I'm heading back to Colorado tomorrow after being down in Santa Barbara over the weekend for the festival." 🎉🔑🔍👍🏠

Place emojis and icons at the end of sentences. Avoid placing emojis and icons within a sentence. Assistive technology tools read content in the order listed. Placing emojis and icons within a sentence interrupts the flow of information.

✓ DO

"There is a fire in the area. 😨" *will be read aloud by a screen reader as "There is a fire in the area. Fearful face."*

✗ DON'T

"There is a fire 😨 in the area." *will be read aloud by a screen reader as "There is a fire fearful face in the area."*

Review the descriptions: Emoji descriptions often vary by device. Before posting, use websites such as [EMOJIPEDIA](https://emojipedia.org/) to cross-check emoji descriptions across different devices. For example, depending on the device used, the emoji below is described as an abandoned, old, haunted, or derelict house.



Figure 5. Old House Emoji

Text Accessibility

Images of Text

Readable text is sometimes presented within an image. If the image is not a logo, avoid text in images. However, if images of text are used, the alternative text should contain the same words as whatever is used in the image.



Color Contrast Accessibility

Depending on the colors used to format text in a document, webpage, or captioned video, some people may experience difficulty reading or understanding the information being presented.

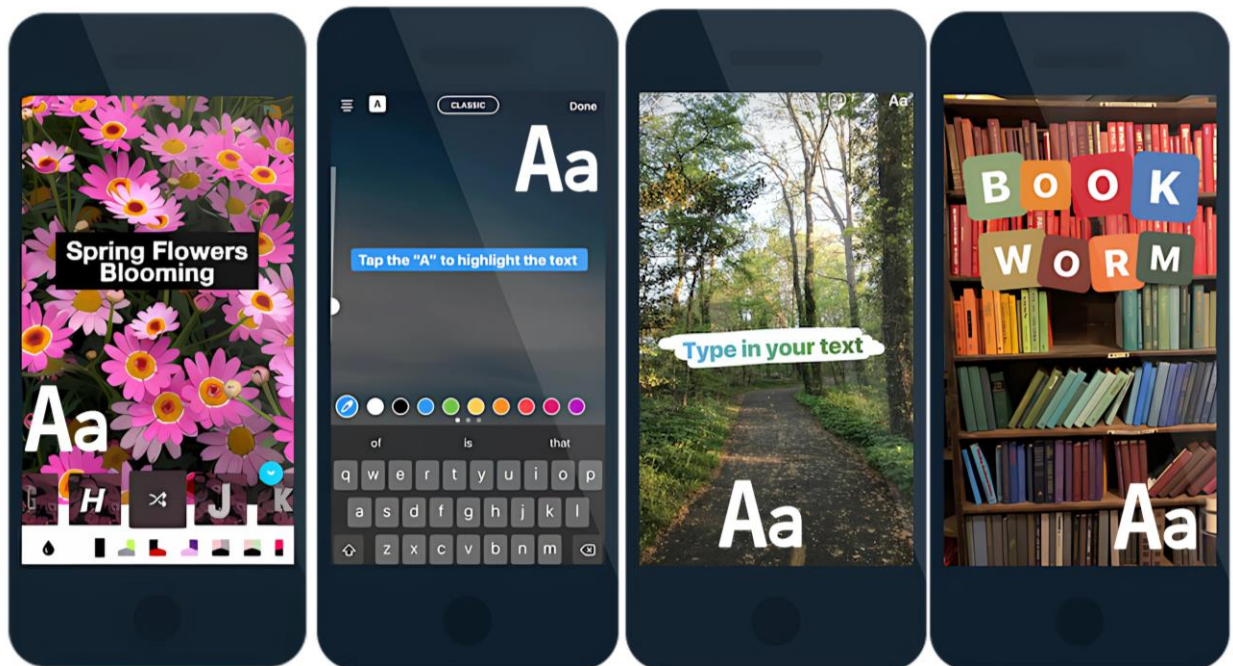
Meeting the color contrast requirement ensures the visual presentation of text and images of text has a contrast ratio of at least 4.5:1, which should be used as a universal standard, except for the following:

- **Large Text:** Large-scale text and images of large-scale text have a contrast ratio of at least 3:1.
- **Incidental:** Text or images of text that are part of an inactive user interface component, pure decoration, or not visible to anyone have no contrast requirement.
- **Logotypes:** Text that is part of a logo or brand name has no contrast requirement.

Note that the maximum ratio on the color contrast scale occurs between black text and a white background (or vice versa) at 21:1.

When creating content, it is important to choose your background and foreground colors in alignment with accessibility requirements. Three best practices are:

- **Choose high-contrast color combinations.** Use dark text on a light background and vice versa.
- **Avoid color combinations that are difficult to differentiate,** specifically red-green combinations pose challenges for individuals with color blindness. Use alternative color combinations for clarity.
- **Enhance text readability on Reels and Stories.** When adding text above images, click on the "Aa" (Add Text) feature to insert and customize text. Ensure readability by selecting high-contrast color combinations, such as dark text on light image areas or light text on dark areas. Use additional customization options like background fills or outlines, found in the text editing menu, to help the text stand out against complex backgrounds. Avoid using color combinations, such as red and green that may be challenging for individuals with color vision-related conditions.



There are several color contrast checkers:

- [WebAIM's Contrast Checker](#)
- [Accessible Web's WCAG Color Contrast Checker](#)
- [Deque's Color Palette Contrast Checker](#)

Test Accessibility

Regularly test your social media content using tools like screen readers, keyboard-only navigation, or color contrast checkers to ensure accessibility.

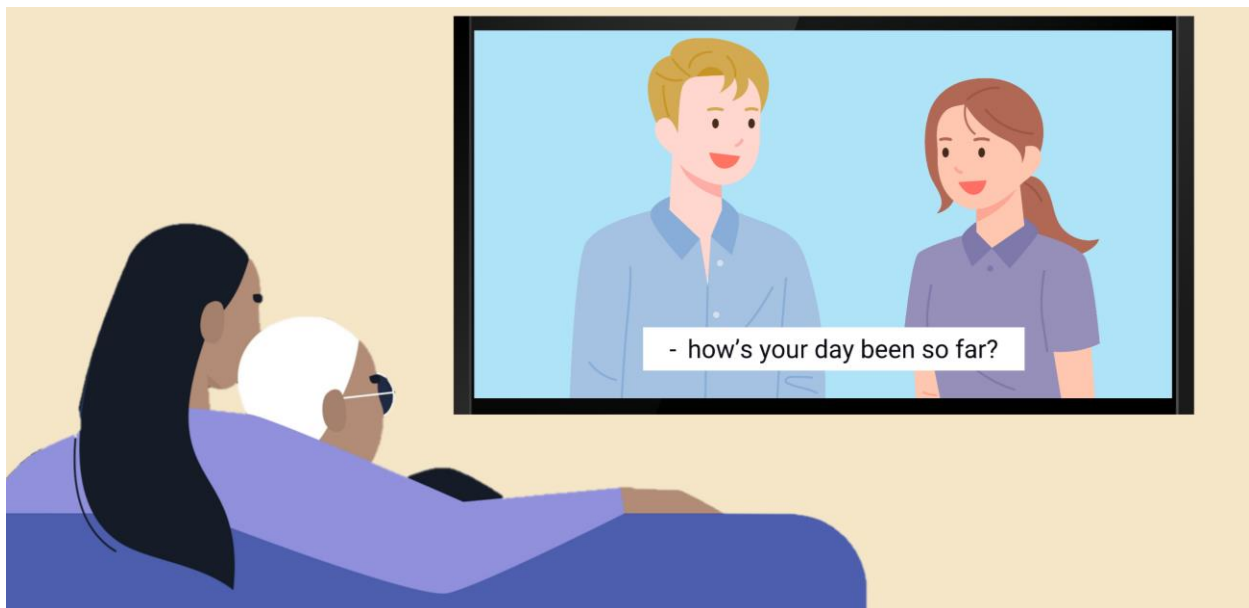
Video Accessibility

In times of emergencies, videos are shared to keep the community well-informed. When making videos accessible, be sure to utilize the following best practices:

Provide Hashtags: Incorporate hashtags or relevant keywords to reach a wider audience.



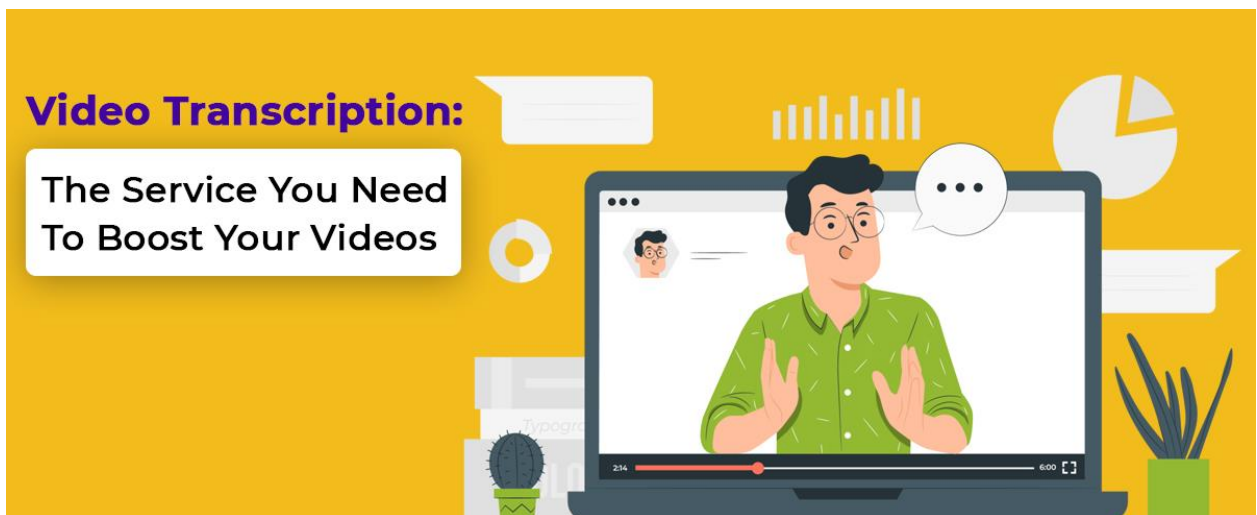
Provide Captions/Subtitles: Captions on social media will convert audio content into written text.



Provide Audio Description: Audio description make visual content accessible for individuals who are blind or have low vision. Unlike captions, which focus on putting dialogue into written form, audio description provides a detailed, audible narrative stating the visual elements, actions, expressions, and other visual details of a video. For more examples and guidance on the use of audio descriptions, visit the "[Samples of Audio Descriptions](#)" by the American Council of the Blind.



Provide Transcripts: Basic transcripts are a text version of the speech and non-speech audio information needed to understand the content. Descriptive transcripts also include text details of the visual information needed to understand the content. Descriptive transcripts are helpful to people who are deaf and/or blind.



