Sample English 101 Assignment on Public Space

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English 101
Final Paper: Public Space Analysis

This paper should be no surprise; it follows the basic format we’ve used all semester; consequently, you will also use the processes of analysis and writing that we’ve used all semester.

Choose a physical space that is open to the public. You may do a building or an open area such as a park or cemetery. You may do clusters of buildings such as a small downtown section or a mall. (But do not choose a large complex because you think you will have more to write about; as usual, I want depth, detail, and analysis, not just a lot of description.) You may choose a particular part of a building such as the entry way or a certain floor or office space, but if you do this, you still need to deal with the context of your space: the access to it, the area surrounding it, as well as other businesses or operations in close proximity. I want you to choose a space that is local or nearby, something that you can go to and see often and easily. Your choice of space must be approved by me. You will need to do several Critical Grids for your space: of the exterior, the interior, and even of the people who are using it. Do this exercise as you sit and do an extended observation of your space.

But don’t dwell only or largely on description. Your main job is to analyze how this space is set up to create particular expectations from the people who use this space. Not surprisingly, you should know who is using this space, why, and how. How is it set up to be conducive to public use? What types of responses, attitudes, and behaviors does it elicit? Does this space work well, or does it work poorly? How and why? Has this space been changed or revamped? How and why? What is the connection between the old use of the building and the new? These questions will help and guide you as you get ready to tell the story of this space.

You will need to do some research and get some history on this space. Ask the current owners or managers of the space, go to the historical society, check local newspapers, and/or go to the library. For this paper, you do not need to formally cite these experts, but you must acknowledge them in your essay; that is, mention the names of people who give you particular information.

Look at the readings in our textbook. These will give you ideas and help you understand what you need to do. You will also want to look at readings we haven’t read in order to get more ideas on how to analyze this space and its use. But you might also look at books and journals on architecture, which you can also find in any of our excellent libraries here in town. Again, for this paper, you do not need to formally cite these authors, but you must acknowledge them in your writing.

You will need to take a photograph (or possibly several) of this space. If you are focusing on a building, you will need to photograph the outside as well as the inside. If you are working on an open area or a street, you may need to do several photographs from different angles. Like all the materials you create to do this project, these must be turned in with your final paper.
Consider your purpose and audience. This paper is very much like an observation-analysis paper, but I want you to take on the attitude of a historical reporter who is uncovering not only the past but the current uses of your particular space. Not surprisingly, revelation is an element here: you are revealing what you have found to those who really have not thought about it. Thus, your audience will be those people who use this space without thinking about it.

As you start to write, you need to think about how you are going to present your research/observations/insights to your audience. There is no one formula to do this, but think about what need to tell actual people and how you need to do it. These are some suggestions.

To start out, you might give some context as to why your audience needs to know your information. You might also give some specific context and background about your and your audience’s interest in this space. You should probably summarize the history of the space (in around one paragraph or so—remember how short American attention spans are); you ought to summarize a description of the space (in about one paragraph or so). Then move to analysis of the space, the people who use it, and the way it is used. Your conclusion should lead us to a larger understating of our uses of architecture (not just be a recap-regurgitation of your thesis-findings).

Six to seven pages, with the standard MLA format/criteria we’ve used all semester. As usual, in order to pass, you must turn in all your analysis and writing process materials with your final paper: Critical Grids, outlines or writing plans, peer editing sheets, introductory writing pieces, rough drafts, and the photographs of your space.

Due Tuesday, May 8, in my office, C-220, by 5 pm. No extensions; no lateness accepted; no re-writes. This is it; make it good.