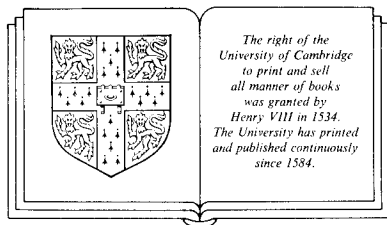


Study Writing

A course in written English
for academic and professional purposes

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PART I

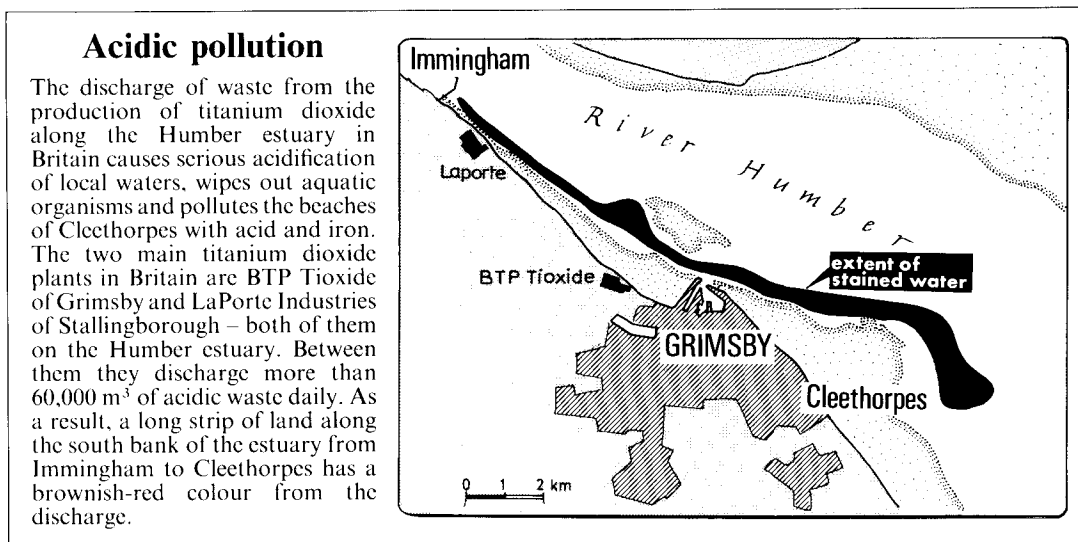
Unit 1 Spatial relationships

Introduction

Very often we have to describe in writing the location of a place, how a place is laid out or how a set of objects are connected (as in equipment for an experiment). In this unit we will look at some of the ways of describing spatial relationships. Spatial descriptions are often accompanied by a visual aid, such as a plan, map, or diagram.

Task 1

Read the following text by yourself and then look at the map which accompanies it. With a partner, discuss the text and the map and decide whether the map helps you to understand the text.



(*New Scientist*)

Not all texts describing spatial relations are accompanied by a map. For example, the writer of the following text, 'The Abraham Moss Centre', did not include a map. The text describes the location of a school and is part of the introduction to an educational research project.

Task 2

Read the passage and then:

- make a note of the expressions which tell the reader where a place is;
- using the information in the text, draw a simple map of the area;
- say what you think the writer's aim was in producing this description;
- say whether you can draw an accurate map on the basis of the information provided in the passage.

The Abraham Moss Centre

The Abraham Moss Centre is a low, white complex of buildings on the borders of Cheetham and Crumpsall, just to the north of the centre of Manchester. Although the site itself was industrial wasteland, it is in the heart of a residential district. Along one side of it runs a railway, but in every other direction it is surrounded by semi-detached and terraced housing of the inter-war years. Both Cheetham and Crumpsall were fairly prosperous Victorian developments, but Cheetham in particular has undergone extensive redevelopment.

(A.D. Edwards and V.J. Furlong *The Language of Teaching*)

Some of the expressions in the above text tell you *what* various places are, or were:

'The Abraham Moss Centre is a *low, white complex of buildings*'.