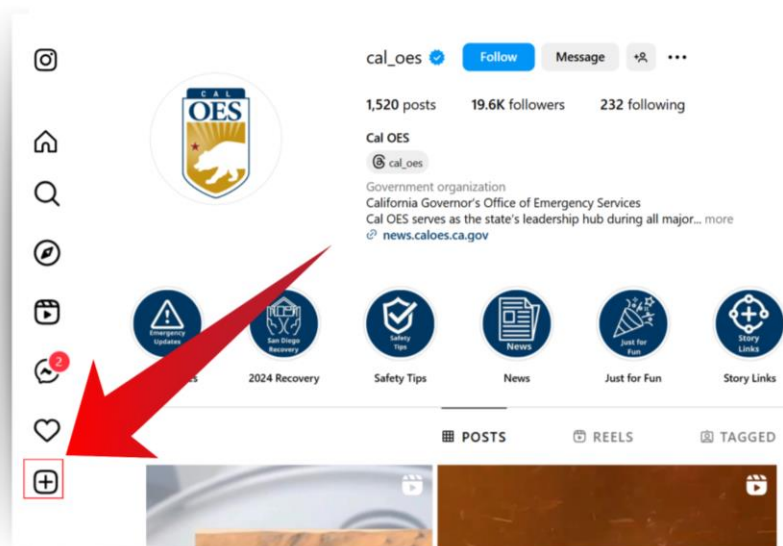
Accessibility of Social Media Platforms

INSTAGRAM

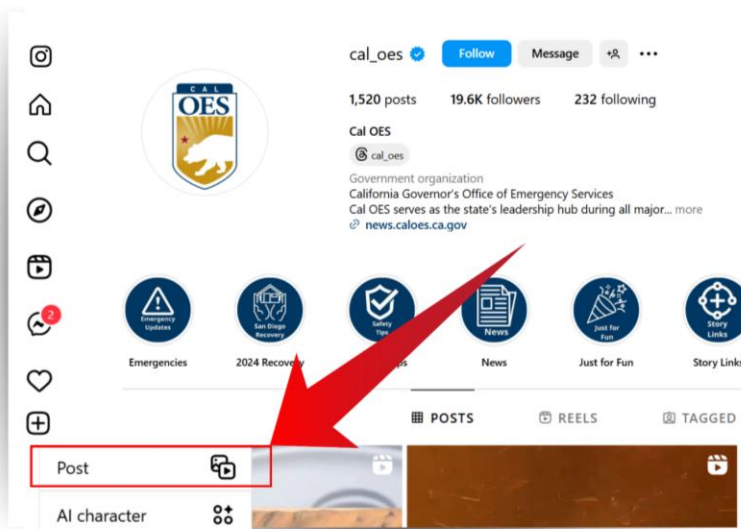
Using Alt Text on Instagram via a Web Browser

Users should manually provide visual descriptions of photos for people with visual disabilities.

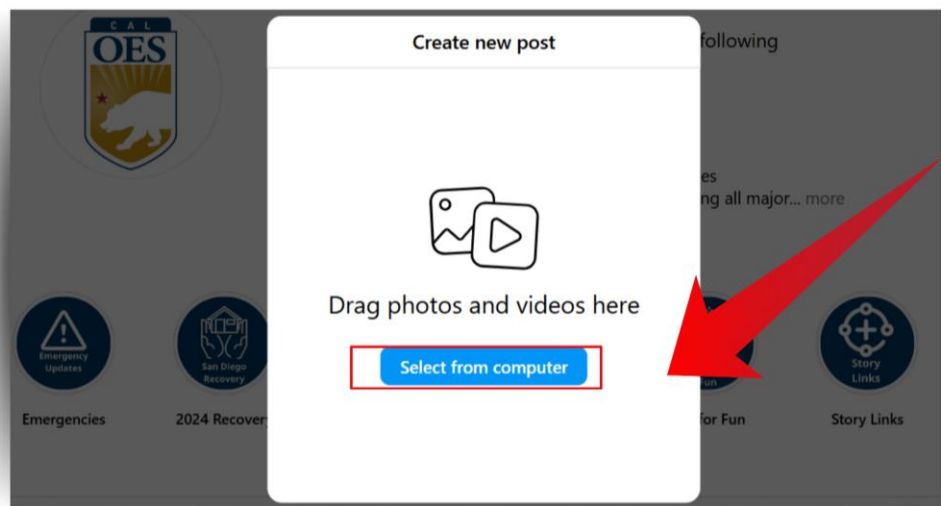
Step 1: Start by uploading an existing photo to Instagram by clicking on the plus sign on the left of the screen.



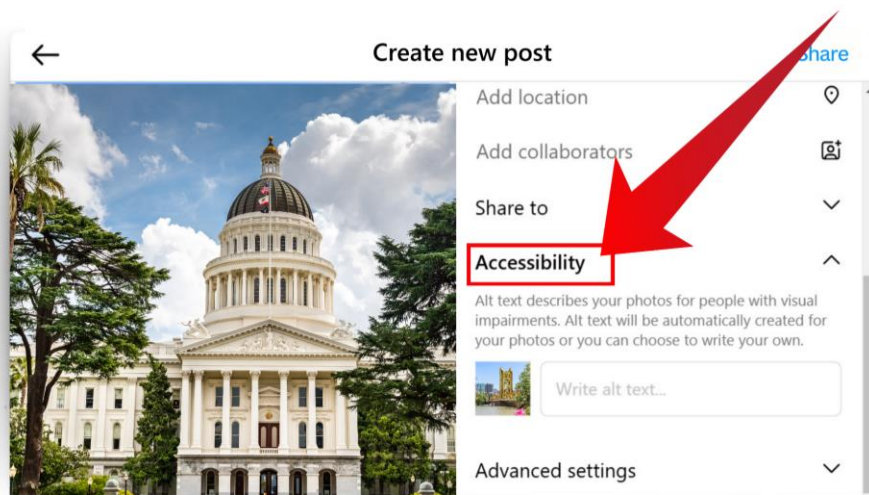
Step 2: Click on **Post** to upload or post a photo.



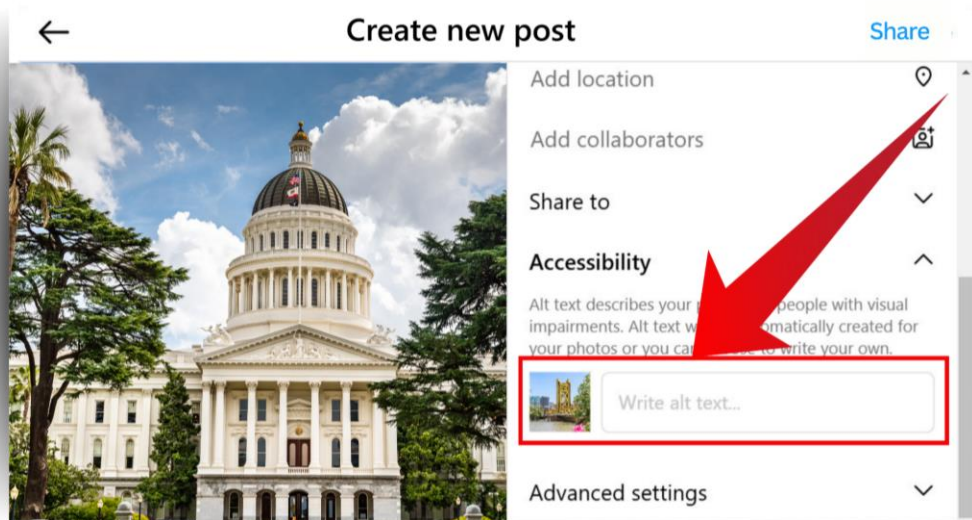
Step 3: Click on **Select from computer**, select the photo you wish to upload, choose a filter, edit the image, and click **Next**.



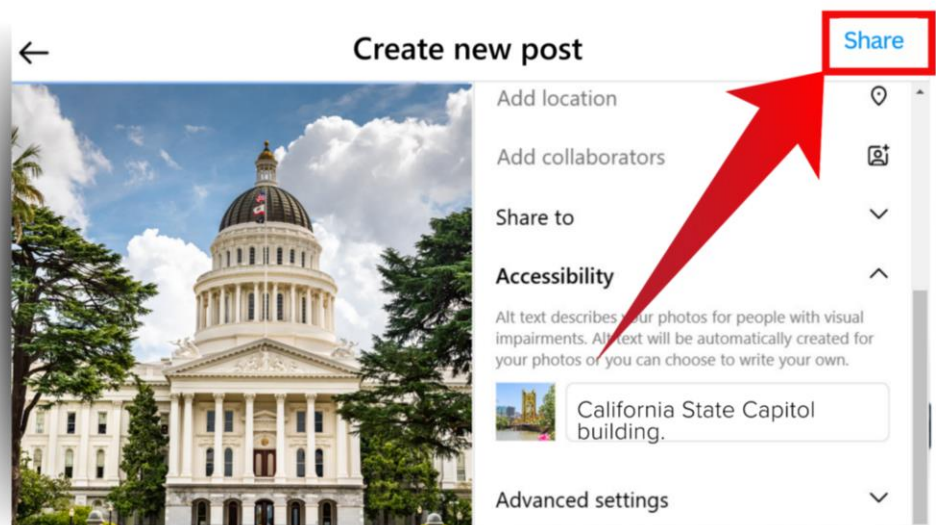
Step 4: On the page for writing an image caption, click **Accessibility**.



Step 5: Write your alt text image description in the box.



Step 6: Click **Share** to post.



Using Alt Text on Instagram via the App

Step 1: Start by uploading an existing photo to Instagram.

Step 2: Choose a filter and edit the image, then click **Next**.

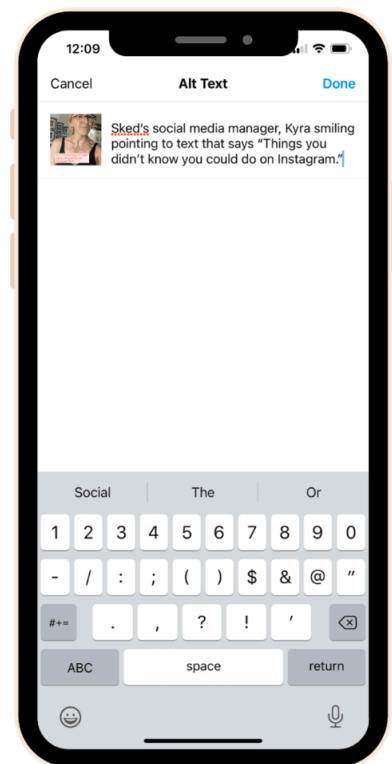
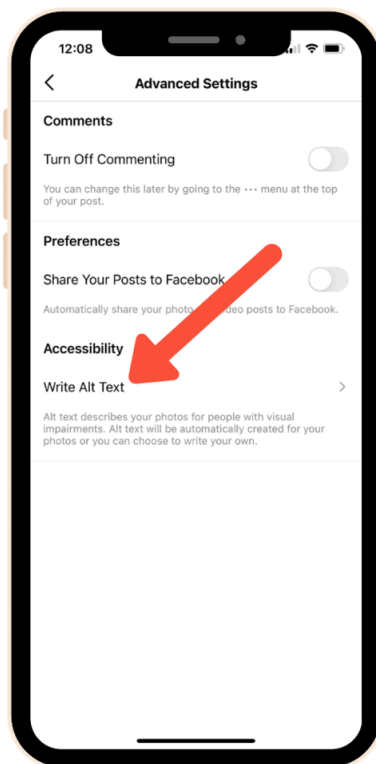
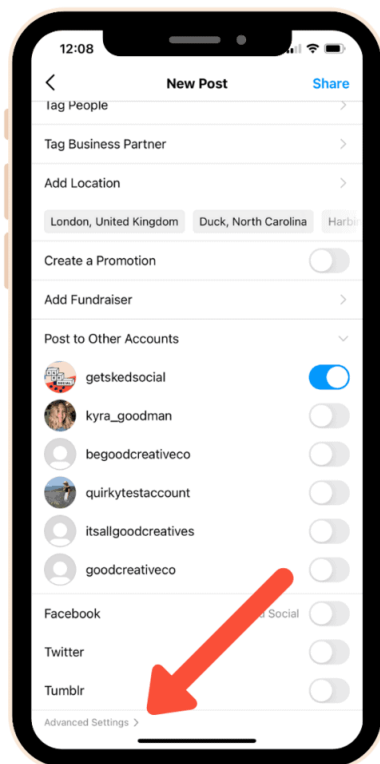
Step 3: On the page for writing an image caption, click the **Advanced Settings** option.

