Perspectives on Structures

Writing Discussion Section

From Katherine Acton a former TA and grader for Perspectives
Make an Argument

• Make a claim then support it with facts

• Facts alone do not make an argument

• A claim alone does not make an argument
Clearly State Your Argument in Your Opening Paragraph

• Bad Opening Statement:
  “The bridge was built in 1965, and cost $2mil. Recent renovations cost an additional $1mil.”

• Good Opening Statement:
  “The bridge is efficient, elegant, and economically beneficial to the city.”
Proceed to support your claim with factual information in subsequent paragraphs.
3 Criteria of Evaluating the Structure

- Social/Economic
- Scientific/Efficient
- Symbolic/Elegant
Social/Economic
General Points

• Consider the various ways a structure can be viewed: can you walk on it? drive on it? experience it from inside and outside?

• Perhaps its social context is not the same currently as it was when it was built. How have the ways in which the structure is used changed?

• What is the expense of the structure?
Social/Economic: Cost

• Do not state a cost without giving a context for the expense.
• Inflation changes the meaning of money.
• Cost is also location dependent.
• Simply stating a cost says nothing about whether the structure is expensive or not.
• The best way to get an idea of the expense of a structure is to compare it with the cost of similar structures.
Science/Efficiency: General Points

• Does your structure have a “type”? (for example, a suspension bridge, cable stayed bridge, column, arch, buttressed)
• How does this type of structure, and your specific structure, react to loads?
• Efficiency in terms of material usage
• Efficiency in terms of structural design
Science and Efficiency: Structure vs. Construction

• Construction is not the focus of this paper.
• Innovations in construction may reduce cost, but they don’t make the structure itself more efficient.
• Do not focus on issues such as method and duration of construction.
Make an argument about whether your structure is efficient or inefficient in the amount of materials used.

Like cost, quantity of materials should not be given as a stand-alone fact.

Instead, give a context. For example, your structure used X tons of steel, compared with Y tons used by a similar structure.

Are new material innovations used to reduce amount of material needed?
Science/Efficiency: Design

• Design will often dictate efficiency in terms of materials.
• If (a lot/not a lot) of materials are used, what factors in the design led to the necessity of using (more/less) materials.
• Are the materials appropriate for the design?
Symbolic/Elegance

• Is the structure an emblem of its city?
• Is it a landmark?
• Is it a symbol of a war? Is it named after a person?
• What about the structure lends itself to being an emblem/landmark/symbol?
• Do you think the structure is elegant or unappealing? Why?
The Distinction Between Social and Symbolic

• Social: How is the structure *used*?

• Symbolic: How is the structure *thought of*?
Make a Comparison

• Comparing your structure to another structure will often give a needed context.
• Comparison can help you decide if the structure is efficient structurally/economically based on the performance of another, similar structure.
Formal Writing Style

• Do not use contractions
• Do not use colloquial expressions
• Do write in the 3rd person (avoid “I,” “me,” “you”)

Do NOT Plagiarize

- Do not use direct language without direct quotes.
- Be sure to cite all of your sources.
- We will be checking for this.
TA Hours

Friday, February 23
Latrobe Room 322/ Departmental Library