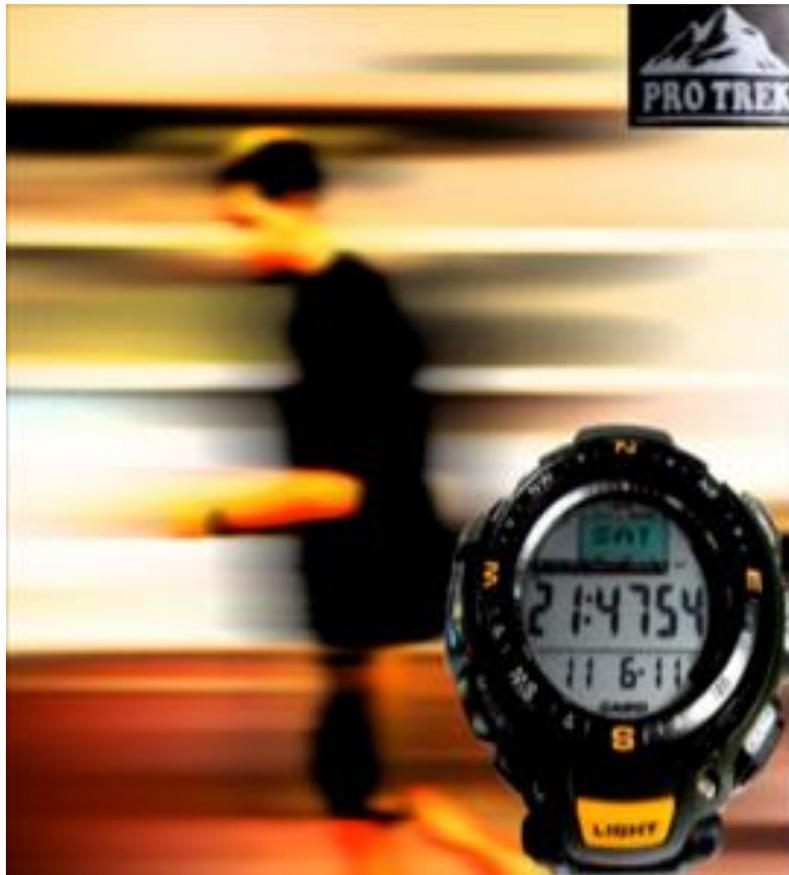


Breaking Down an Image: A Guide to Image Analysis



- **Purpose**
Purpose refers to the overall goal for creating an image. With advertisements, that goal is fairly easy to understand. Advertisements are almost always made to sell items. In our example image, the purpose is to sell the Pro Trek watch.
- **Audience**
The *audience* consists of who is being targeted by the author, designer, or creator. In the above image, it appears that the audience is men. How do we know this? Not only is the person running in the background a man, but the color of the watch and the size of the watch face indicate that the watch is likely a man's watch. Of course, women could indirectly be an audience, too, since they might want to buy this watch for someone or wear it themselves. In addition, the audience might be male *athletes* or outdoor *enthusiasts*. If you pay close attention to the watch features, it includes North, South, East, and West orientations; it is digital with various modes that likely include a stopwatch, and it has a light for when it is dark. All of these features are likely to appeal to outdoors types, athletes, or both.
- **Context**
The *context* includes any background information that will help you understand and analyze an image. In the above image, the most important context is that the watch is a Pro Trek watch. If you did some research, you would find out that Pro Trek watches are part of Casio, an electronics manufacturing company. Knowing that Casio is an electronics company, we might assume that they value functionality over aesthetics; therefore, this might be the reason why the above watch is not very decorative or complex, but is still the focal point of the image. This is because Casio wants to feature the watch's functionality.
- **Characterization**
What sort of people—race, gender, culture, etc.—are placed in the image, if any, and how does their inclusion relate to the audience and purpose of the text?
- **Setting**
Where is the image set? When is the image set? What is the effect of modern or vintage effects? How does setting relate the audience and purpose of the text?
- **Tone**
In literature, *tone* refers to the author's attitude toward the subject. So, with regard to images, tone can also refer to the photographer/artist's/designer's perspective on the issue. In our image above, the tone is a bit hard to interpret. However, the fact that the watch is focused and up close while the background image of a person is blurred gives us a clue: it seems that the designer is portraying that the wearer of the watch is not that important. The watch is what's significant. Perhaps the message is that anyone can wear these watches. Whether or not this is an effective approach to selling the watch is up for debate!