Step 4: Scroll to the **Accessibility** section and click on **Write alt Text**.

Step 5: Click on the **Write alt text** field and type your text.

Step 6: Click on the **Done** button in the top right corner to return to **Advanced Settings**.

Instagram

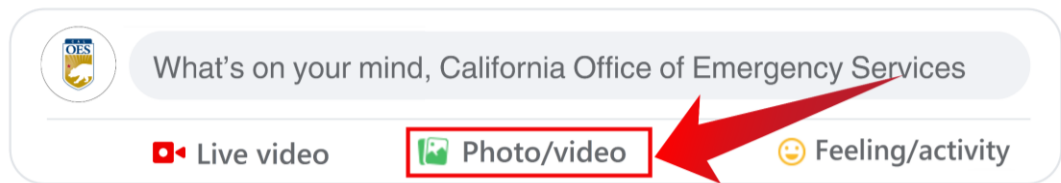


FACEBOOK

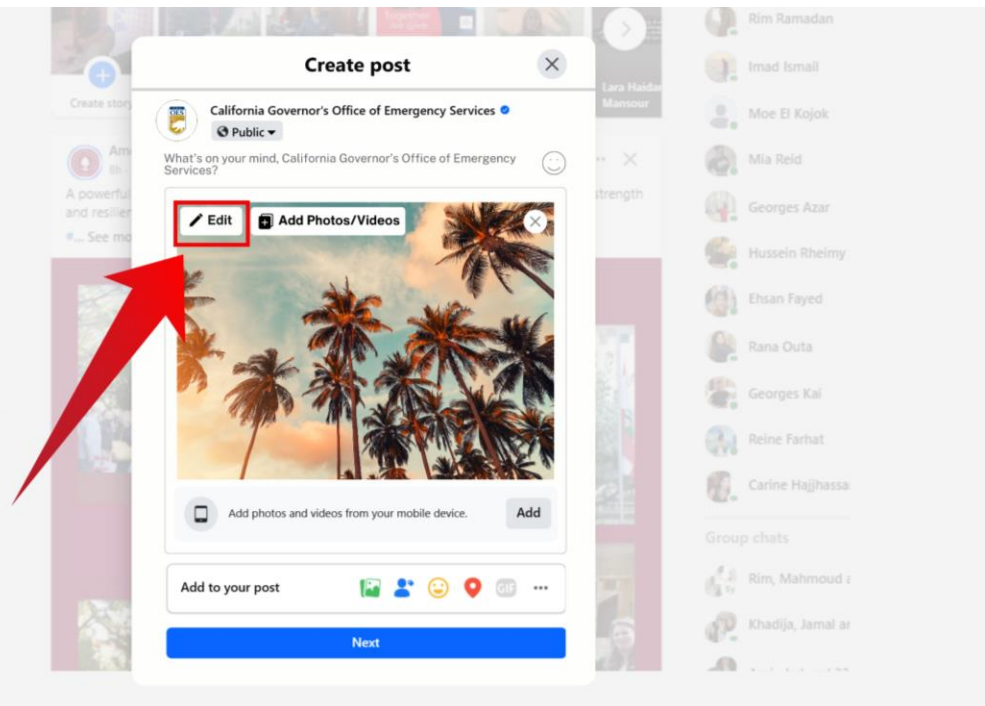
Facebook uses object recognition technology to provide visual descriptions of photos for people with visual disabilities. However, these descriptions are often inaccurate or lack detail, requiring you to replace them with more accurate and descriptive alternative text for the photo.

Using Alt Text on Facebook via a web Browser

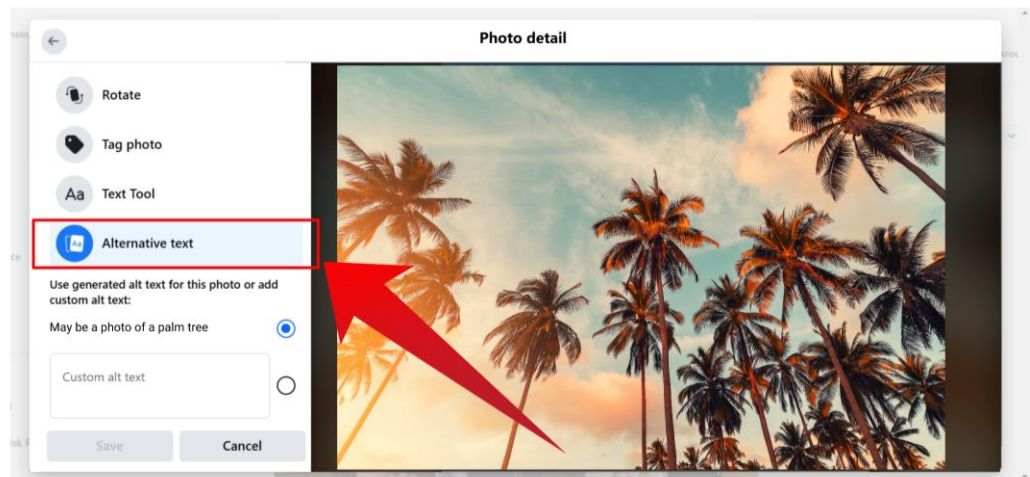
Step 1: Click **Photo/Video** at the top of your Feed and select the photo you want to add.



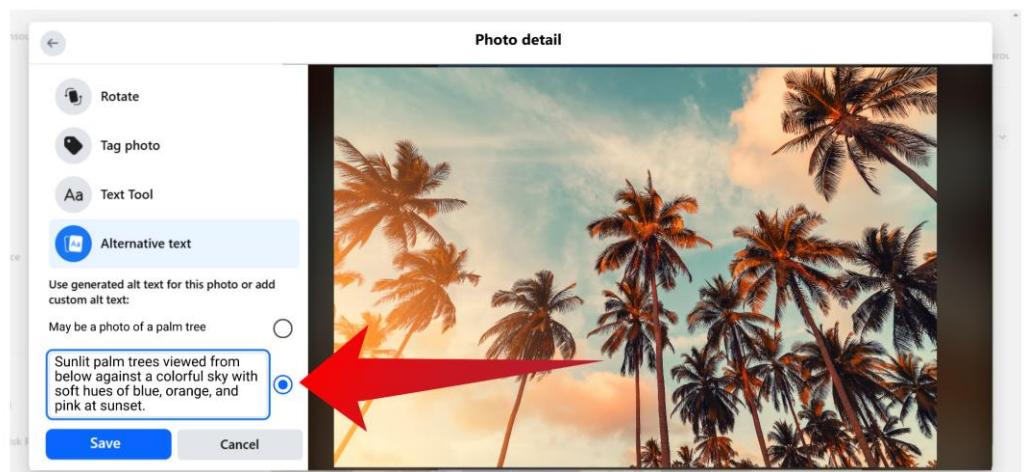
Step 2: Hover over the photo and click **Edit**.



Step 3: Click **Alternative text** in the menu on the left. The automatically generated text will be automatically selected for you on the left of your photo.



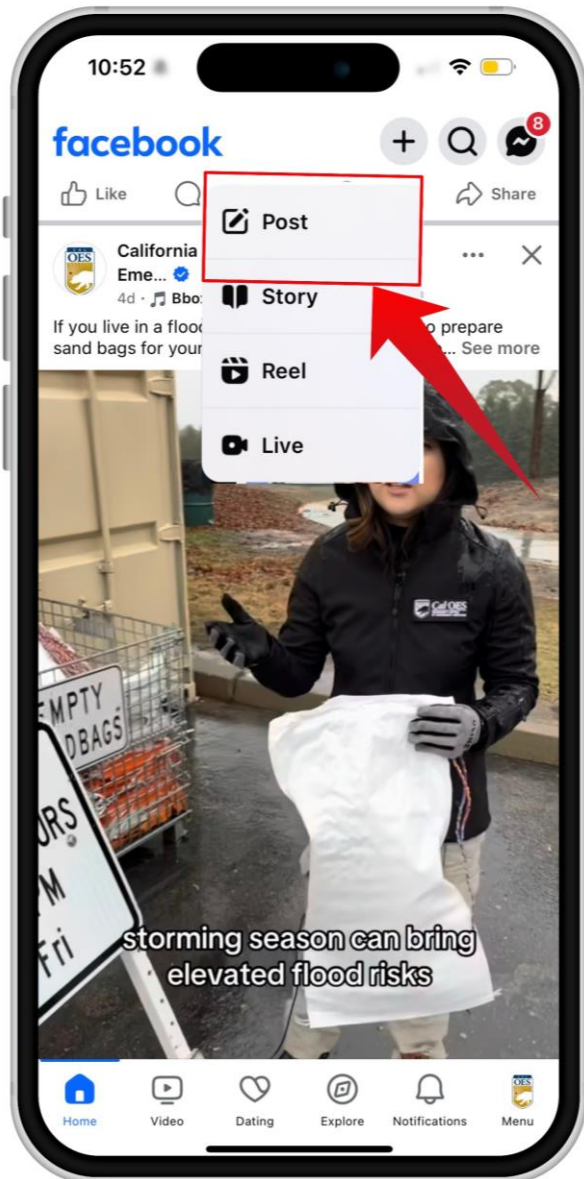
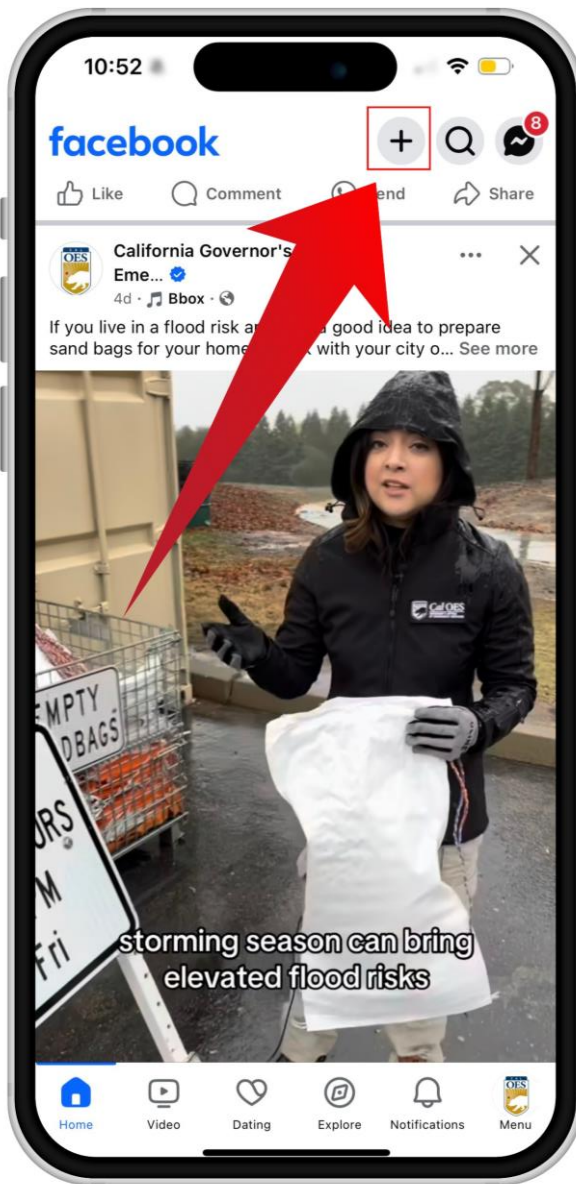
Step 4: Select **Custom alt text** to customize your description of the photo.



