**Best Web Practices for Images**

We want to use <img> tags for background images as little as possible because Google will interpret that as inaccessible and low-quality. Technically, background images are allowed an empty alt attribute, but we cannot be sure that Google will correctly assess an image as background, especially if there are many images without alt text. Also, a link must either have text content or an included <img> which has alt text, for accessibility.

**Useful methods**

* Use an a element with the ir (image replacement) class, and another class to add a background-image. The ir class makes the text not visible to the eye, yet visible to screenreaders.
  + Example taken from site logo in header of ivygroup.com
  + HTML: <h1 class="site-title ir">The Ivy Group</h1>
  + CSS:

.ir { display: block; border: 0; text-indent: -999em; overflow: hidden; background-color: transparent; background-repeat: no-repeat; text-align: left; direction: ltr;}

.site-title { background: transparent url("/wp-content/themes/ivy2015/img/header-sprite.png") no-repeat scroll -5px -73px; height: 78px; width: 175px; …}

* Another example of the above with a linked image:
  + Example taken from search icon in header of ivygroup.com
  + HTML: <a class="ir search\_opener" href="#" onclick="return false;">Search</a>
  + CSS:

.ir { display: block; border: 0; text-indent: -999em; overflow: hidden; background-color: transparent; background-repeat: no-repeat; text-align: left; direction: ltr;}

.search\_opener { background: url("/wp-content/themes/ivy2015/img/global-sprite.png") no-repeat scroll -304px -146px transparent; display: inline-block; height: 27px; width: 20px; …}

* Attach an image as a background element to an associated container/element.
  + Example taken from the flourish under the slideshow on http://chilesfamilyorchards.com/orchards/chiles-peach-orchard/
  + HTML: <div id="features\_section">… </div>
  + CSS (positions the background image at the top center of the container):

#features\_section { background: rgba(0, 0, 0, 0) url("/wp-content/themes/spartan/images/Visit-flourish.png") no-repeat scroll center 0px; margin-left: auto; margin-right: auto; margin-top: 0; max-width: 1220px; overflow: auto; padding-bottom: 65px; padding-top: 41px; width: 100%;}

* Attach an image as a background element to the before or after selector of a container/element.
  + This works similar to the above, but is better to use if you find that parts of the sprite are showing that should not.
  + Example taken from the social icons in the Connect section of http://www.dslcc.edu/
  + HTML: <a href="http://www.facebook.com/dslcc.edu" title="Like us on Facebook. (Opens a new window)" tabindex="0" target="\_blank">LIKE</a>
  + CSS:

#connect\_section .connection a:before { background: url("/wp-content/themes/spartan/images/social-icons-goodasgold.png") repeat scroll -18px -335px transparent; content: ""; float: left; height: 33px; margin: -10px 7px 5px 0; width: 32px;}

* Use the obscure class. (This is not necessarily for images.) This will also make the text not visible to the eye, yet visible to screenreaders. This is useful for items necessary for accessibility, but sometimes ugly, like legend or label elements in forms:
  + Example taken from search form in header of ivygroup.com
  + HTML: <legend class="obscure">Search Form:</legend>
  + CSS:

.obscure { position: absolute !important; clip: rect(1px 1px 1px 1px); clip: rect(1px, 1px, 1px, 1px);}

* Styling an hr. If syntactically, an image will be used as an hr, it is more appropriate to create an hr and style it, than to use an <img> or another element merely visually as an hr.
  + Example taken from the squiggly line hr in homepage of ivygroup.com
  + HTML: <div class="hr"><hr></div>
  + CSS:

.home div.hr { background: transparent url("/wp-content/themes/ivy2015/img/global-sprite.png") no-repeat scroll -4px -77px; height: 15px; margin: 63px auto 34px; padding: 14px 0; width: 138px;}

.home div.hr hr {display: none} *Or, instead of this, put class=”obscure” on the hr, which would actually be better!*

**Regarding alt text**

Even when you don’t know what the alt text will be, it is the programmer’s responsibility to enforce best web practices as much as possible. Therefore, for <img> tags which are truly not background and require alt text, he must request it. Image tags which are created through content-management must be programmed so as to create alt text that comes from the Wordpress Alternative Text field.

**Regarding Sprites**

Try to put as many global image elements as possible in 1 sprite, to save load time.