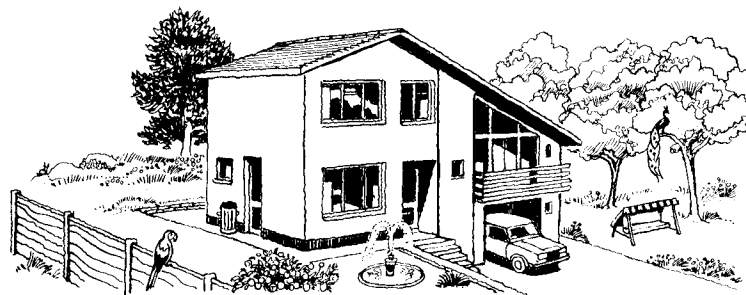
Other expressions tell you *where* various places are, or were:

'The Abraham Moss Centre . . . buildings *on the borders of Cheetham and Crumpsall*'.

Task 3

- Add as many expressions of spatial relationships as you can to this illustration. Some you could use are:

opposite
between
beside
behind
(etc.)



- Write four sentences to describe some spatial relationships between objects in the illustration, for example:
The fountain is *in front of* the house.

About writing

There are basically two ways of organizing a description of a place. One way is to describe it as if it was being seen from the air (a bird's eye view). The other is to describe it from the point of view of a journey through it (a pedestrian's view). The description may need to be very detailed as, for example, when a novelist is describing a scene; or it can be rather general, as when a student is describing a geographical area as background to an agricultural experiment; or it can be very technical, as when an entomologist is describing the marking on a rare butterfly.

Task 4

Read this text, which describes a geographical area of East Africa, and then, working with another student:

- a) decide whether it is written from a bird's eye view or from a pedestrian's view;
- b) draw an outline map of the area to accompany the text;
- c) decide what changes you would need to make in the text if you rewrote it from the other point of view.

As the Rift Valley sweeps northwards out of Kenya and into Ethiopia, it forms the spectacular Lake Turkana basin. The long, shallow waters of the lake, which stretches 155 miles north to south and up to 35 miles east to west, sparkle green in the tropical sun: someone called it the Jade Sea, a very apt name. At the south a barrier of small volcanic hills prevents the lake spreading further down into the arid lands of northern Kenya. From the west side rises the Rift Valley wall, a range of mountains with some peaks of more than 5000 feet. This is the land of the Turkana people, a tall, elegant pastoralist tribe. Beyond are the mountains and forests of Uganda. Pouring its silt-laden waters into the north end of the lake is the River Omo, a huge river that drains the Ethiopian Highlands to the north, and meanders tortuously as it nears its end at the border with Kenya where it reaches the Jade Sea. Where the river reaches the lake the sudden barrier to its progress forces it to dump its burden of silt, so creating an enormous delta.

(Adapted from R. Leakey and R. Lewin *People of the Lake*)

Task 5

The following text describes the same area as in Task 4, but in a different period of time and from a different point of view. Read the text and draw an outline

map to accompany it. When you have completed your outline map, compare it with a map drawn by one other student.

Suppose now, we are back on the eastern shores of Lake Turkana 2½ million years ago. Standing by the shores we would be aware of crocodiles basking in the tropical heat on sand-spits pointing finger-like into the shallow water. A little more than five miles away to the east savanna-covered hills rise up from the lake basin, sliced here and there by forest-filled valleys. At one point the hills are breached by what is obviously a large river that has snaked its way down from the Ethiopian mountains. Where the river reaches the flood-plain of the lake it shatters into a delta of countless streams, some small, some large, but each fringed by a line of trees and bushes.

As we walk up one of the stream beds – dry now because there has been no rain for months – we might hear the rustle of a pig in search of roots and vegetation in the undergrowth. As the tree-cover thickens we catch a glimpse of a colobus monkey retreating through the tree tops. Lower down, mangobeys feed on the ripening figs. In the seclusion of the surrounding bushes small groups of impala and water-buck move cautiously. From the top of a tree we could see out into the open, where herds of gazelle graze.

After going about a mile up the stream we come across a scene that is strangely familiar. Before us is a group of eight creatures – definitely human-like, but definitely not truly human – some on the stream bed and some on its sandy bank.