Using Alt Text on Facebook via the App

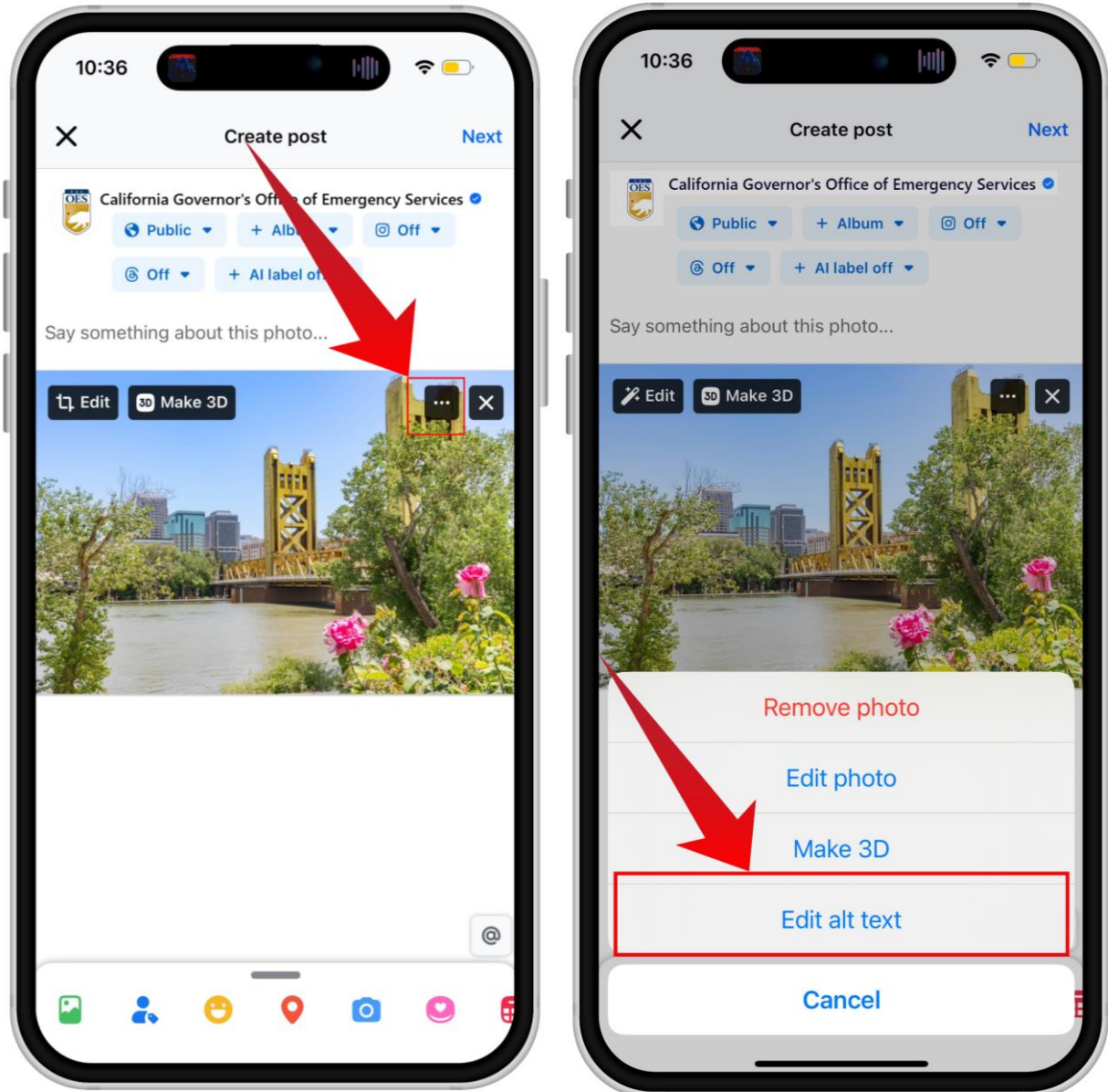
Step 1: Click on the **plus (+) sign** at the top right corner, then click **Post**.

facebook



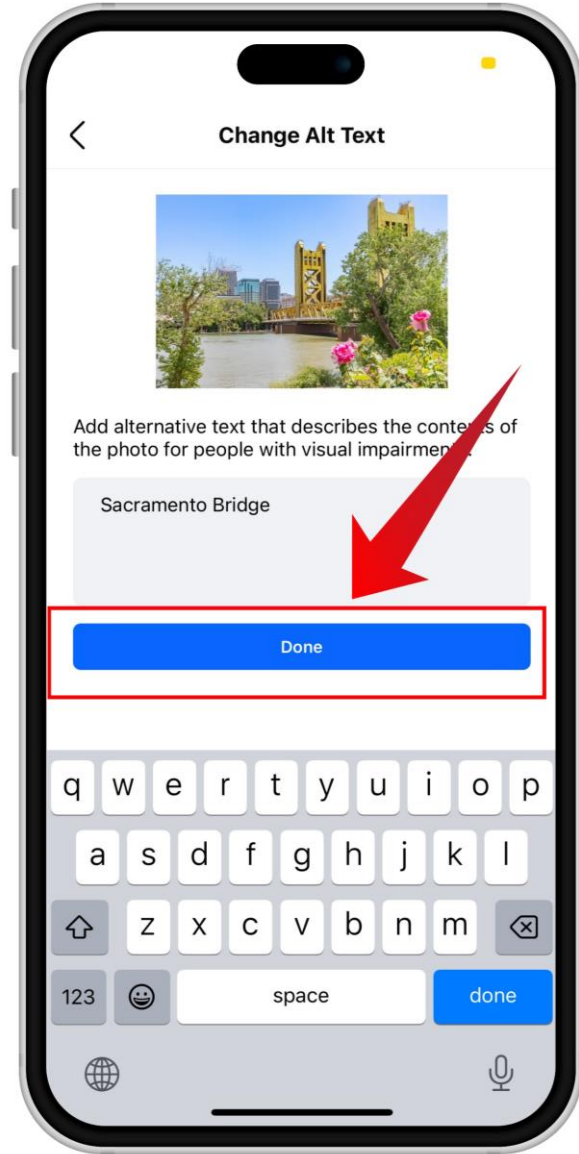
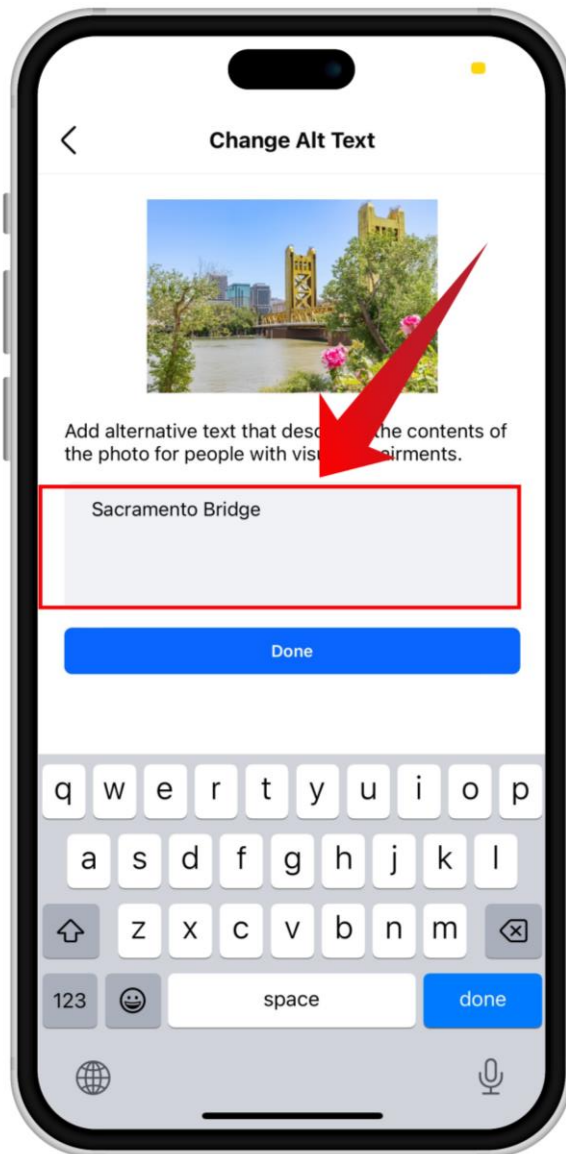
Step 2: Click the three-dot menu in the top right of the image. Then select **Edit alt text**.

facebook



Step 3: Add your image description and click **Done** to continue editing your post.

facebook



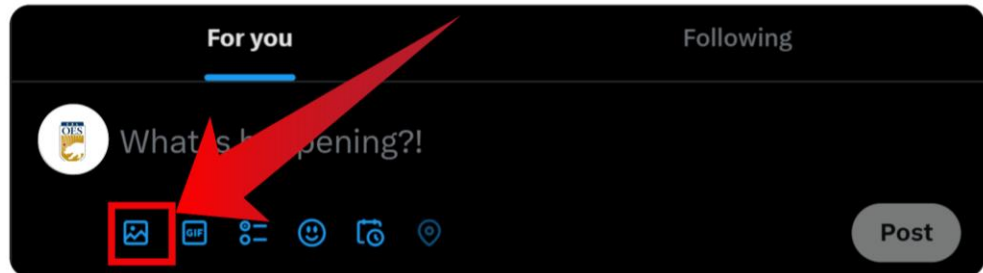
X (Formerly Known as Twitter)

Using Alt Text on X via a web Browser

Step 1: Create a tweet and add an image.



