

Instruction Manual – Annotation

If you search the Web for “instructions,” you’ll find many excellent—and not-so-excellent—examples for inspiration or analysis. Or, when you purchase a new product, you may be able to locate product documentation on the corporate website.

Kodak Instruction Example

Kodak’s website includes instructional modules for its cameras; below is a link to a page from the online manual for the Kodak DX3600 digital camera. This page teaches the reader how to set the camera’s clock.

http://www.kodak.com/global/en/service/manuals/GLB_en_urg_00012_manual/urg00012c1s9.jhtml

Notice that the instruction set begins with a context (why setting the clock is important) and provides links to related information, such as how to display the date on video or still images.

The instruction set is only four steps long; as you know, it is important to chunk instructional information so that the processes won’t be overwhelming to the reader.

This instruction set also incorporates several functional graphic elements.

- Small images of the controls are included within the instructions.
- The proper appearance of the screen helps the reader determine when the correct controls have been selected.

The online instruction manual is well designed to emulate a paper manual.

- The reader can easily move to the next or previous step, much like flipping the pages in a printed manual.
- The reader can access the table of contents with the click of a button, or do a keyword search by clicking on Index.

A FAQ Site—Instructions With an Attitude

FAQs (compilations of Frequently Asked Questions) are a very common instructional form and are readily available on the Internet. Take a look at this FAQ site, which compiles common questions and problems associated with unzipping downloaded games.

<http://www.download.net/arcade/faq/unzipfaq.shtml>

Judging from the style in which the FAQ is written, it is apparent that both authors and audience members are young, and that they have a casual, informal attitude toward one another.

The first two sections, “About Archives” and “Types of Archives,” provide essential background information for anyone who wants to download programs from the Internet. Like the Kodak instructions, they educate the reader by providing the relevant contextual information.

The file consists of three remaining sections. Two employ a question and answer format in their main headings—“So how do I download a program?” and “I’ve got the file. What do I do with it?” The final section header echoes a complaint that might be heard from a new user of the archive: “WinZip or the self-extracting archive gives me errors!”

The instructions have several good features.

- The section headers allow the user to locate the needed information quickly.
- Individual chunks are short, clear, and written in an active, informative manner.
- The white text on dark background is easy to read on screen.
- The color-coded links are helpful for those readers who seek more in-depth information.

However, a reader who wants to print the instructions will not be able to do so directly, and the site does not include a “printer friendly” option.