- **Arrangement**

Arrangement refers to the placement of images, graphics, and text in an image. There are two key elements of arrangement—location and scale. *Location* refers to where a text or image is placed, whereas *scale* refers to the relative size of the visual components.

- **Location on the page/screen**

Typically, our eyes scan an image, text, and/or webpage from left to right and from top to bottom. The designer of this advertisement has placed the Pro Trek logo and the image of the watch to the right side of the page—top and bottom, respectively. If the designer wanted our eyes to go to the logo first, he or she probably should have placed the logo at the top left corner so our eyes would catch that logo first. However, because the size of the watch is so large, it is obvious that the focus is the watch. This brings us to the term scale.

- **Scale**

As discussed, image of the watch is both large and focused (compared to the blurred image of the man). Thus, the scale of the watch (its size in relation to everything else on the page), along with the sharp focus, indicates that the designer wants to viewer to focus on the watch, ensuring that viewers can see all the neat features this watch has to offer, while not getting distracted by other text or images.

- **Text**

Text is another important element to analyze, assuming an image includes text. If it does, the text is obviously there for a purpose. Now, the only text on this advertisement is the company logo. This is obviously there for the purpose of showing viewers what type of watch it is so they can find it online or in a store. However, it is possible that this image could have been more effective if it included a catch phrase like those we often see in print ads or in commercials (think of Skittles’ “Taste the Rainbow” or Subway’s “Eat Fresh” slogans). If you see an image with text, consider the connotations of the words, the possible underlying assumptions of the phrase, and the effect the words are meant to have on the audience.

- **Typography**

Typography refers to the *font size* and *font type* choices that are made in a visual composition.

- **Font Size**

Notice that the font size of Pro Trek is actually smaller than the time indicated on the watch! This seems to actually reduce the importance of the company as compared to the importance of the watch itself. Do you think this is an effective visual strategy to persuade the audience to buy a Pro Trek watch?

- **Font Type**

The font type we see with the words *Pro Trek* is strong, bolded, and in ALL CAPS. Since this advertisement is for a men’s athletic watch, the STRONG, SERIOUS FONT TYPE is probably more effective than a silly or playful font type.

- **Color**

Color choices can really affect your audience, too. Colors can have different meanings (*connotations*) that implicitly portray a message. Colors can also enhance or detract from an image’s readability depending on the level of contrast used.

- **Connotation**

Notice that this advertisement has red hues in the background and orange/yellow hues in the background and on the watch. The orange/yellow hues from the background tie in nicely with this same color in the watch, creating a sense of coherence that makes the design feel professional and therefore convincing. The red hues *could* connote warmth, raising the heartbeat, getting the blood pumping, which all symbolize that the watch is effective for athletes.

- **Readability**

You also should think about practical concerns with color, such as whether or not the text color is contrasted well enough with the background so that it is readable. For instance, **THIS** is more effective than **THIS**. The white/black contrast of the Pro Trek logo makes it easy to read.

Ultimately, the image we have just broken down has both effective and ineffective rhetorical effects (persuasive effects). For instance, the absence of a catchy phrase might detract from its persuasiveness, or the blurred image of the man might indirectly signal that the company cares more about the watch than who its users are. On the other hand, though, the absence of text might send the message that the watch is so amazing it speaks for itself. The blurred image might simply reflect the movement of a man running, further emphasizing that this man is using the watch for athletic purposes. These decisions about the effectiveness of each strategy really depend on your individual analysis of the image. This is how you will make an argument about its effectiveness. While the above terminology will be helpful for analysis, regardless of the terminology, the most important thing to remember is this: visuals portray meaning, just as language does. If you take the time to understand the strategies used in images to create meaning, then you will become a stronger critical thinker, understanding how images are persuading you on a daily basis.