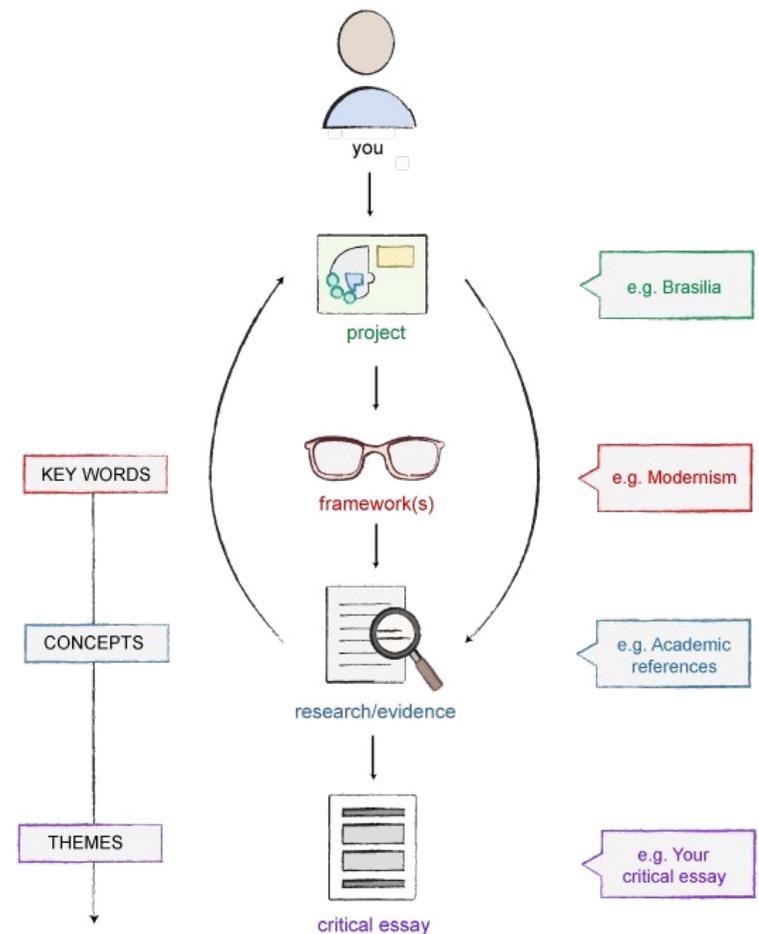


## What is a critical essay in Landscape Architecture?

This resource provides a guide for writing a critical essay in landscape architecture.

It models how key words, from the abstract and your research, are used to express the concepts or themes that run through the framework. These themes allow you to structure your essay, paragraphs, and flow of discussion.

The diagram below shows the relationships between the framework, the research and the project. All of these provide the evidence to develop your argument and inform your essay.