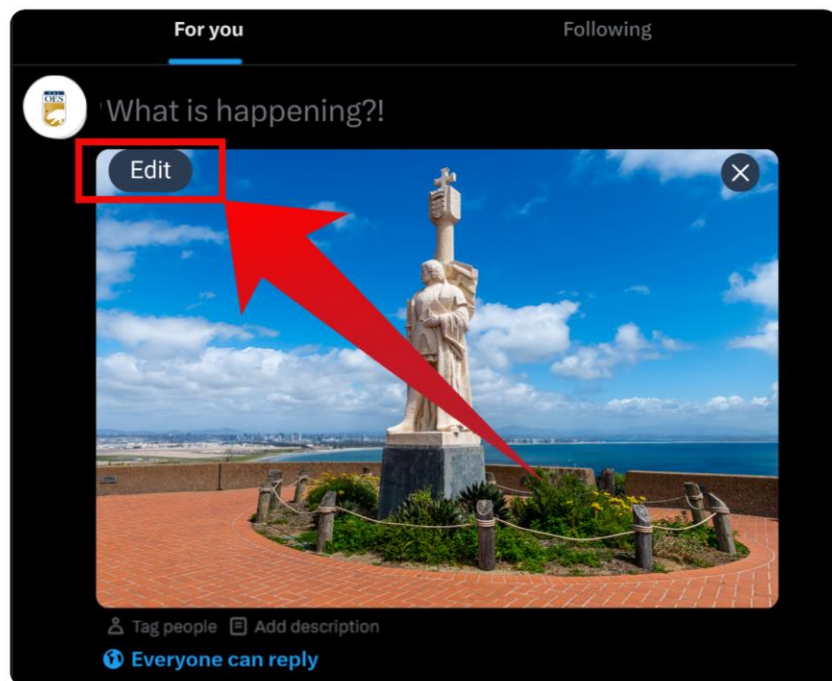
Browser Version



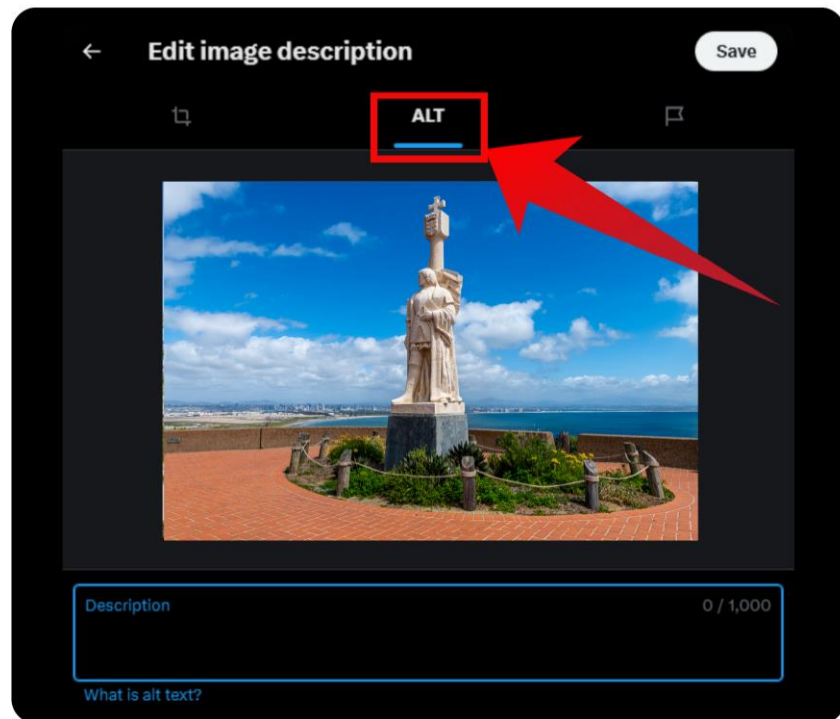
Step 2: Click on **Edit**.



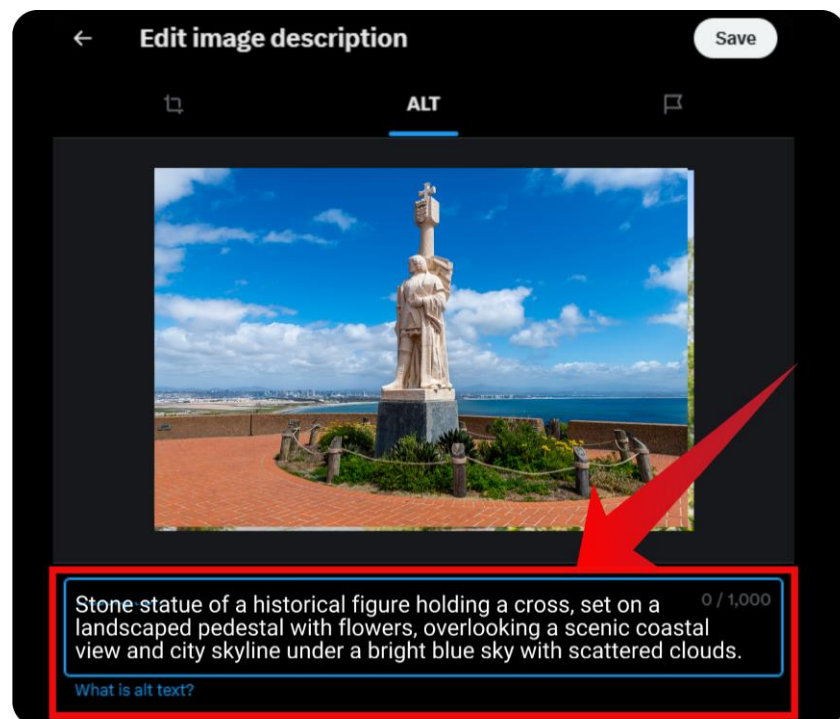
Browser Version



Step 3: Click on **ALT**.



Step 4: Add your photo description in the description box.



Step 5: Click on **Save**.

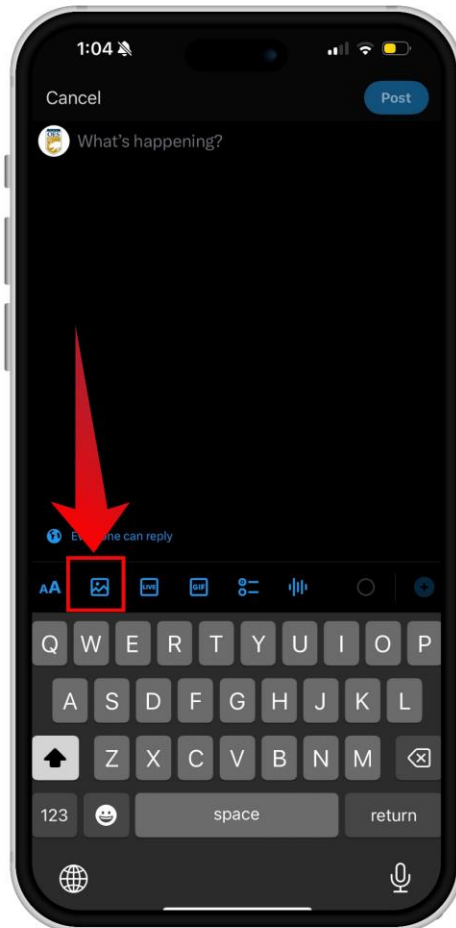


Browser Version

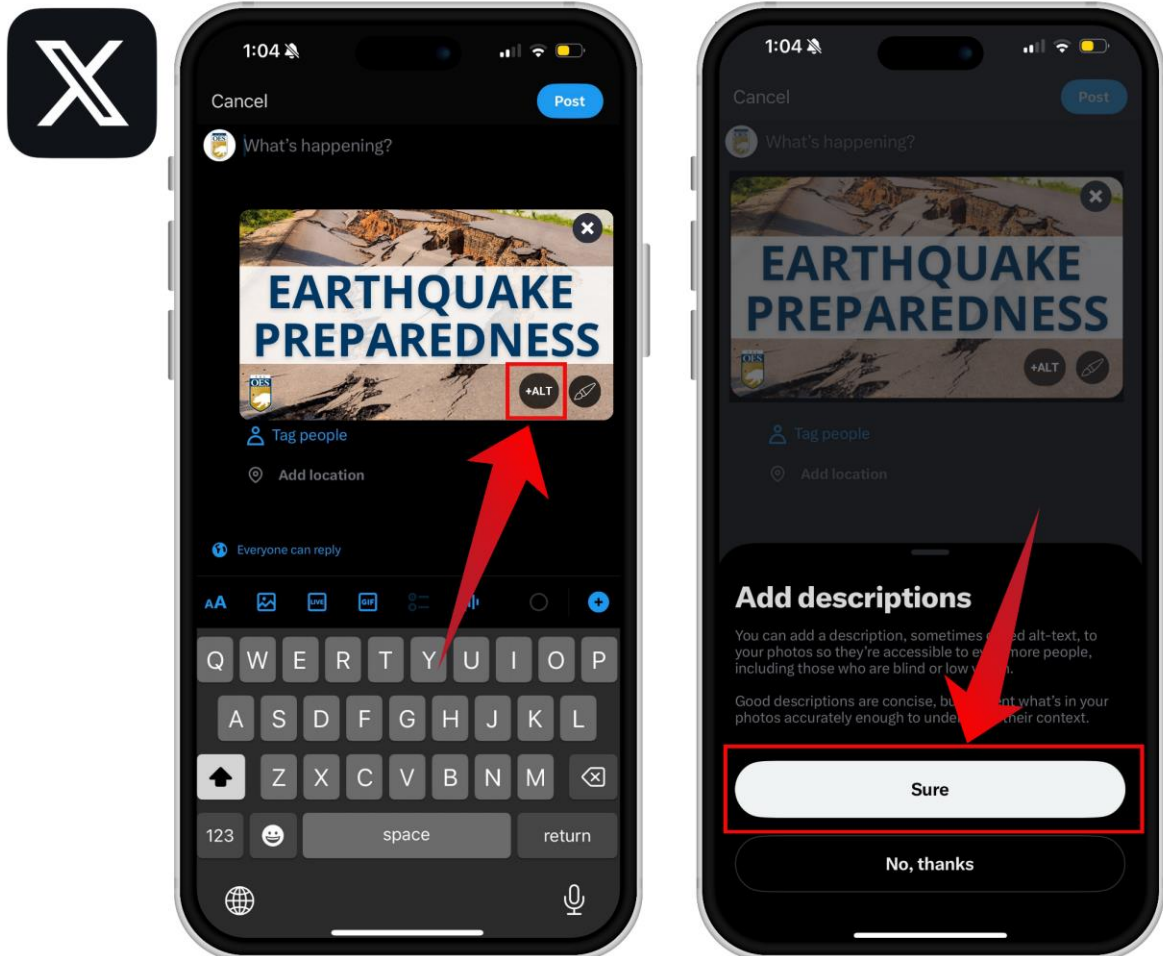


Using Alt Text on X via the App

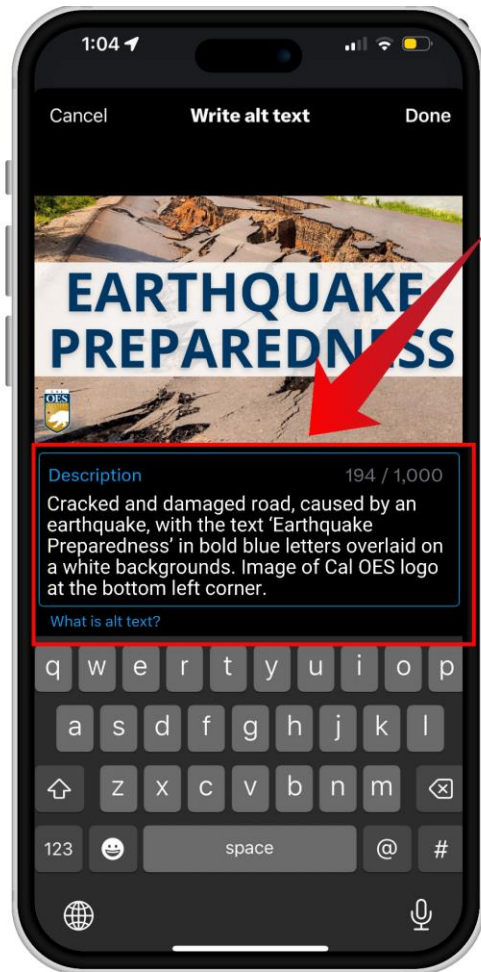
Step 1: Click on the **plus (+)** sign and the **image icon** to add a photo.



Step 2: Click **+ALT**, then click on **Sure** to add your description.



