

Visuals for Instructions (Draft)

Research shows readers learn better from words and pictures placed closely together. Use the following strategies to help your reader follow your directions:

1. Analyze your audience.
2. Select a visual type: photo, line drawing, etc. Consider whether shadows, highlights, extra details will overcomplicate a visual.
3. Choose an orientation—prefer a visual that respects the learner’s point of view. Keep the viewpoint and size consistent throughout, or explicitly indicate if either of these has changed.
4. Show the parts list (before the relevant parts start undergoing the process).
5. Determine which specific “frames” (views, specific pictures) the audience will need. In other words, don’t leave out steps that may be important for a novice. At minimum, show the action and the result.
6. Number and caption the visuals/and or steps. Or consider a modular set up: group a visual and its corresponding instruction for each step—the step functions as the caption.
7. Include guides for orienting the reader, but don’t clutter the visual. Decide whether to place the guides on or next to the visual. Use the following judiciously:
 - a. hands (drawn or photographed)
 - b. landmark labels (right, left, top, bottom, side, Area A, etc.)
 - c. part labels
 - d. arrows
 - i. direction indicators
 - ii. motion indicators
 - iii. force indicators
 - iv. attention getters
 - v. object focus or identification
8. Test instructions and visuals for usability.

(adapted from Roy, Debopriyo. *Technical Communication*. November 2006)