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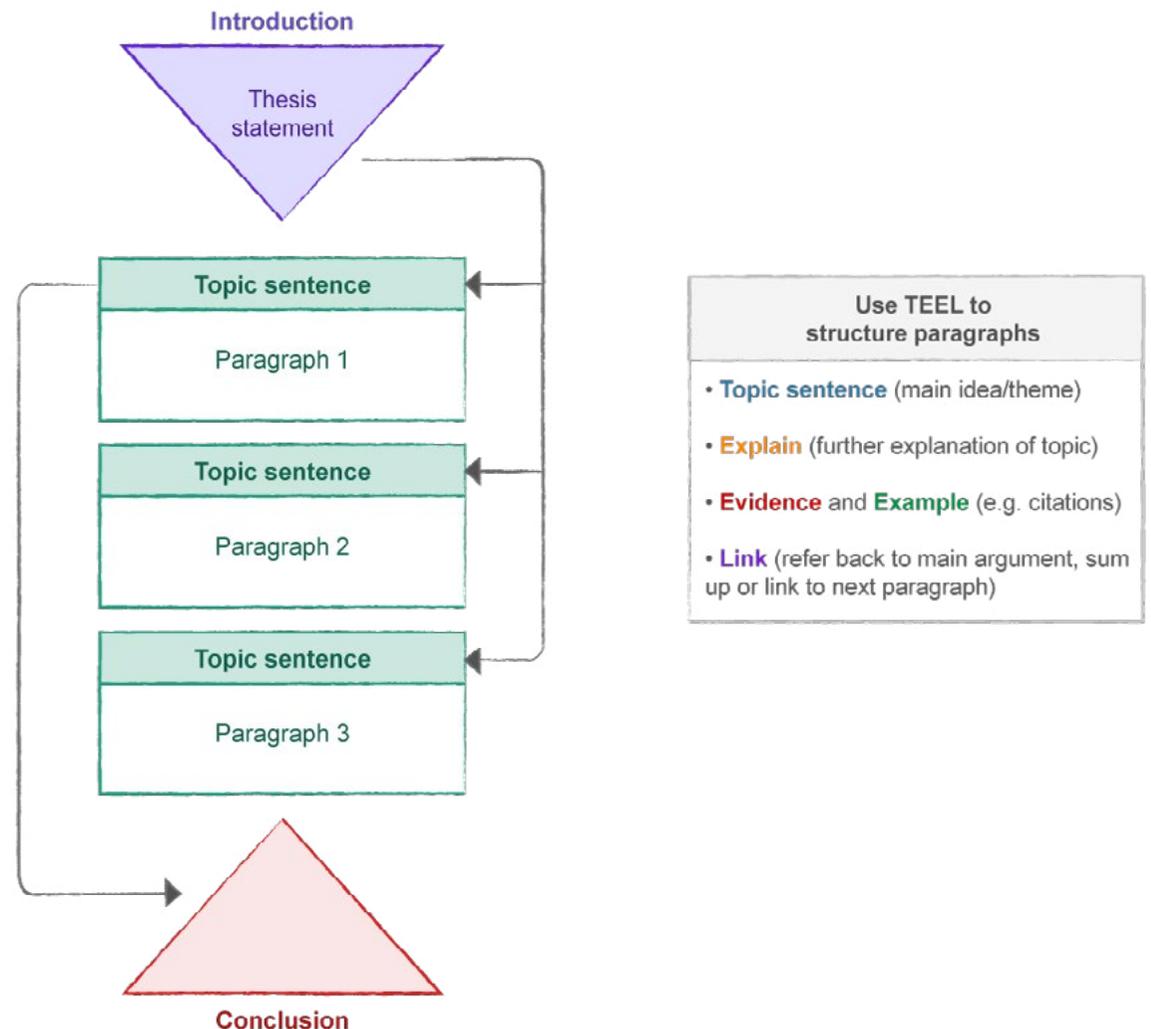
conclusion

## Structure

This section outlines the overall structure of an essay comprising an introduction, body and conclusion. It also explains how to structure an effective paragraph using the TEEL strategy.

**Note:** While the **topic** and **linking sentences** are fixed at the beginning and end of the paragraphs, **explain, evidence and example** are interchangeable.

For more information on how to use TEEL, visit the [Paragraphs](#) page on the Learning Lab.



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## Introduction

The introduction prepares the reader for your analysis.

**There are three main parts:**

- **General statements** to provide **context** and **background** information, and to show the importance of the work and the reason for your evaluation.
- A **thesis statement (argument)** that identifies your specific topic and your position.
- An **outline of the scope and organisation** of the essay so the reader knows what is covered. This will be determined by your argument, which you support in the body of your essay.

The introduction should also include key words from the themes and concepts of the framework. Key words should be used throughout your essay to reinforce cohesion and help with the overall 'flow' of your writing.

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### Modernist Brasilia: A utopian paradox

The modernist movement in urban planning and architectural design in the twentieth century rejected tradition in pursuit of the new. This approach to design presented a clear break from the past, taking its cues from a changing environment, society and technologies. The search for idealistic, utopian visions of the future nevertheless led to breakdowns in the social and cultural life for the residents of modernism. The city of Brasilia, designed and developed by Lucio Costa and Oscar Niemeyer, survives today as a monument to modernism, thus providing a valuable opportunity to consider the societal consequences of Corbusierian philosophies applied by Costa and to evaluate the flaws and successes of a realised, modernist utopia in the context of a national capital city.

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The modernist movement in urban planning and architectural design in the twentieth century rejected tradition in pursuit of the new. This approach to design presented a clear break from the past, taking its cues from a changing environment, society and technologies. **The search for idealistic, utopian visions of the future nevertheless led to breakdowns in the social and cultural life for the residents of modernism.** The city of Brasilia, designed and developed by Lucio Costa and Oscar Niemeyer, survives today as a monument to modernism, thus providing a valuable opportunity to consider the societal consequences of Corbusierian philosophies applied by Costa and to evaluate the flaws and successes of a realised, modernist utopia in the context of a national capital city.