(Adapted from R. Leakey and R. Lewin *People of the Lake*)

In academic writing it is more usual to describe a place using the bird's eye technique (as was done in the text in Task 4). Such a description may or may not be accompanied by a visual (a map, photograph, etc.). In novels and other writing which emphasizes the human aspect of a description, the pedestrian's view technique is often used (as in the text in Task 5).

Task 6

This text is not a geographical description, but a set of instructions on how to set up the equipment needed in order to produce an unusual photograph. First read the text and then try to draw a diagram showing how the equipment should be set up. Then check your diagram with the one on page 19.

Making a physiograph using a camera

To make a physiograph, place the camera on the floor with its lens pointing directly upwards and lying immediately below the torch which has been suspended from a hook in the ceiling on a piece of string. Two other strings are hung from hooks several inches to either side of the main string to which they are connected at a point, say, three-quarters of the way down so that they form a V. The strings and the torch should be so arranged that when the torch is given its first swing to set it in motion the movement of the light comes within the area of the negative in the camera. Turn the torch on, turn the room light off, set the torch swinging and open the shutter. Using a fast film, the aperture may be set at about F/11 but the correct stop will have to be discovered experimentally by tests. After several minutes' exposure the track made by the swinging light will have produced a delightful linear pattern on the negative and this can be enlarged in the ordinary way to make a white linear design on a black background.

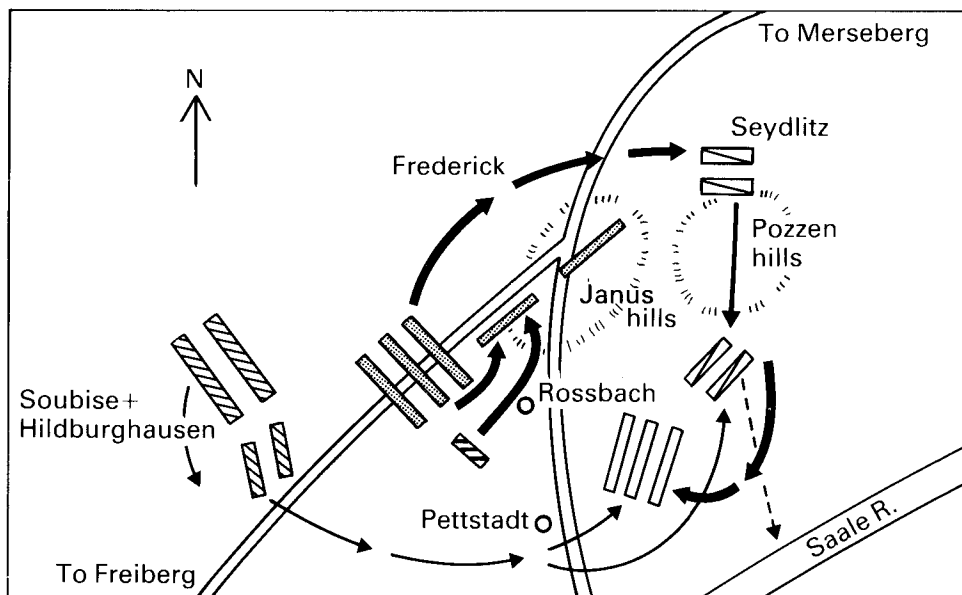
(E. de Marie *Photography*)

Visuals are used by writers to achieve different goals. Sometimes they are used only to break up pages of text. However, in academic writing they usually have a more informative purpose. Sometimes this purpose is to duplicate information given in a text in order to help the reader visualize the relations more clearly. This can be seen in the 'Making a physiograph' text and the diagram on page 19. The visual clarifies the rather complicated spatial relations set out in the text. It is a good example of the old saying that 'a picture (map/plan/diagram) is worth a thousand words'.

Visuals are also used to supplement texts, i.e. to add further information to the text or to emphasize a different aspect of the information given in the text.

Task 7

Read the text and decide whether the map which accompanies it contains supplementary or duplicate information, and whether it is essential to an understanding of the text.



