

“O, SAE Can You See?”:

Developing A Geographic Eye

History is to time as geography is to _____.
How would you complete this analogy? The answer is
space. The space of the earth's surface is the point of
focus for geographers.



Cultural geographers study regions to determine the human imprint on the physical landscape also known as the cultural landscape. “A landscape is not a natural feature of the environment but a *synthetic* space, a man-made system of spaces superimposed on the face of the land.” By “reading” the landscape, we get clues about who we are, who we were, how we live and what is important to us.

By observing elements of the material culture in a neighborhood, geographers get a sense of the non-material culture of a region.

For this assignment, you are the geographer doing fieldwork!

Fieldwork allows direct observation “on the ground” and is a great way to get to know your chosen neighborhood. You will walk around and observe a neighborhood and identify, describe and analyze the human impact on it. Have fun!

What Do I Do?

Step 1: “O” is for Observation

Observing is not the same as looking; observing is looking + thinking about what you see.

- Take a trip to a Baton Rouge neighborhood listed in the table (or a vacation spot or another neighborhood). Observe, photograph and collect data about the material culture in the neighborhood.

Examples of material culture:

Housing types, religious buildings, shops, signs, schools, community organizations, local papers, athletic facilities, restaurants, parks, monuments, statues.

Neighborhoods in Baton Rouge Downtown/Central Business District (CBD)	Neighborhoods in Baton Rouge Spanish Town	Neighborhoods in Baton Rouge Garden District
Beauregard Town	Third Street Corridor/Historic District	LSU/Lakeshores
Vacation Spot	Other neighborhood	

Step 2: “S” is for Speculation

What can I guess about this area based on my observation?

Use your observations and preliminary research to try to identify the culture of the area. Below are the kinds of questions you should answer in your paper:

- What human-made features can you identify in your area? (buildings, churches, parks, etc.) What purposes do these features have?

- Is there vegetation? Bodies of water? What purpose do they serve, if any?
What are the impacts of vegetation and bodies of water in the area?
- Does the neighborhood appear poor/wealthy/middle class? What evidence do you observe that offers clues?
- Who lives there? How do you know? Were there other groups living there before the present time?
- Is it residential or mixed-use?
- Is there evidence of “sequent occupance”?
- Is there an “ethnic enclave”?
- Are there different architectural styles? If so, describe them in your own words.
- Does there appear to be a border?

Photographs are an essential part of this project. You must include 10 to 15 pictures that you feel represent the culture of the area. This is your primary data along with your observations.

You should also gather **secondary data from reliable sources** (e.g. census data, flood information from local, state and federal sources). You will need to include a brief history of the area. Most of these neighborhoods have a website. *Note about Wikipedia* – this can be a good starting point but use the Wikipedia article sources, NOT the actual Wikipedia article.

Step 3: “A” is for Analysis

What can you understand about the human impact on the area based on evidence? Using your observations, speculation and evidence from research, analyze the neighborhood you chose for your report.

Some questions to guide you:

- How have people altered the landscape?

- What conclusions can you make about what people have built in this neighborhood?
What is important to the residents?
- What effects have human activity had on the environment?
- What can be done to improve the neighborhood? Have there been attempts to improve the neighborhood? How?
- Has human activity changed? In what ways?
- How have humans organized the space in this neighborhood? Are there big yards, are houses close to the street or far away? Why?
- How has the population changed over time? Why?

Step 4: “E” is for Evaluation

Your final paragraph will be a short evaluation of this project. What did you learn? Did you enjoy it? Were there any surprises or “Aha!” moments?

Key Terms:

- Built environment: physical artifacts that humans have created and that form part of the landscape, e.g., buildings, roads, signs and fences.
- Culture: body of customary beliefs, social forms and material traits that constitute a group’s distinct tradition
- Cultural landscape: modifications to the environment made by humans, includes the built environment and agricultural systems
- Ethnic enclave: a place with a high concentration of an ethnic or religious group that is distinct from those in the surrounding area.
- Material culture: Physical objects, resources and spaces people use to define their culture

- Non-material culture: ideas, beliefs, practices, customs, knowledge that influence how people live, behave
- Sequent occupance: the pattern of multiple uses of a building over the years, layering over each other, each group leaving its own imprint on the culture. (e.g. plantation homes now used as bed and breakfasts)

What Do I Turn In?

You will complete a 1-2 page written report on your fieldwork observations. You will attach 10-15 color photos with captions, a hand-drawn map of your neighborhood and a Works Cited page (MLA format if you know how to do that, otherwise, links are fine). The report should be double-spaced, typed, using a 12 point Times New Roman font.

The report is due on August 15th, 2025. Submit on Google Classroom (no need to print out your report).

Order of your report:

1. Title page with name and heading (you decide what to name your report)
2. Paragraph 1: Introduction: name of neighborhood, why you chose it, brief history
3. Paragraph 2: Observations
4. Paragraphs 3 and 4: Speculation and Analysis
5. Paragraph 5: Evaluation
6. 2-3 pages of photographs with captions
7. Hand drawn map of your neighborhood
8. Works Cited page

Hand-drawn map: This should be drawn with a fine-tip black Sharpie on a blank 8 ½ x 11 sheet of paper. It is up to you how detailed and colorful you want your map to be!

Photos should be printed in color with a caption. If you do not have access to a color printer, please let me know.

Safety and (suggested) Etiquette:

- Do not go to the neighborhood by yourself. You should go with a trusted adult, parent or older sibling.
- Avoid taking pictures from cars, unless you can do so safely.
- This is a walking fieldwork assignment-get out and walk around!
- Do not go to the neighborhood at night.
- If you decide to take interior pictures of a house of worship or a private establishment, make sure to ask permission.
- Do not take pictures of people without their permission.

If you have any questions or concerns, do not hesitate to contact me: mtsolakis@lsu.edu

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