

# Universal Design in a Nutshell

## Creating Accessible Images

Images in digital content must be accessible, meaning that people with visual impairments or learning disabilities are provided with alternative ways to understand the images. For example, clarifying or descriptive textual information can be added to an image. Fortunately, many of the tools used to create content make it easy to make images accessible.

### Three Ways to Get Started

#### 1. Use ALT tags to describe images.

An ALT tag is a descriptive label attached to an image. For people who are blind or who have low vision, screen-reading software reads aloud the description contained in the ALT tag. Microsoft Office, Google Docs, WordPress and most other content-creation tools offer simple ways to add ALT tags to images. For a variety of reasons (mostly technical), ALT tags should be less than 125 characters. If you cannot adequately describe the image in an ALT tag, also provide a long description by using the LONGDESC tag.

#### 2. Reduce or eliminate text in images.

Screen readers can't read text in an image or interpret complex visuals (e.g., equations, graphs, maps). Avoid using text in images if the text conveys meaningful content (as opposed to being strictly decorative). Additionally, use large, high-quality images to ensure accessibility for students with low vision.

#### 3. Provide a narrative version of complex visuals.

Complex visuals containing alphanumeric values are often essential to instruction. When you include a chart, equation, or similarly complex visual, craft an instructionally relevant description or explanation of the image. For example, on exams, you can carefully describe an image while still providing students the opportunity to interpret or draw conclusions from the image. In assigned readings, providing descriptions of complex visuals can help students understand them.

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Want more help with universal design?

Visit [idea.boisestate.edu](https://idea.boisestate.edu)

and contact the instructional design consultant assigned to your department.



**BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY**

INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN AND EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT



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# Making a Complex Image Accessible

Brian is a student with low vision who uses JAWS, a popular screen-reader, to read digital course content. When JAWS encounters an image with an ALT tag, it reads the description of the image to Brian, helping him understand the visual content even though he cannot see it. Similarly, Sara has a learning disability and uses VoiceOver on her iPad to supplement visual information with verbal narration. VoiceOver also reads aloud the ALT tag description.

How can you help Brian and Sara make sense of these pie charts? Consider providing ALL students with a description or explanation.

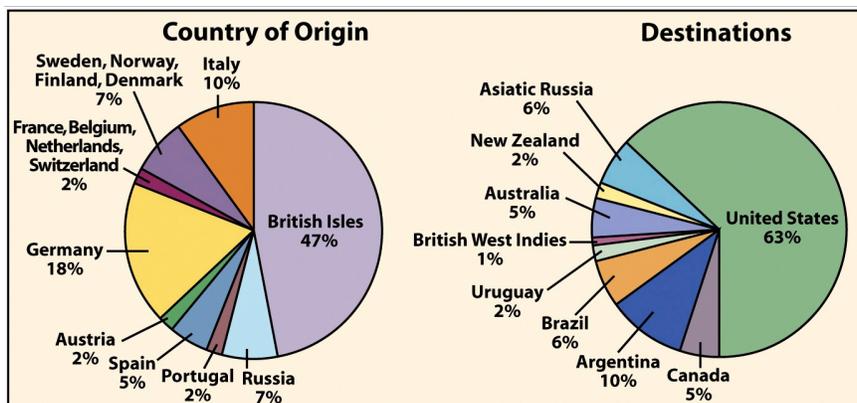


Figure 23.1  
The Making of the West, Third Edition  
Theodore Hamerow, *The Birth of New Europe: State and Society in the Nineteenth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 169.

You could provide a narrative version of the charts that **describes** what is being shown—e.g., “47% of European immigrants originated in the British Isles, 10% came from Italy, [etc.], and 63% of European immigrants went to the United States, 10% went to Argentina, [etc.]”—thus allowing students to draw their own conclusions. Alternatively, you could provide a narrative version that **explains** the significance of the charts: “Nearly half of immigrants came from the British Isles, and nearly two-thirds went to the United States.”

## Resources

For more information on making images accessible, visit “[Accessibility and Universal Design for Learning at Boise State.](https://accessibility.boisestate.edu/)” (<https://accessibility.boisestate.edu/>)

Find more tips on image accessibility at [WebAIM](https://webaim.org/techniques/images/) (Web Accessibility in Mind). (<https://webaim.org/techniques/images/>)

View a video tutorial titled “[How to Make Graphs, Charts and Maps Accessible.](http://bit.ly/2xSBMhA)” (<http://bit.ly/2xSBMhA>)

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