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### Modernist Brasilia: A utopian paradox

#### Key words

(themes, concepts and framework)

The **modernist** movement in urban planning and architectural design in the twentieth century **rejected tradition** in **pursuit of the new**. This approach to design presented a clear **break from the past**, taking its cues from a changing environment, society and technologies. The search for **idealistic, utopian** visions of the future nevertheless led to breakdowns in the social and cultural life for the residents of **modernism**. The city of Brasilia, designed and developed by Lucio Costa and Oscar Niemeyer, survives today as a monument to modernism, thus providing a valuable opportunity to consider the societal consequences of Corbusierian philosophies applied by Costa and to evaluate the flaws and successes of a **realised, modernist utopia** in the context of a national capital city.

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## Body

The body of a critical essay should have a logical sequence.

This helps the reader to follow the development of the argument, as stated in the introduction. Your argument determines what evidence you select from your research, how you develop your reasoning, and what citations you include to support your position.

Consider others' analyses of the work and identify the strengths or weaknesses of your reasoning. Use evidence to support your views and acknowledge any arguments against them.

Paragraphs are used to group and categorise your evidence. In the example below, note how the linking sentence of the first paragraph connects to the topic sentence of the following paragraph.

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### Modernist Brasilia: A utopian paradox

Modernism in Brazil arose from optimistic visions of progress and stability. Brasilia, the new federal capital, was based on modernist principles on a very large scale. Commissioned to be the 'capital of hope' (Wheeler 2007, p. 64), it was meant to fulfil forecasts for an optimistic future, to be an 'elegy to progress, to modernity' (Madeleno 1996, p. 274). With these clearly modernist principles of promise and progress, Costa and Niemeyer developed the formal layout in the 'pilot plan' for Brasilia. The space was ordered into zones defined by two main axes: the 'monumental' and the 'highway' that intersected in a cross shape 'resulting in the modernist analogy to the wings of an aeroplane' (Wright & Turkienicz 1998, p. 349). The spaces between were then ordered following Le Corbusier's principles of the functional city: spaces for specific purposes (Le Corbusier, cited in Mumford 2000). Hence, residential dwellings and places of work were separated and industry was removed to the outskirts of the city; cultural precincts were established near the green and open residential precincts; and the movement of pedestrians and vehicles was separated (Wright & Turkienicz 1998, p. 349). This initial planning was to be repeated in the utopian vision for the interior spaces.

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## Modernist Brasilia: A utopian paradox

Modernism in Brazil arose from optimistic visions of **progress** and **stability**. Brasilia, the new federal capital, was based on modernist principles on a very large scale. Commissioned to be the '**capital of hope**' (Wheeler 2007, p. 64), it was meant to fulfil forecasts for an **optimistic future**, to be an 'elegy to progress, to modernity' (Madeleno 1996, p. 274). With these clearly modernist principles of **promise** and **progress**, Costa and Niemeyer developed the formal layout in the 'pilot plan' for Brasilia. The space was ordered into zones defined by two main axes: the '**monumental**' and the 'highway' that intersected in a cross shape 'resulting in the modernist analogy to the wings of an aeroplane' (Wright & Turkienicz 1998, p. 349). The spaces between were then ordered following Le Corbusier's principles of the **functional** city: spaces for specific purposes (Le Corbusier, cited in Mumford 2000). Hence, residential dwellings and places of work were separated and industry was removed to the outskirts of the city; cultural precincts were established near the green and open residential **precincts**; and the movement of pedestrians and vehicles was separated (Wright & Turkienicz 1998, p. 349). This initial planning was to be repeated in the **utopian** vision for the interior spaces.

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Modern planning is derived from the design **rationality**: informed by the context of a site and the organisation of interior spaces according to the needs of the inhabitants (Treib 1993). Therefore it is apparent that the **function** of spaces and the links between these, and the users of the spaces, is paramount for the **modern ideology** for living (Eckbo, cited in Treib 1993). In Brasilia, these ideals resulted in **zoning** separate sectors to accommodate differing civic amenities and functions. The residential areas are made up of self-contained 'super-blocks' of **uniform** height. Dwellings are separated from the work **sectors** with ample green space, offset from roadways. The **separation** of living and working areas was devised to fulfil the citizens' needs for rest, as Le Corbusier (cited in Mumford 2000) claimed that urban residents required spaces of natural greenery and **freedom** from noise and air pollution in order to live and work together **without discord**. The **separation** of **space** and **purpose** is illustrated by Costa's attempts to order aspects of daily life following his **modernist, functional ideology**.