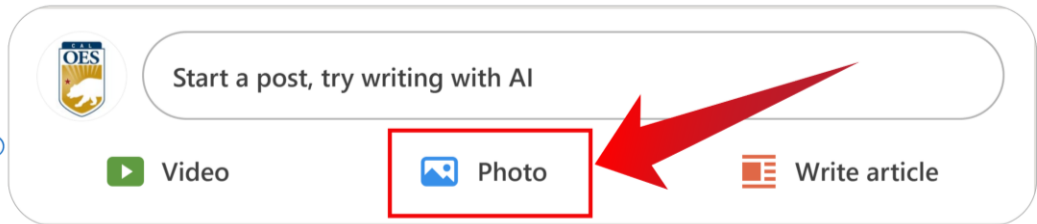
Step 3: Add your image description and click **Done**.



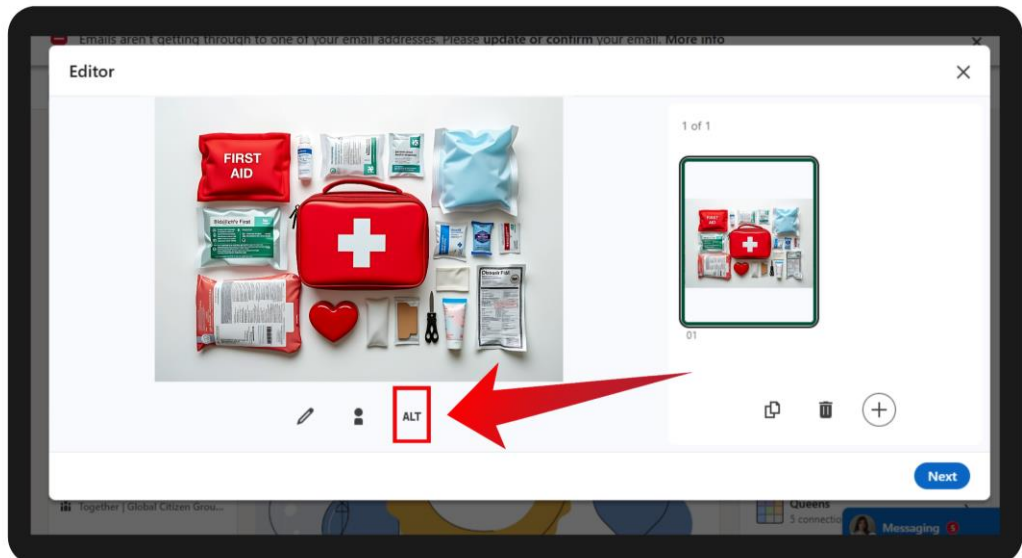
LINKEDIN

Using Alt Text on LinkedIn via a web Browser

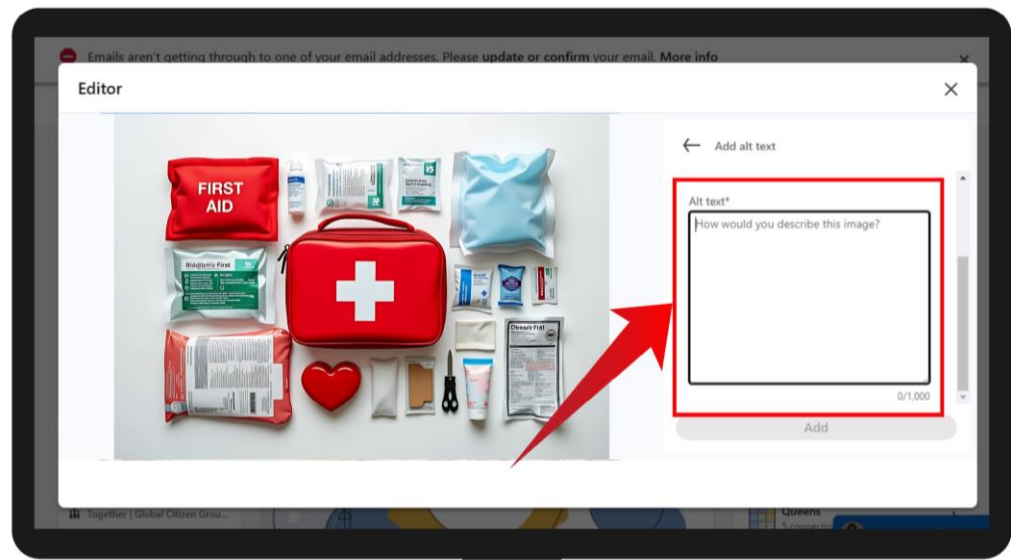
Step 1: Click on **Photo** to create a post.



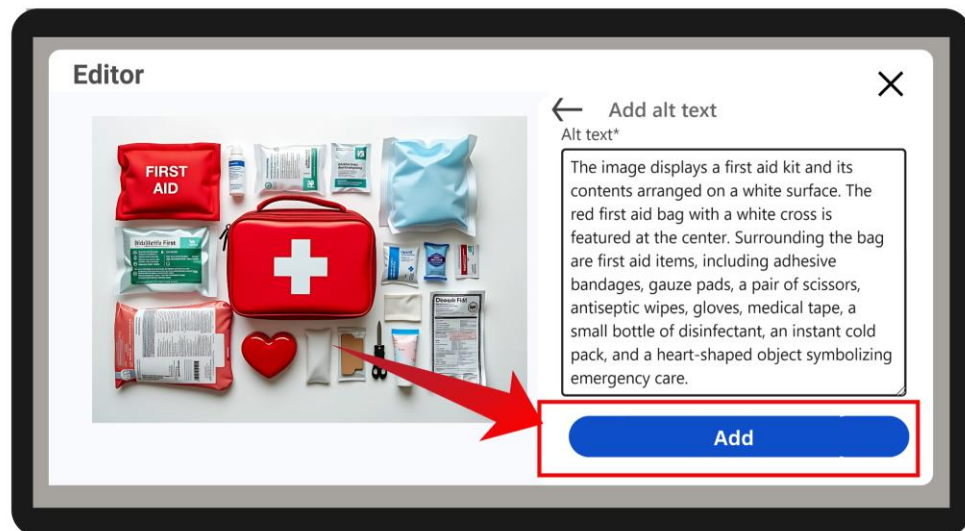
Step 2: Click on **ALT** to add your text description.



Step 3: Write your **alt text description** in the box.

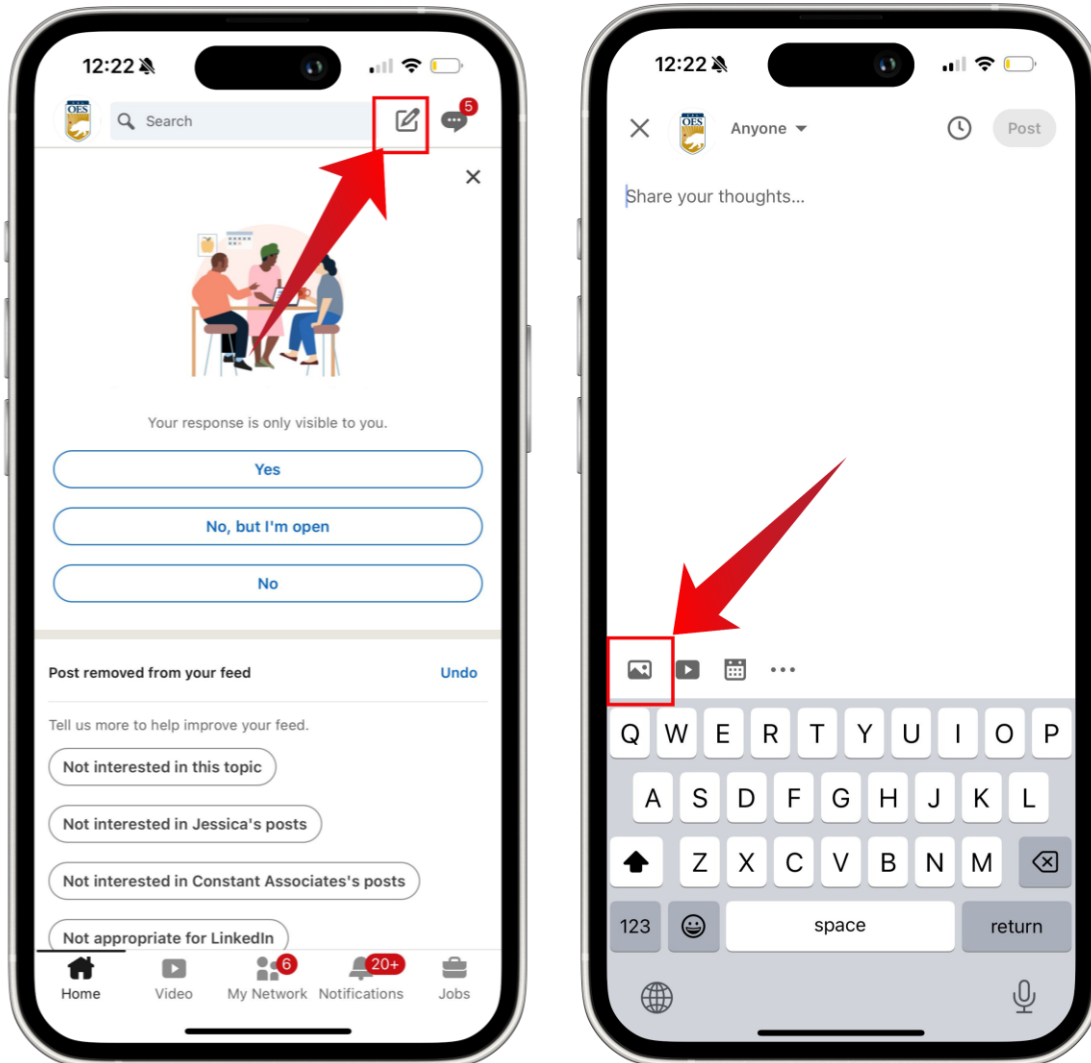


Step 4: Click **Add**.

