

Joy Bower

831-657-0786

Writing Sample: Documentation Analysis

joy.bower@ymail.com

Audience: The audience for this visual analysis is composed of technical communication managers, technical communicators, web and graphic designers, and documentation illustrators. Their level of experience in the design and layout of effective, usable printed documentation ranges between intermediate and expert. This visual analysis is intended to provide guidance for the improvement of future documentation.

Canon PowerShot SD770 IS Camera User Guide Visual Analysis

Rhetorical Situation

Audience

The audience for this manual is the consumer buyer of point and shoot digital cameras, whose level of technical knowledge ranges from novice to advanced. The audience has sufficient income to spend two hundred dollars on a camera. Audience ages range from preteen to elderly. They are likely to have functional vision, adequate use of hands and arms, and may speak any language.

Purpose

The manual's purpose is to teach the owner how to use this camera to take photographs and video, transfer video and image files to a computer, print and erase photos, and troubleshoot problems.

Context

The owner is likely to read the manual before and after using the camera, and while taking photos anywhere, in any situation.

Visual Language

Font types and sizes

Text is set in a Sans Serif font, using bold, Roman, and italic styles. Section, topic, and instruction headings are bold. Body text is Roman. Words emphasized within body text are italicized. Illustration labels are Roman. Headings are larger than body text and follow a size hierarchy. The manual title is largest, followed by section headings, subsection headings, and individual instruction headings. Body text size is legible. Text within tables is slightly smaller than body text, and illustration labels are smallest. Body and table text leading (vertical space between lines of text) provide insufficient white space for easy readability.

Document structure

The front section includes a list of package contents and the table of contents. The rear section includes two appendices and an index. The camera instructions are divided into two sections: *Getting Started*, and *Learning*

More. Sections begin with distinctive title pages. Pages in the *Getting Started* Section are further delineated by a wide, dark sidebar along the outside edge of each page with the section name reversed out in bold, white text. The *Learning More* Section is divided into subsections by task. Subsections begin with a bold title bar. Tasks are broken into numbered or bulleted steps that include bold headings, illustrations, and Roman body text. Tasks instructions are organized logically for the camera user. Tips are identified by a bold icon and are printed on light gray, rectangular backgrounds. Page layouts are jumbled and visually distracting. The mix of elements, sizes and styles reduces visual appeal and obscures the natural flow of information and readability.

Icons, graphics, charts, tables, graphs

There are many icons, photos, illustrations, and tables, but no charts or graphs. Most icons are illegible. This is due to their very small size and the natural spread of ink into the porous fibers of newsprint paper that obliterates fine details in the images. Photos are larger, but are illegible due to ink spread and lack of sufficient contrast. Line illustrations of the camera are clear and comprehensible. Tables are packed too solidly with text. There is insufficient white space for comfortable legibility. Tables include heavy lines, and overly large bullets and numbers that distract the reader's eye from the information. The icons, photos, illustrations and tables do not visually integrate well on the page, and thereby reduce reading ease and comprehension.

Document size

The manual size is 4" wide x 6" tall and contains 228 pages, including front and back covers.

Impact of the Visual Language

Arrangement

Individual pages have a jumbled, disorganized feel. There is no apparent logic or order to the many dissimilar line weights, paragraph and characters styles, bullet and number sizes, and horizontal and vertical alignments. The eye jumps frenetically around the page, unable to settle into a smooth flow of information from top left to bottom right. The reader must strain to focus and comprehend. Reading this manual tires the eyes and the mind.

Emphasis

The bold headings stand out clearly. However, heading visibility is significantly reduced by competition from many other strong, competing design elements. The hierarchy of meaning is buried under visual static.

Clarity

Many aspects of this manual combine to significantly decrease the reader's ease of use and comprehension of information.

Conciseness

The large number of different styles and the ragged alignment of elements result in cluttered pages

Tone

The newsprint paper, single ink color (black), and low-end visual design produce a cut-rate look and feel.

Ethos

The Canon logo lends credibility to the manual. All other design choices collectively create a low level of trust, honesty and credibility.

Conclusion

The quality of the user manual is an important contributing factor to the satisfaction of the camera buyer and will influence whether they will buy from this manufacturer in future. Canon will find it beneficial to upgrade the quality of this camera user manual.