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## Conclusion

The conclusion is your final opportunity to persuade the reader of your position based on the information you have presented. An effective conclusion establishes a sense of completeness.

### Your conclusion should:

- restate your position
- summarise how the most important evidence supports this
- show how your position is related to the broader body of knowledge of this field/topic.

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restate the argument

sum up the main points

relate to the broader topic

show all

### Modernist Brasilia: A utopian paradox

Brasilia was an attempt to advance a nation by rejecting history and embracing new ideas and technologies based on ideologies of a utopian future: making the planned city a useful context through which to analyse modernism and its inherent failures. It is evident that the philosophies of Brasilia's designers, Lucio Costa and Oscar Niemeyer, have led to a breakdown in autonomy between perceived ideas of utopia and the desires of its inhabitants. The strict ordering and bureaucratic regulations that control life within the planned city have led to social segregation, where people are denied the freedom that modernism promised. The city has been meticulously structured, rooted in the principles of modernism that control any spontaneous event. The concepts of functionality and rationalism that are fixed in modernism can be useful in planning civic spaces. However, rejection of historical context and denial of freedom of thought of its occupants has led to a refusal to accept these theories as a way of living.

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### Modernist Brasilia: A utopian paradox

Brasilia was an attempt to advance a nation by rejecting history and embracing new ideas and technologies based on ideologies of a utopian future: making the planned city a useful context through which to analyse modernism and its inherent failures. It is evident that the philosophies of Brasilia's designers, Lucio Costa and Oscar Niemeyer, have led to a breakdown in autonomy between perceived ideas of utopia and the desires of its inhabitants. The strict ordering and bureaucratic regulations that control life within the planned city have led to social segregation, where people are denied the freedom that modernism promised. The city has been meticulously structured, rooted in the principles of modernism that control any spontaneous event. The concepts of functionality and rationalism that are fixed in modernism can be useful in planning civic spaces. However, rejection of historical context and denial of freedom of thought of its occupants has led to a refusal to accept these theories as a way of living.

Critical essay

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introduction

body

**conclusion**

Overview

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Key words

## Conclusion: structure

restate the argument

sum up the main points

relate to the broader topic

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### Modernist Brasilia: A utopian paradox

#### Key words

(themes, concepts and framework)

Brasilia was an attempt to advance a nation by **rejecting history** and embracing **new ideas and technologies** based on ideologies of a **utopian future**: making the **planned city** a useful context through which to analyse modernism and its inherent failures. It is evident that the philosophies of Brasilia's designers, Lucio Costa and Oscar Niemeyer, have led to a breakdown in autonomy between perceived ideas of **utopia** and the desires of its inhabitants. The **strict ordering** and bureaucratic **regulations** that **control** life within the planned city have led to social **segregation**, where people are denied the freedom that modernism promised. The city has been **meticulously structured**, rooted in the principles of modernism that control any spontaneous event. The concepts of **functionality** and **rationalism** that are fixed in modernism can be useful in planning civic spaces. However, rejection of historical context and denial of freedom of thought of its occupants has led to a refusal to accept these theories as a way of living.

