**How to write about buildings:**

Buildings, like people, have stories to tell about their community’s and the nation’s past.

There are different approaches to writing about historic (or current day) structures.

Describe in detail a general overall view of the structure.

Write a factual piece on the history of the structure.

-Support this with information on the structure itself and/or its contents, in part or in whole.

-Include the date the structure was built, its architectural style, how the structure changed through the years

Explore the people connected with the structure: the builder, the owners through the years, who worked in the structure, who visited the structure and why.

What was the structure’s original use?

- How did it reflect its certain historical era.

-How did it change through the years (additions, renovations, etc.)?

-What is its current use?

-Why were these changes made?

-What construction, special to its purpose, was used?

-What is the relationship between its construction and its purpose?

What does the building mean to the community?

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Exploring Architecture as an Art Form

(from: http://www.architeacher.org/aesthetics/archi-elements2i.html)

SENSORY ELEMENTS:

When we analyze a building, we begin by scanning its façade. This means that we will examine the front of the building and systematically identify the aesthetic elements that compose the overall design. The first things we notice about a building are elements that appeal directly to our senses: line, shape, texture, color, light/dark, and space.

Line:

 A line is a continuous mark made by a pencil, brush, pen or other tool. Lines can be thick or thin, straight or curved, jagged or smooth, light or heavy. In architecture, lines are often suggested by the structural materials designers choose for their buildings such as the random lines of natural stone or the sleek lines created by beams of steel or walls of glass. Modern buildings often use bold lines created by structural steel cross bracing. Lines can also be suggested by the shape and massing of a building. For instance, a building can look horizontal or vertical.

Shape:

A shape is made when a line is closed and space is enclosed. A two dimensional shape is one that is drawn on a flat surface such as paper. A three-dimensional shape is one that takes up real space. Architectural drawings often try to indicate what the proposed building win look like as a three-dimensional form by the use of perspective.

Texture:

Texture is the apparent look or feel of the surface of an art object. Texture is a tactile property and requires touching to be appreciated. Once we know how a material feels, however, we can interpret a texture with our eyes and can tell visually how it might feel. An architect creates texture in building by certain choices of materials. Heavy, jagged stone may be used in a building to give it a rough texture, whereas delicate, carved woods can give a structure a light and airy look. Texture can also be suggested by the rich layering of shapes and forms on a building. Architects add visual interest to their buildings by using decorative building materials such as siding, stone and woodcarvings, or they can vary the pattern of concrete form.

Colour:

Color is an element of our visual perception that is related to how our eyes perceive light. We differentiate these perceptions and name them red, blue, yellow, etc. Architects use color in the choice of materials used to construct a building. These color choices can be quite subtle, such as using a warm, yellow toned concrete instead of a cold gray base, or using a brownish brick instead of the traditional red. However, the architect must consider the color effect of every element of a building's construction, from the earthy colors of primary construction materials like wood, stone, brick and marble, to the expansive variety of colors available for paint, doors, windows, siding, and trim. Once chosen, the architectural drawings and sample boards tell a contractor exactly what color building materials to use when constructing a structure.

Light and Dark:

Light and dark are relative perceptions of light. Architects use the concept of light and dark as they create visual interest on a building by choosing shapes that create a sensation of depth. When some shapes stick out, they leave others in shadow. Narrow openings often appear dark, as in a tunnel, and broad, flat spaces look light. Materials can be used to vary the light quality of a building. For instance, a band of tinted windows gives the illusion of a dark space wrapping around a building.

Space:

Space is the relative position of one three-dimensional object to another. Space is one of the most important considerations an architect must think about while designing a building, because the sizes of rooms and hallways, the height of ceilings and the ease of entering and exiting each living area must carefully match the function of the building. Architects chose dimensions of rooms to match the number of people who will occupy the space and the amount of activity that will occur in it. To make a building more interesting, architects will experiment with aesthetic qualities of space by varying the width and height of rooms through which people will move. Architects also speak of space as the amount of land that will be occupied by a building on a site. The remaining area is called open space.

FORMAL ELEMENTS:

Elements like line, shape, color and texture do not exist in isolation on a building. They are combined to make formal compositions in an architectural design, creating pattern, rhythm, symmetry, balance, contrast, proportion, theme, and unity. It is important that the variety of elements used for a building blend together well so that the design appears unified. As we scan architecture we look for the following:

Patterns and Repetitions:

When lines and shapes are repeated, they create a pattern. Patterns can be regular or irregular, however, architects try to repeat elements of design in a regular manner. In architecture, patterns can be found in the way bricks are laid, in repeated shapes of windows, and in decorative wood or stone trim.

