

WRITING ALTERNATIVE TEXT DESCRIPTIONS

As a publicly funded institution, Nordicom is required to meet EU's Web Accessibility Directive (EUR-Lex, 2016). It is also in line with our own mission to impart science-based knowledge about media and communication to decision-makers, professional groups, and citizens in the Nordic countries and internationally. Part of this effort is to make all aspects of our publications accessible, in order to allow "everyone, including people with disabilities, to perceive, understand, navigate and interact with" the knowledge we seek to disseminate (European Commission, 2016).

As an author, your role in this effort is to provide alternative text descriptions (alt text) for all figures you submit for publication at Nordicom.

Here are some things to keep in mind before you get started:

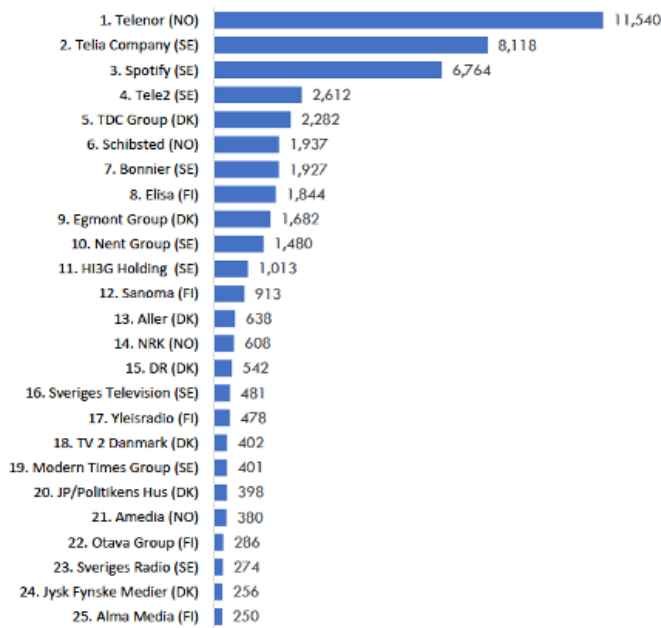
- First, establish your motivation for including the figure: Why is it meaningful? Does it illustrate or highlight something that cannot be described in the text? If it is purely illustrative, then it should not be included.
- Do not repeat the header, comments, or surrounding text. Imagine someone is reading the article to you: what would you want to hear when they get to the figure?
- Keep the text as short as possible – preferably one sentence.
- Don't use symbols, such as & – spell out the word.

The following formula is a simple and straightforward place to start (Cesal, 2020):

"Type of figure of data type or what's shown where reason for including figure"

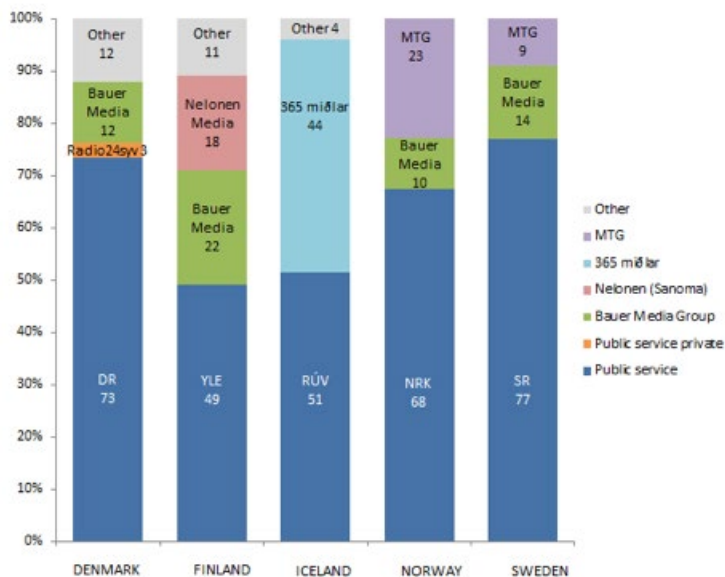
Examples

Figure 1 The 25 largest media companies in the Nordic region by revenue, 2019 (EUR million)



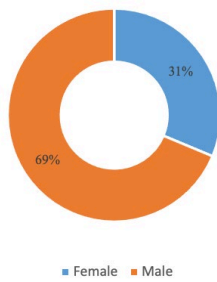
Alt text: Bar graph of 25 largest Nordic media companies where Telenor, Telia Company, and Spotify dominate the other 22

Figure 2 Largest radio companies by audience shares, 2016 (per cent)



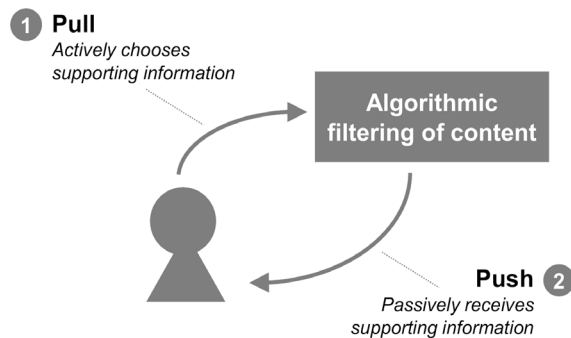
Alt text: Stacked bar graph of radio audience shares where public service dominates

Figure 3 Female representation in Canadian news media



Alt text: Donut chart of the male-to-female representation ratio where men dominate 2-to-1

Figure 4 More of the same: The self-reinforcing spiral of how a filter bubble emerges



Alt text: Diagram of filter bubble creation illustrating the push-pull cycle of algorithmic filtering

References and further reading

- Cesal, A. (2020, July 23). *Writing alt text for data visualization*. Nightengale.
<https://medium.com/nightingale/writing-alt-text-for-data-visualization-2a218ef43f81>
- European Commission. (2016). *Shaping Europe's digital future: Web accessibility*.
<https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/web-accessibility>
- EUR-Lex. (2016). Directive (EU) 2016/2102 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 October 2016 on the accessibility of the websites and mobile applications of public sector bodies. *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 327/1.
<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2016/2102/oj>
- Schepers, D. (2020, May 21). Why accessibility is at the heart of data visualization. Nightingale.
<https://medium.com/nightingale/accessibility-is-at-the-heart-of-data-visualization-64a38d6c505b>