

Tips for Writing Compare and Contrast Essays

- be aware of the difference between description and synthesis
- be sure that you have something to say on an issue before you select it
- don't write everything you know – just what is relevant
- understand what the suggested categories mean:
 - function – the program of the structure
 - at the point in history where we are in class. typically one of four:
sacred space, domestic/residential space,
funerary/tomb space, or civic/governmental space.
 - ritual or ceremonial uses – any specific rituals that take place in the structure – rarely used, as we rarely know details of the ritual
 - political implications or lack thereof – also fairly rare, used only when we know something specific about the politics of the culture
 - symbolic meaning – what symbols are embodied in the structure? Does its shape have special meaning?
 - formal characteristics – elements of the physical form of the structure
 - spatial characteristics – the nature of the space created inside the structure; only applies to structures that HAVE interior spaces
 - lighting effects – not useful for structures that sit in the open air with no windows, as all light comes from the same direction
 - decorations – only useful if there are decorated surfaces
 - materials – the only two we have encountered so far are mud brick and stone; easy to describe but a difficult one for which to find significance
 - structure – what keeps it from falling down; so far we have encountered only three types:
 - bearing walls
 - post and beam (columns with entablature)
 - arches (and their composite forms, vaults and domes)
 - site planning – only applies to structures with multiple parts or entry paths