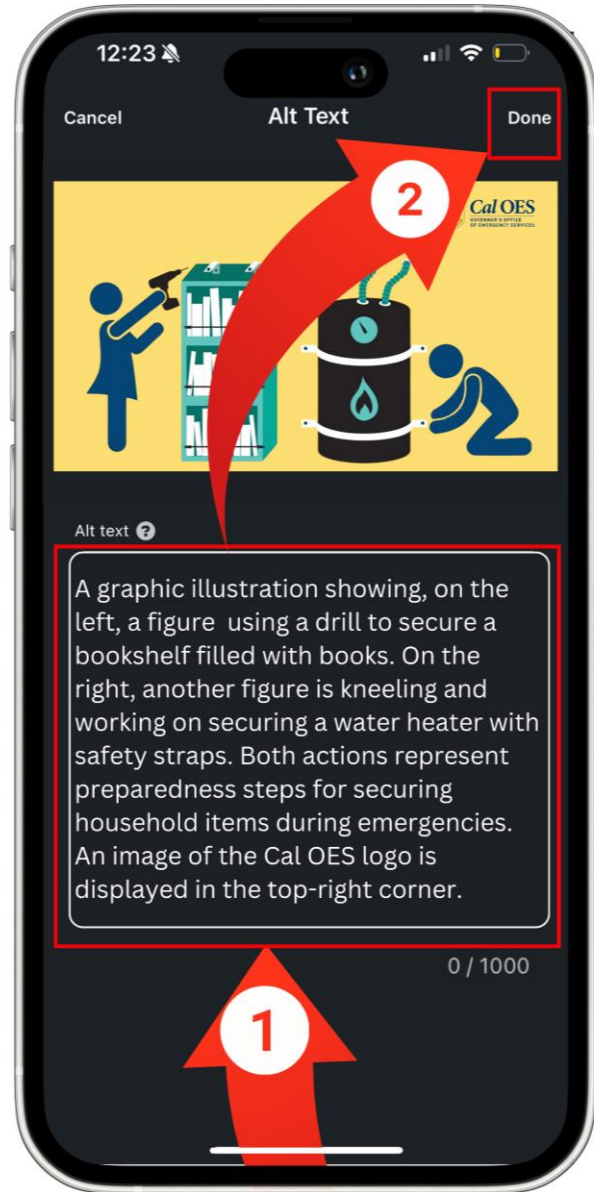
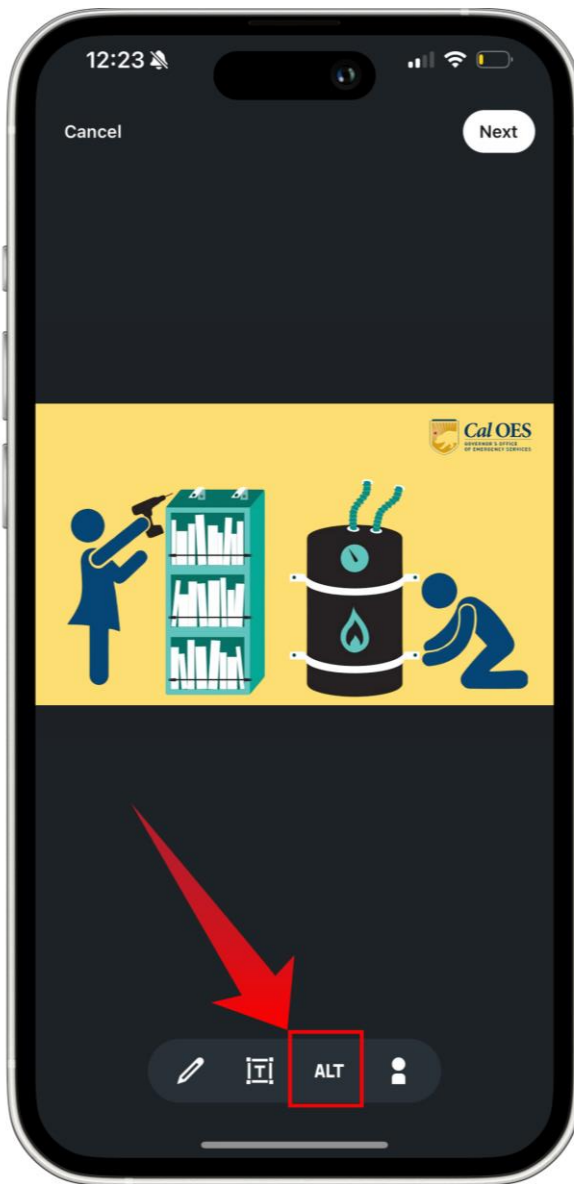


Using Alt Text on LinkedIn via the App

Step 1: Click on the **Edit icon**, then upload your image.



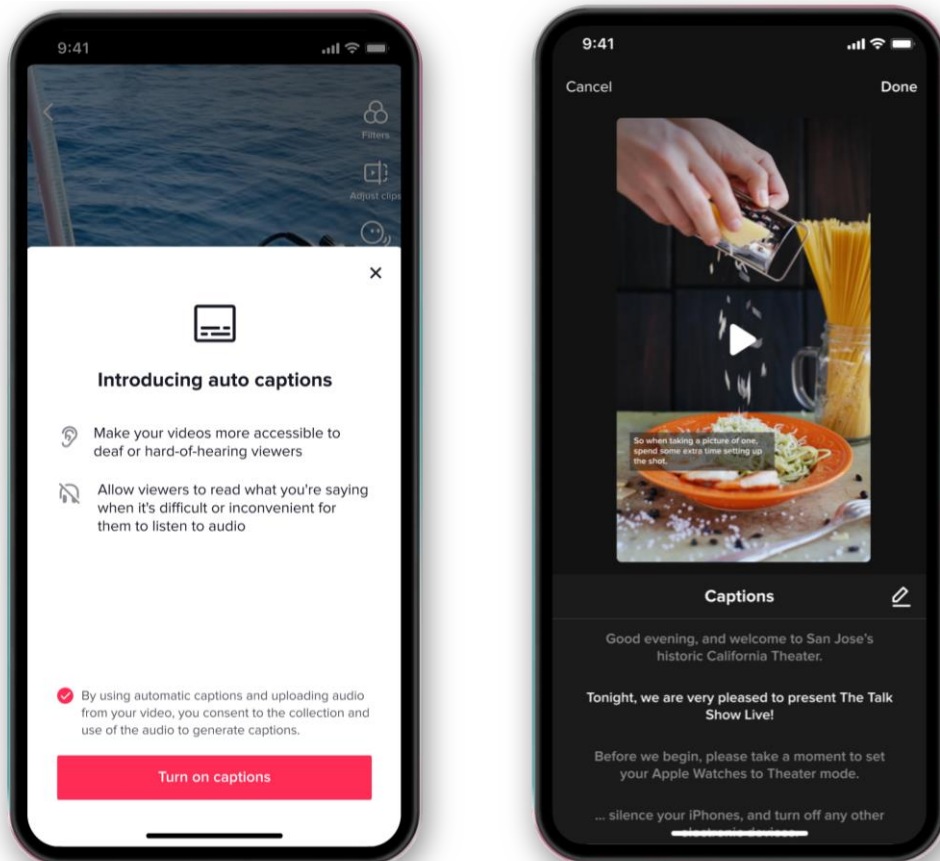
Step 2: Click on **ALT**, add your description (1), and then click **done** (2).



Using Captions on TikTok via the App

TikTok videos should include captions. Make sure to [add and edit captions](#) for TikTok videos, and, if using the auto-generated feature, make sure the captions are accurate.

Auto captions automatically generate subtitles, allowing viewers to read or listen to content. As creators make content, they can select auto captions in the editing page after they have uploaded or recorded a video. The text is automatically transcribed and displayed on their videos.



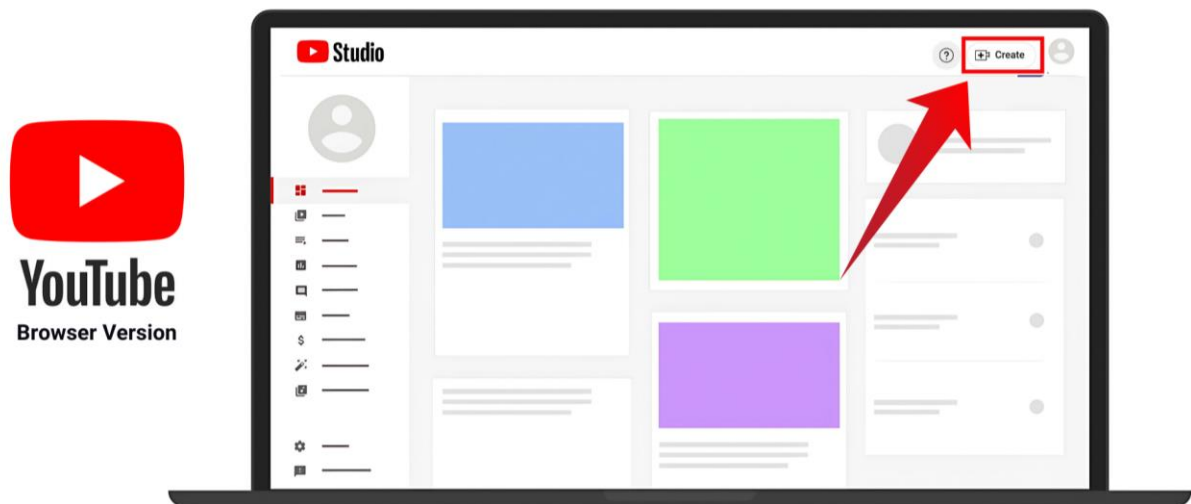
With this feature, creators can edit the text of their captions once they're generated. This feature is initially available in American English and Japanese.

YOUTUBE

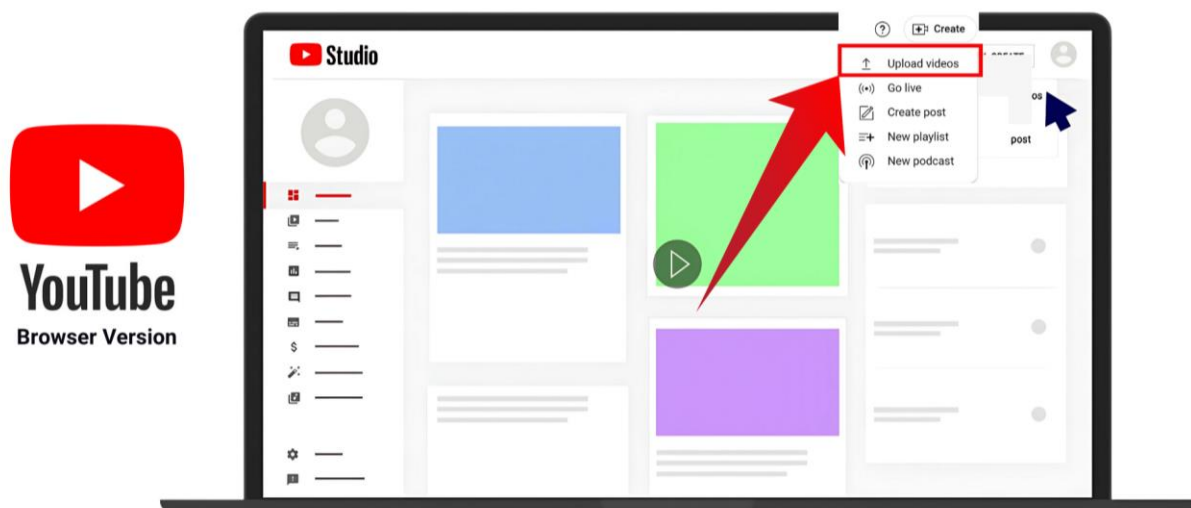
Using Captions on YouTube via a web Browser

With YouTube, captions are called Subtitles. These are generated automatically or manually from the creator's [YouTube Studio](#). Making sure to [add subtitles and captions](#) to videos benefits individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing and users who speak another language.