Rhythm:

If you look carefully at the patterns on buildings, you can sense a rhythm to their order. These rhythmic patterns give a dynamic quality to a building, making it seem to be very lively. Rhythm is very apparent in rows of columns or repeated arches. Such patterns carry our eye across the façade of the structure and add visual excitement to a large form.

Symmetry / Asymmetry:

When there is correspondence in size or shape of parts on either side of a bisected whole we say it is symmetrical. A good starting point for understanding symmetry might be to look in the mirror and imagine a line drawn down the center of your body. You are fairly symmetrical with correspondence between your eyes, ears, arms and legs, A symmetrical building has the same shapes on either side of an imaginary line drawn down the middle of its façade. Buildings can be asymmetrical as well when different shapes are placed on either side of a bisecting line.

Balance:

Balance is the characteristic; of equal weights opposing one another. In art, we say that a composition is balanced if the shapes on one side of a center line appear to have the same weight as those on opposite sides. Buildings can be balanced whether they are symmetrical or asymmetrical as long as they maintain a sense of equal, visual weight on either side of a center line drawn through the façade.

Contrast:

Contrast exists when two adjacent parts are very different from one another. In architecture, we speak about such things as materials that have contrasting colors and textures. We may also mean the relationship of highlights and shadows. When contrasting materials are placed together, one seems to move to the front of your line of vision. Architects use contrast to add visual variety to their designs.

Proportion/Scale:

Proportion is the term used to describe the relationship between two things of different size. In architecture we are looking for the proportional relationship between spaces and the size of the human body. The proportion of the room can greatly affect the way a person feels in a space. We often talk about this kind of proportion as scale when we speak about a building. Ordinarily, an architect tries to design a space so that people feel comfortable moving about in it. For that reason, a bedroom may have a much lower ceiling than an auditorium. where many people will mingle. Sometimes a building is designed so a space is purposely out of proportion to human scale. An example of this would be the towering spaces inside cathedrals that make people feel quite insignificant in comparison to the awesome power of God. Architects also deliberately design spaces with changing scale by varying heights of ceilings and sizes of rooms. This makes the occupants movement through the space more dynamic.

Theme and Variation:

A theme is a dominant feature of a work of art that is carried throughout the piece. A variation is a change in the dominant elements with the main idea still recognizable. An architect might design a building using a theme based on history such as a Classical building with columns, domes and pediments, or make reference to architecture of another culture such as choosing to style the building using simple, horizontal forms of the Japanese. Frank Lloyd Wright often chose a geometric theme for his Prairie School houses. In these homes he altered the sizes of squares and rectangles to add variety while maintaining the geometric theme of the buildings.

Coherence and Unity in Variety:

A work of art has coherence when its elements are used together in a logical and systematic manner. In architecture, a variety of elements is used to add interest to a design, however the architect tries hard to tie them together. Many people feel that the most pleasing architectural designs have an elegant system of repeated elements that give unity to the overall structure.

TECHNICAL ELEMENTS

Once we isolate the elements of architecture and take time to see how they work in composition, we begin to see that the merit of a building's design is determined by the skill and creativity of both architects and builders. The Technical Properties describe such things as the architect's creativity and the extent of his or her design skills. Creativity is innate, however, through training and experience, architects learn to use space wisely and to choose constriction materials that offer artistic yet comfortable living spaces.  
  
We look carefully at the construction materials used in a building. Each has a different property, or effect peculiar to its medium. For instance, glass allows light to illuminate a structure, and architects use this medium to create bright, sunny areas; however, there are times when glass allows too much light to enter a structure, and another choice must be made.

The final impact of architecture, however is determined by the skill of the various contractors who actually build the building. Architects must rely on a builder's ability to follow the design plans, and often, the craftsmanship of individual workmen determines the quality of the final product.

EXPRESSIVE ELEMENTS

Works of art may express human values, feelings and dynamic states. We derive meaning from these works based upon our perceptions of the sensory, formal and technical properties of the work and from our own experiences. We learn to identify how the artist used the aesthetic elements to give the art expression. In architecture, we search for the mood or metaphor expressed by the architectural design.

Sensory, Formal and Technical elements of design are combined, they give expression to a work of art that can be explained using the language of human emotion. Expressive Elements are those that give a structure the appearance of having a mood, emotional state, character, or dynamic qualities.