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Maps: How to Write a Long Description

This is the most common complex image you will come across in your work. Again, context will also help you out a lot in your description. Below are the general guidelines for how to describe a map.

- Include the Name/Title of the Map and a Description of the Legend
- It is not necessary to describe types of lines/colour-coding and images when this information can be described using the information the legend conveys.
- Aim for clarity, even if detail is sacrificed. Focus on the information that is relevant in the greater context of the book.
- Ask yourself: What is this Map telling the reader? Only describe what is necessary to convey the intended meaning of the map. This will vary.

Spatial relationships are very important in maps. The reader needs to know where they are and where they are going within the description. The most common way to break down a map is with the compass technique, but this also is dependent on context. If you have a map that has a central focus, then the clock technique might be better. You also might find it easier to use the quadrant method. Again, you may have to experiment as you are writing. Remember it has to walk the reader through the image, and be recreated based on the description alone.

Do not simply list places on a map. This removes all spatial information, and can be meaningless to the reader. A list is often a good way to organize complex images, but never simply list the pieces or labels in the image. When introducing a list, include where you are starting and in what direction the list goes (top to bottom, left to right, counterclockwise, etc.)

In your list can include the following:

- The name of the item/part/location you are describing
- The shape (not needed for maps)
- The location
- Proximity (i.e. spatial relationship to other items/parts/locations in the image)
- Colour (for science images)



Sometimes a meaningful list works, and other times paragraph breaks are enough. You will have to play with the modalities to see what works in the context of your make. The most important thing to remember is word choice and including spatial relationships. The reader should be able to move through the map with the description and know where they are going.

See examples on [Samples of Alt Text: Maps](#)

More tips on [writing text descriptions for maps](#).

We also recommend checking out the DAISY webinars on the [Resources page](#).



Go to [Writing Tip: Using Point Form Technique](#) for a breakdown on how you can start the writing process



If you have any questions, post your question on the [Alt-Text Q&A](#)

[Navigate Back to Complex Images and Long Descriptions](#)

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