

Alt Text

We ask that you provide us with alt text for each illustration (images, maps, graphs and diagrams) in your book. It is not necessary to provide alt text for tables or music examples. Please include the alt text alongside the captions for the illustrations. The captions and alt text should be provided as a separate list or included within the manuscript where the image needs to be located.

What is Alt Text?

'Alt text' is a contraction of 'alternative text'. It is a short description of the illustration that will be read out by the screen readers of visually impaired eBook users. Alt text should be as short as possible (roughly the length of a tweet, 140 characters, and ideally never more than 250 characters) as some screen readers have a character limit that prevents longer descriptions being read aloud in their entirety. It should not repeat information given in the caption or in the surrounding text but should focus on describing the important visual elements of the image that would otherwise be missed by a visually impaired reader.

There are some good examples of how the alt text should differ from the caption here:



Caption

Putting his head in the British Lion's Mouth. Political cartoon by Thomas Nast, Harper's Weekly, 9 March 1872, p. 200.

Alt text

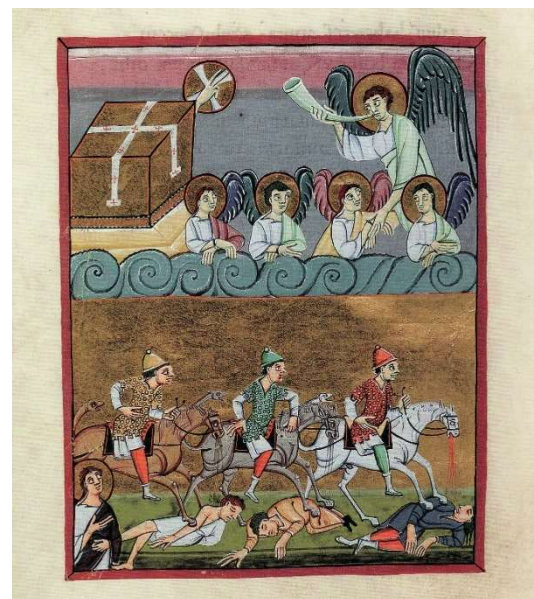
A portly man holding papers stating that the U.S. sold arms to France puts his head in the gaping mouth of a lion. In his pocket are papers on Alabama's claims against Great Britain. Carl Schurz looks on anxiously behind.

Caption

Illumination of the sixth trumpet blast in the Revelation of John from the Bamberg Apocalypse, circa 1010. Staatsbibliothek Bamberg Msc.Bibl.140, fol. 24v.

Alt text

An angel holds John's hand as the other Evangelists watch. Below them, run three horses spewing liquid, their riders wearing red, green and yellow. The horses' tails are snakes and they trample over three corpses. Another John looks on from the bottom corner looking up at his counterpart.

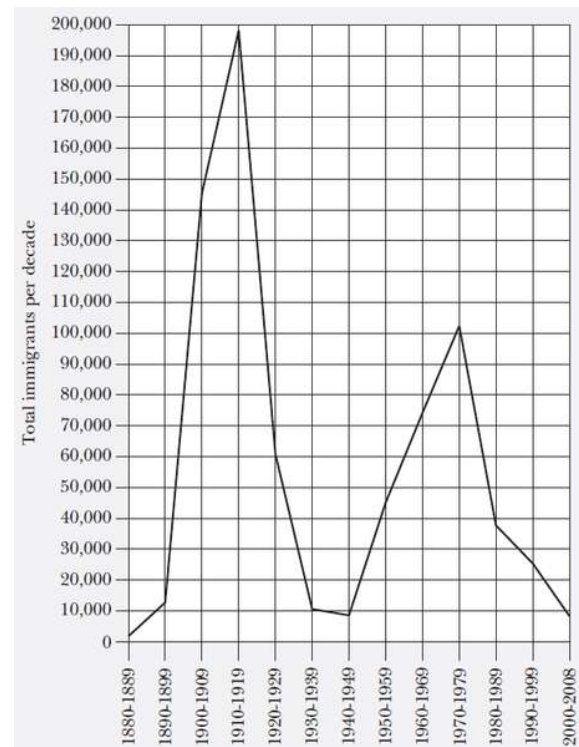


Caption

Immigration from Greece 1880–2008.

Alt text

Line graph showing the total number of immigrants entering per decade into the USA. Numbers increase steeply from 1880–1919, peaking between 1910–1919 at 199,000. A steep decline follows for several decades, with numbers at their lowest (8,500) between 1940–1949. Numbers continue to rise from the 1950s until the 70s, reaching 102,000 in 1970–1979, before declining until 2008.



Tips for Writing Good Alt Text:

1. Describe the image as specifically as possible: As mentioned above, alt text should not repeat information already given in the text or caption, nor should it be discursive and include more information than what is simply visible on-page.
2. Prioritise: aim to include the most important information at the beginning.
3. Be as concise as possible: Please note that it is not necessary to begin the alt text with ‘image of’, ‘photograph of’ etc. A screen reader will recognise the file as an image and let the reader know for you.
4. Writing alt text for data visualisations (charts/graphs and diagrams): You probably won’t be able to write text that conveys the entire meaning of a chart. Instead, focus on the following: 1) chart type e.g. line graph; 2) type of data included in the chart – the y and x axis labels may help with this; 3) general trends and maximum and minimum values.
5. Consider context: The alt text used for an image could vary significantly depending on how it is used. We recommend this article from WebAIM (<https://webaim.org/techniques/alttext/>) as a resource that clearly explains how to understand context in order to write appropriate alt text for a specific image.