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coherence

cohesion

## Building a coherent argument

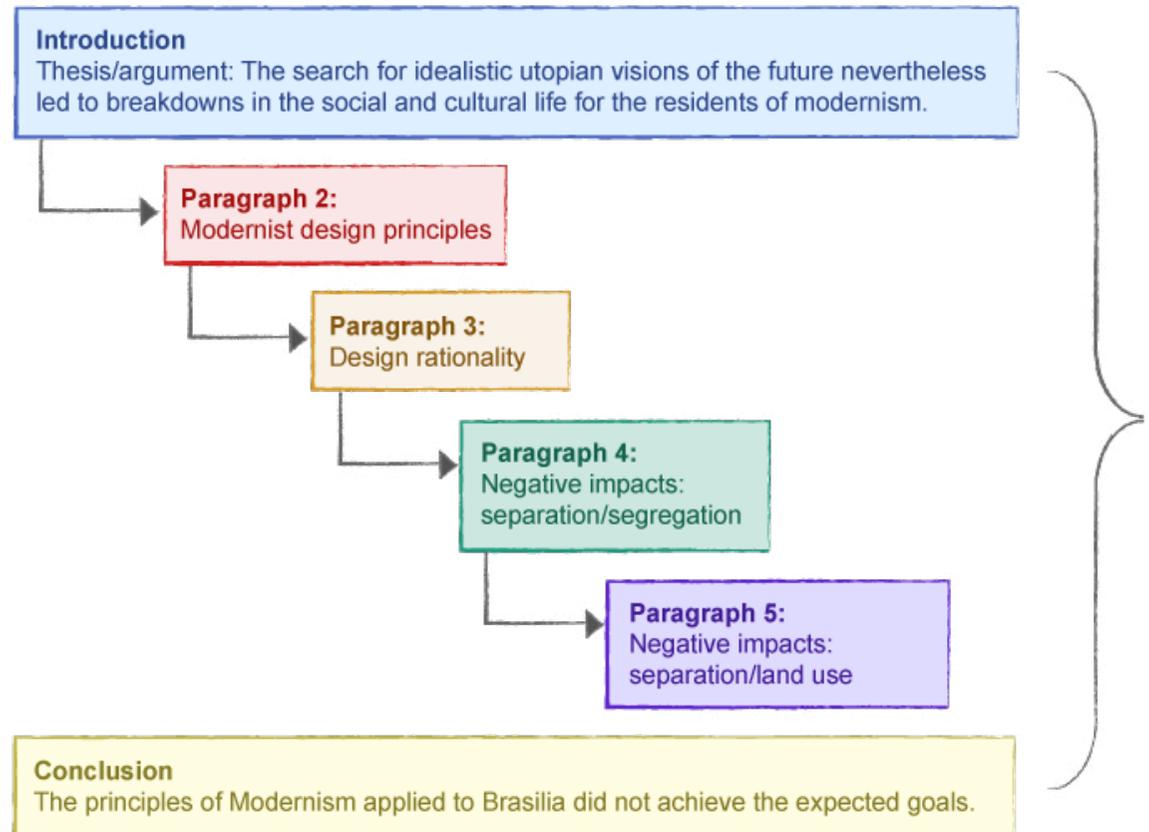
The structure of your essay provides a framework for the logical development of your argument, from the introduction through the body and to the conclusion.

Each paragraph should develop your main argument (thesis) and link to the next paragraph to build coherence. The repetition of key words from the concepts and themes of the framework reinforces cohesion throughout the text.

## Coherence

The diagram shows how the writer's argument logically develops through the overall structure of the essay.

Each paragraph contains evidence grouped and categorised around one main idea.



Critical essay

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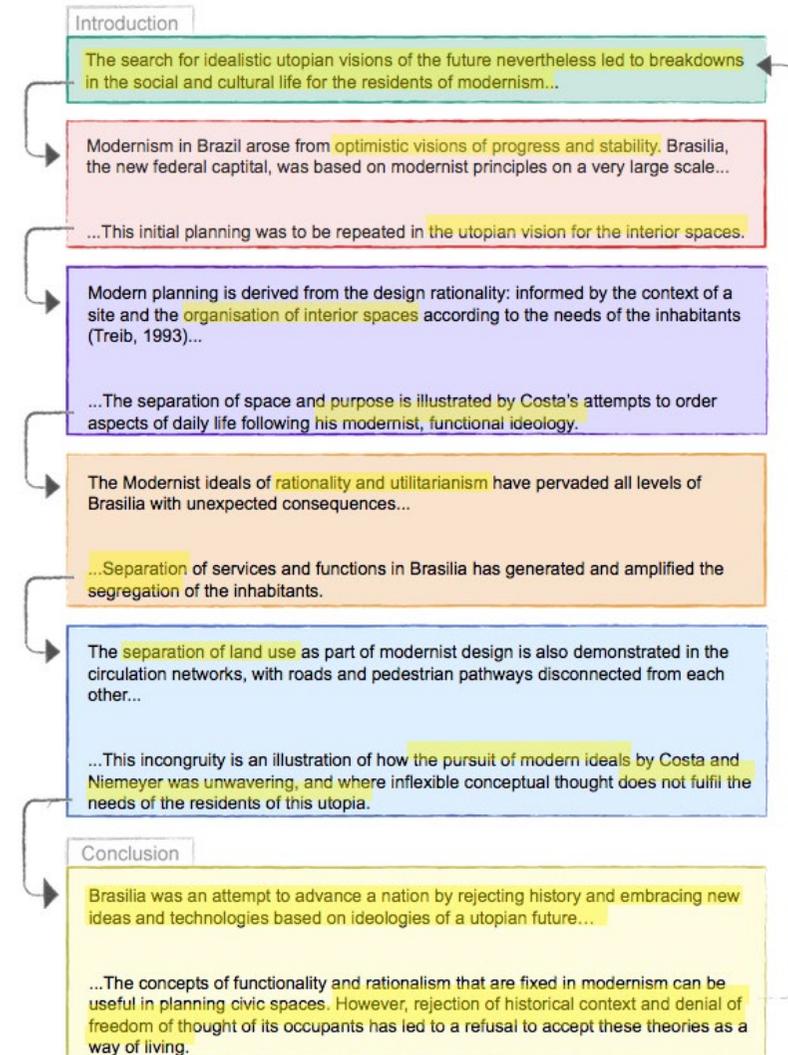
coherence

