

Picasa for Seniors—a book for beginners

Book: Picasa for Seniors

By Visual Steps (www.visualsteps.com)

\$22.95, 262 pp. (For Picasa v.3)

Rating: ★★ ★

Picasa for Seniors, another in Visual Steps' growing series of "For Seniors" books printed in large typeface, is a tutorial for using the program's features. As such, it is intended for novice users to read front to back for instruction more so than as a handy reference book for looking up information.

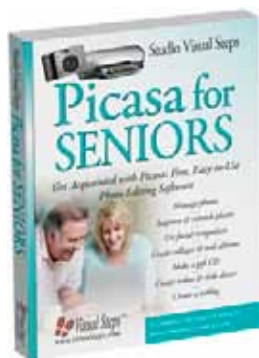
The manual contains excellent tips, explanations, extra background information, etc. It also includes digital photos you can download to use as you go through the manual, which is handy for first-time users who have not yet loaded their own photos, or who don't want to play with their own photos.

The general format presents a detailed step-by-step tutorial on a program's use and features, with screen shots for each step. Lines are drawn from each step's note to the location on screen where you find the button on which to click, menu selections, etc.

In addition, the website has many helpful pamphlets that you can download free and a newsletter of computer tips to which you can subscribe. You can find a "Picasa test" on the website to test your knowledge after you finish reading the book. (All the Visual Steps books have

tests, and you can print Certificate of Completion after you pass the tests.)

The manual starts with information about its organization, followed by sections on Installing Picasa, The Library, Basic Operations, Tuning, Saving and Making Backups, Printing and Publishing, Slide Shows and Movies, Displaying Photos on a Blog, and Getting Started with your Own Photos. Appendixes cover Creating a Google Account, Geo-tagging Photos, Removing Picasa, Creating a New User Account, and How Do I do That Again? The latter is a handy quick reference to most-used features of Picasa, but its organization can be confusing.



Throughout the book, "footstep" icons indicate an operation, that is, "open the library," which has been described in detail previously. A number appears next to the icon. Items in the Appendix are listed numerically per footstep, which results in a random listing of features. This aspect of the manual makes finding information about a specific feature difficult to locate.

Since the numbers are related to their icon, not to the page on which they appeared, you must leaf through the book to find a footstep with that number for the full feature description. Readers would be better served by simply noting the page on which the full feature is described ("see page xx") next to the footstep or alphabetizing the features and adding page numbers.

(Picasa, cont. on page 6)

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Its contents are excellent, but its layout is not conducive to searching for a specific operation. It includes no visual guides on outer page margins to indicate the subject covered, so if you want to find a specific item or section of the book, you either have to leaf through the index or the table of contents.

I've been fiddling with Picasa by use of the Help Files and luck (it isn't an intuitive program, although it has many fine features), and I have a lot of photos already housed on my computer.

Picasa for Seniors assumes you downloaded its sample photos and have nothing else. It doesn't mention how to handle matters if you want to use the samples, but they will be among other photos already on your hard drive.

In addition, Picasa is a work in progress, and new features are always being added until a new version is issued. Any hard copy book should note this and perhaps add updates on its website to help readers assimilate changes. Something called "Picnik"—an online editing program at the Picasa site—seems to be new. I can't find anything about it in this book.

—Reviewed by Babette Bloch, GGCS

Extend your laptop's battery life

You're about to board your flight out of SFO and realize your laptop battery is not fully charged. What can you do? Here are some simple tips for extending the power life of your laptop battery.

Dim your screen

The LCD of your laptop is one of the biggest power draws. Reducing the brightness can extend the battery 15 to 30 minutes. Most notebooks have a easy keystroke sequence, function (Fn) key, or utility for adjusting this variable.

Unplug unnecessary items

Remove any PC cards, USB or firewire devices that you don't need. Even though you aren't using them, they're still drawing power.

Keep it cool

Because batteries are just simple chemical reactions, the operating temperature can significantly impact the life your battery. Experts agree; always work (and charge) your battery at room temperature. And always allow plenty of airflow around the laptop. This will extend the charge by keeping the battery cool and have the internal fan run less often.

Use power management

Inside the control panel of Microsoft Windows are the "Power Options" controls. Select the Max Battery power scheme.

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