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