Rossbach (*The Seven Years War*)

Frederick II, the Great, faced his greatest peril in the summer of 1757. Prussia and its English ally had suffered successive defeats in the south (from Austria), west (from France), and east (from Russia). As the hostile ring tightened about him, the Prussian King rallied his forces and struck out to the west where the advance of 30,000 French and 11,000 Imperial troops of the Holy Roman Empire posed the greatest threat. In 12 days Frederick marched 170 miles to confront the invaders of Saxony at Rossbach, 26 miles southwest of Leipzig. The Prussians, reduced to 21,000 effective men by the forced march, camped northeast of the village.

On November 5 the allied commanders, the Prince de Soubise and the Prince of Saxe-Hildburghausen, resolved to crush Frederick with a large-scale turning movement against the Prussian left flank. Anticipating the manoeuvre, Frederick deployed a small masking force to his front while his main body executed a leftward turning movement of its own behind a cover of hills. The ponderous allied columns, somewhat disorganised by a too-hasty march, suddenly received the full force of the Prussian blow on their right flank. Behind the fire

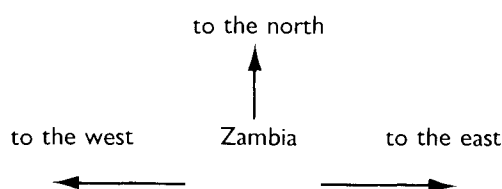
Unit 1 Spatial relationships

of 18 heavy guns, Gen. Friedrich von Seydlitz' cavalry, followed by seven battalions of infantry, routed the enemy cavalry and then swooped down on the startled allied infantry. In 40 minutes the Prussian horsemen gunned and sabered the French and Imperials into wild flight. Most of the Prussian foot soldiers were still coming up when Soubise fled the field with 7,500 casualties, chiefly prisoners. The victors lost less than 600 men. Frederick's spectacular victory at Rossbach broke the advance from the west.

(D. Eggenberger *A Dictionary of Battles*)

Using grammar in writing

The most important information in a sentence very often appears at the beginning. This information may tell us what the sentence is about. For example, the sentence 'Zambia is a landlocked country' seems to be about Zambia. In this case 'Zambia' is also the subject of the sentence. However, in the sentence 'To the north lies Tanzania', 'To the north' is not the subject but is very important information as it locates the position of Tanzania in terms of some reference point which we already know.



The organizing principle here is the points of the compass.

Task 8

Look at the following short texts and decide which is easier to understand.

- i) I live in Edinburgh. The capital of Scotland is Edinburgh. A part of the British Isles is Scotland.
- ii) I live in Edinburgh. It is the capital of Scotland. Scotland is part of the British Isles.

Text (ii) is easier to understand because the writer uses the beginning of each sentence to lead into the next, guiding us through the text in a logical way.

I → Edinburgh → It (Edinburgh) → Scotland → Scotland → British Isles

The organizing principle here is from part to whole.

In spatial descriptions you will find that locational expressions often appear at the beginning of sentences in the text (e.g. *Beside the river*, *Further south*, etc.).

Task 9

Read the spatial description which follows and underline the locational expressions that are used to guide the reader through the description.

Cairo: the modern city

The hub of the modern city of Cairo is the spacious Midan el-Tahrir (Liberation Square). Here all the city's main traffic arteries meet. – To the SW* of the square are the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Government Buildings, to the SE the American University and the National Assembly. To the NW of the square is the large range of buildings occupied by the Egyptian Museum, which has the world's largest and finest collection of Egyptian and Graeco-Roman antiquities. Just beyond the Egyptian Museum the Corniche el-Nil along the bank of the Nile is lined by large modern hotels and prestige buildings. In Shari Qasr el-Aini, which runs S from Midan el-Tahrir, is the Ethnological Museum, and in Shari el-Sheikh Rihan the Geological Museum. – To the NE of the Midan el-Tahrir are the main commercial and shopping districts of the modern city, which are entirely European in character. The goods sold in the shops here are marked with fixed prices, which cannot be reduced by bargaining like prices in the bazaars.

* SW = south west; NE = north east etc.