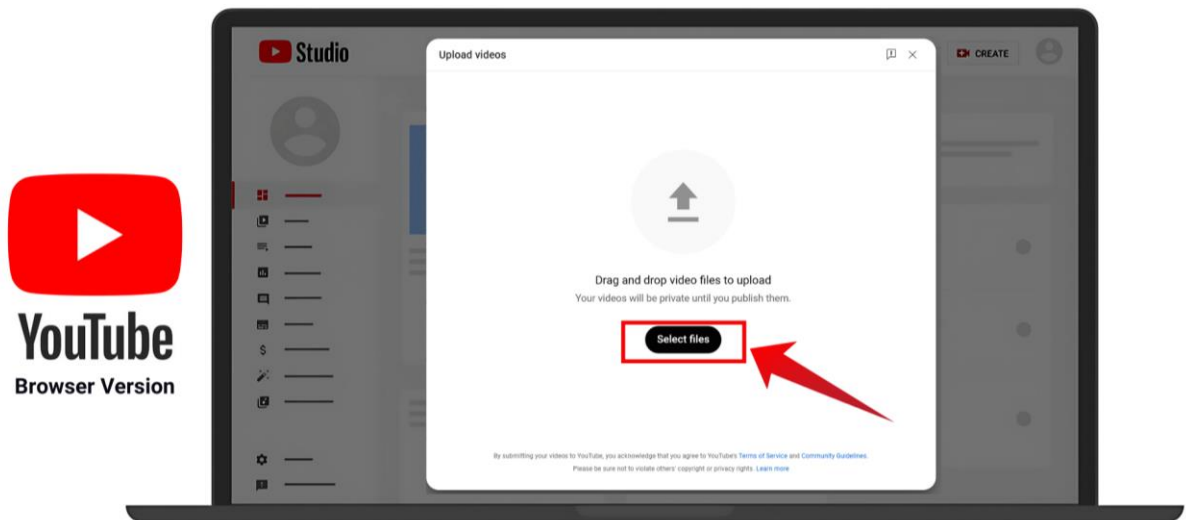
Step 1: Sign in to [YouTube Studio](#) and upload videos.



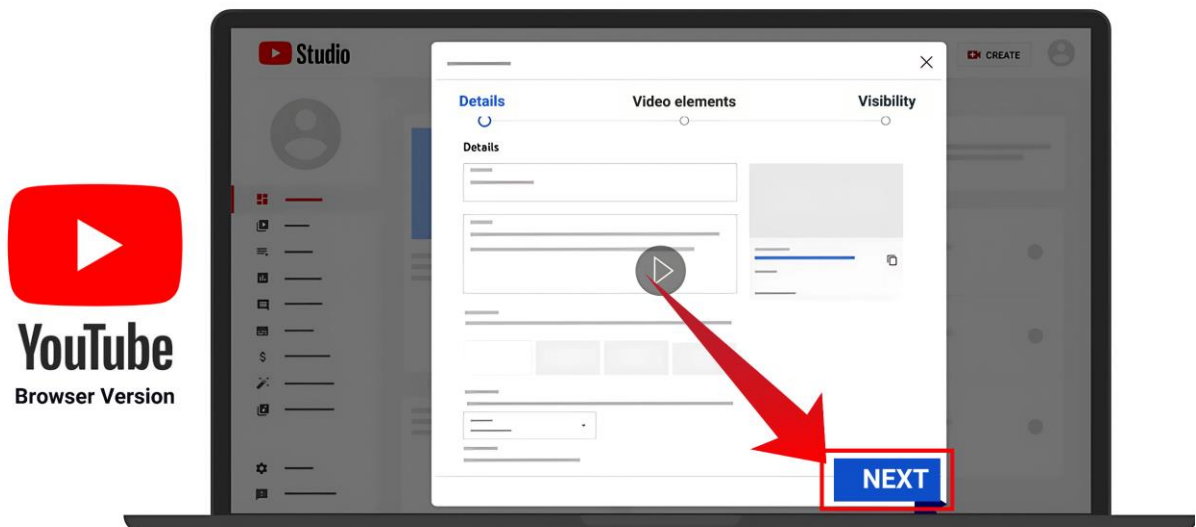
Step 2: Upload your video.



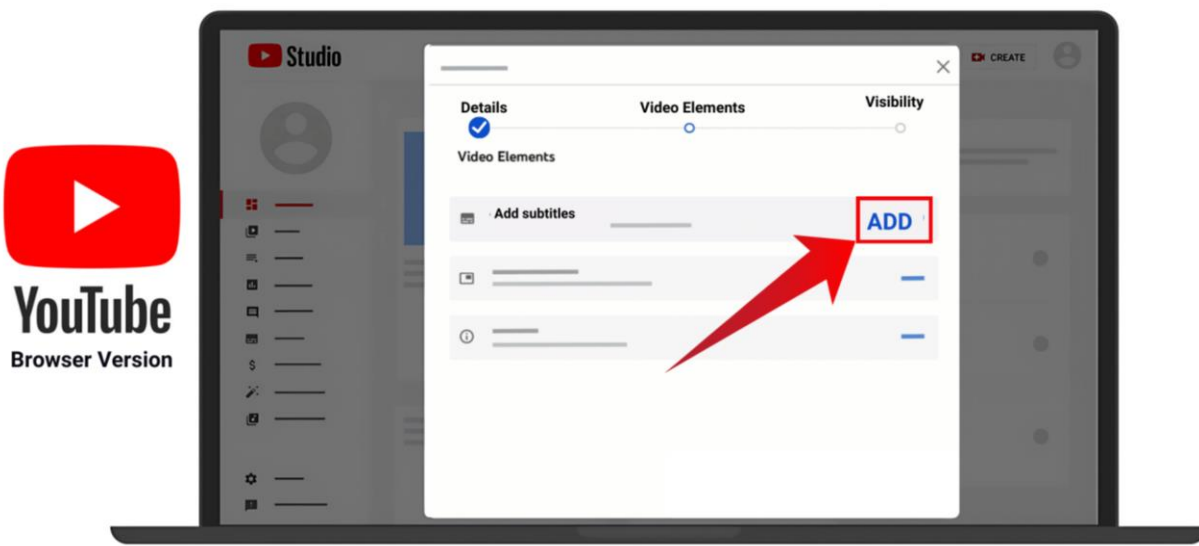
Step 3: Click on **Select files**.



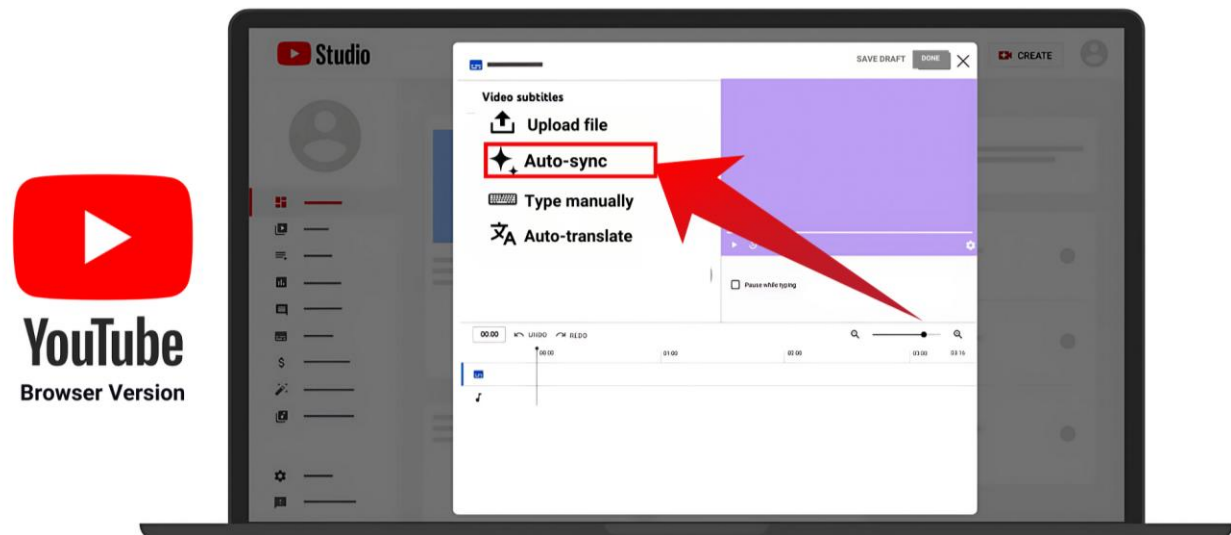
Step 4: Once your video has been uploaded, click **Next**.



Step 5: Click **Add** to add subtitles.



Step 6: Click on **Auto-sync**.



Helpful Resources

To learn more about accessibility guidelines, policies, and laws, visit the following websites:

1. **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA):** A federal law in the United States that prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities. The ADA website, www.ada.gov, offers resources and information about accessibility requirements.
2. **Disability.gov:** Disability.gov, now integrated into the U.S. Department of Labor's website, provides information on various aspects of disability, including laws and regulations related to accessibility. Visit www.dol.gov/agencies/odep for disability-related resources.
3. **Section 508:** Section 508 is part of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. It mandates that federal agencies make their electronic and information technology accessible to people with disabilities. Learn more at www.section508.gov.
4. **Web AIM:** Web AIM is a leading organization that provides resources and training on web accessibility. Their website, www.webaim.org, offers a wealth of articles, tools, and tutorials to help people understand and implement accessibility best practices.
5. **Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG):** WCAG provides a comprehensive set of guidelines for making web content accessible to people with disabilities. Visit www.w3.org/WAI/standards-guidelines/wcag/ for detailed information on WCAG standards. To learn more about additional requirements that can be applied to websites, webpages, and electronic content, visit [Understanding Conformance Requirements](#).
6. **World Wide Web Consortium (W3C):** W3C is the international standards organization for the World Wide Web. They provide resources and updates on web accessibility, including WCAG. Explore their accessibility resources at www.w3.org/WAI.

Free Online Electronic Accessibility Courses

Cal OES offers multiple free monthly online training courses to teach, educate, and train emergency managers, and community partners, on how to create accessible electronic documents.

To register for a free course, visit csti-ca.csod.com, log in or create an account, click on "**Browse Training**," and select any course listed below. Click on the drop-down arrow to the right that says, "**View Details**" and choose "**Request**" to enroll.

These classes should be taken in the order they are listed, **as each course is a prerequisite to the following one.**

Select any of the links below to view upcoming session dates and times. The courses will be taking place virtually:

- I. [How to Create Accessible Office Documents](#)
- II. [How to Create Accessible PDF Documents](#)
- III. [How to Create Accessible Forms](#)

Annex 1: Disability Integration Mandates

Federal

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 specifically requires equal access for people with disabilities. This includes but is not limited to, programs and activities conducted or funded by the federal, state, or local governments.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 requires all entities that receive federal financial assistance to effectively communicate with people who have communication disabilities, including hearing, vision, mobility, or cognitive disabilities.

Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 requires federal electronic and information technology when they develop, procure, maintain, or use electronic and informational technology to be accessible to people with disabilities. The law applies to all Federal agencies. Under Section 508 (29 U.S.C. § 794d), agencies must give employees with disabilities and members of the public access to information that is comparable to the access available to others. Government Code Section 7405 directs that state governmental entities follow Section 508 of the federal Rehabilitation Act requiring accessibility of electronic and information technology.

State

Government Code § 8593.3 (Assembly Bill (AB) 2311, Brown, Chapter 520, 2016) raised the bar for inclusive emergency management by requiring that a county, including a city and county, upon the next update of its Emergency Operations Plan (EOP), integrate access and functional needs-related considerations. Specifically, jurisdictions must indicate how they will serve the access and functional needs community by addressing several elements, including emergency communications and the integration of interpreters, translators, and assistive technology.

Whereas Government Code § 8593.3 (Assembly Bill 2311, Brown, Chapter 520, 2016) requires jurisdictions to integrate access and functional needs within their respective EOPs, Government Code § 8593.3.(c) (Assembly Bill 477, Cervantes, Chapter 218, 2019) mandates they do so by including whole community representatives in the development process used to update their plans. The law helps jurisdictions plan with people with access or functional considerations instead of planning **for** them.

Gov. Code § 11135 requires state agency and state funded programs and activities comply with the protections under the ADA and to provide full and equal access for people with disabilities to the benefits of those programs.