**cohesion**

## Cohesion

The diagram below shows how the writer uses key words and concepts from their research to reinforce cohesion throughout the text.

Note how the linking sentence in each paragraph connects to the topic sentence of the following paragraph and the conclusion links back to the introduction.



## Integrating evidence

To reinforce your argument, integrate the analysis of experts by using citations - both direct and indirect.

- **Direct quotations** are when you use the author's exact words and require quotation marks and a reference. These should be used sparingly and add value to your analysis, not replace it.
- **Indirect quotations** are when you paraphrase the author's words, i.e. rewrite in your own words. They also require a reference. Paraphrasing allows your own 'voice' to be heard in the text.

The example below uses the [RMIT Library Harvard referencing guide](#).

Critical essay

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example

Click on the buttons to show direct quotes and paraphrasing.

direct

paraphrasing

show all

## Excerpt from article

An analysis of the urban layout sheds some light on this. Peculiarities in the combination of the highway system and the superblocks seem to have produced some bad results, at least in the case of Brasilia. The highway system is devoted to high speed motor vehicles. There are few crossings and roundabouts, and the terrain is flat. The super-blocks are self-contained dwelling units with a single access route. Inside is a relatively safe area for pedestrians, with wide entrances followed by narrower winding routes, as opposed to the wide, straight, long highways outside. When a car enters one of these axes it is naturally travelling at high speed. Pedestrians moving from one superblock to another or from one sector to another, have to cross these dangerous routes. The few underground crossings that exist are seldom used, since they are narrow, have 'L' shaped entrances and have become dirty and smelly: they are places where assaults can occur without surveillance. The combination of the superblock and the highway represents two extreme poles, with no intermediary scale. The result is a pervasive lack of continuity in the urban tissue: The space between the superblocks is clearly not a pedestrian's terrain.

*Wright, C L & Turkienicz, B 1988, 'Brasilia and the ageing of modernism', Cities, vol. 5, no. 4, pp. 347-364, viewed 1 July 2014, Elsevier Science Direct.*

## Integration of evidence in essay

The separation of land use as part of modernist design is also demonstrated in the circulation networks, with roads and pedestrian pathways disconnected from each other. Brasilia's pilot plan was developed with the two main roadways as the predominant means of circulation (Madaleno 1996). This was due to the automobile being perceived as a sign of modernist status and progress, a way forward literally and metaphorically. Read (2005, p. 269) observes however, that it is 'impossible to circulate around the city without a car'. Large-scale residences have vast spaces in between with few or no facilities for pedestrians who, in order to travel to another sector, must cross a number of multiple lane, high-speed expressways (Wright & Turkienicz 1988). The spatial segregation and transport solutions have resulted in 'a pervasive lack of continuity in the urban tissue: The space between the superblocks is clearly not a pedestrian's terrain' (Wright & Turkienicz 1988, p. 355). This incongruity is an illustration of how the pursuit of modern ideals by Costa and Niemeyer was unwavering, and where inflexible conceptual thought does not fulfil the needs of the residents of this utopia.

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