(Baedeker's AA Egypt)

Descriptions of spatial locations are normally organized according to conventional ways of looking at scenes. The most common conventions are:

general to particular
whole to part
large to small
outside to inside
top to bottom
left to right

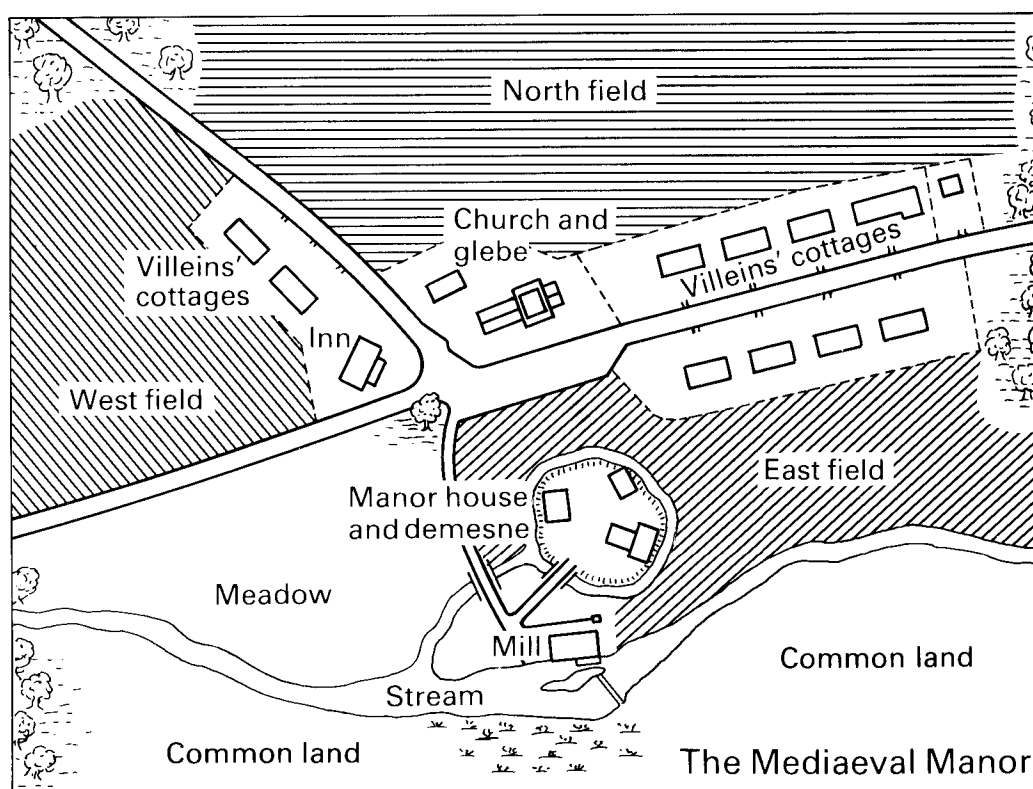
The main point here is to be consistent. If you choose a particular convention, use it throughout so as not to confuse the reader.

Task 10

- Reread 'Cairo: the modern city' and state its organizing principle.
- Draw a map of Cairo in as much detail as this text makes possible.

Task 11

- a) Study the sketch map and then read the text which accompanies it. Notice how the writer has tried to organize both the whole text and each sentence, to guide your reading. Trace or copy out the map, then mark it with arrows (a red pen would be ideal) and number them to show the sequence in which the text describes it.



During the Middle Ages, the chief man of the village, or manor, was the lord of the manor. He owned his own piece of land on which he built his sturdy manor house. The lord's lands were known as the demesne and were usually walled, and separated from the rest of the village. The common lands of the manor were divided into three large fields: each field consisted of many long, narrow strips, and each villein (or villager) had a number of these strips, scattered about the field. Each year, wheat would be grown in one of the fields, barley or oats in another, and the third would be left uncultivated. A different field was left uncultivated each year to rest the soil.

The cottages of the villeins were built along the edges of

the fields beside the road, or track. These houses were simple buildings built of stone or wattle and daub (i.e. twigs and mud), and often had only one room. The church, with the priest's house and the glebe (the land belonging to the church) was in the middle of the village, frequently at a crossroads.

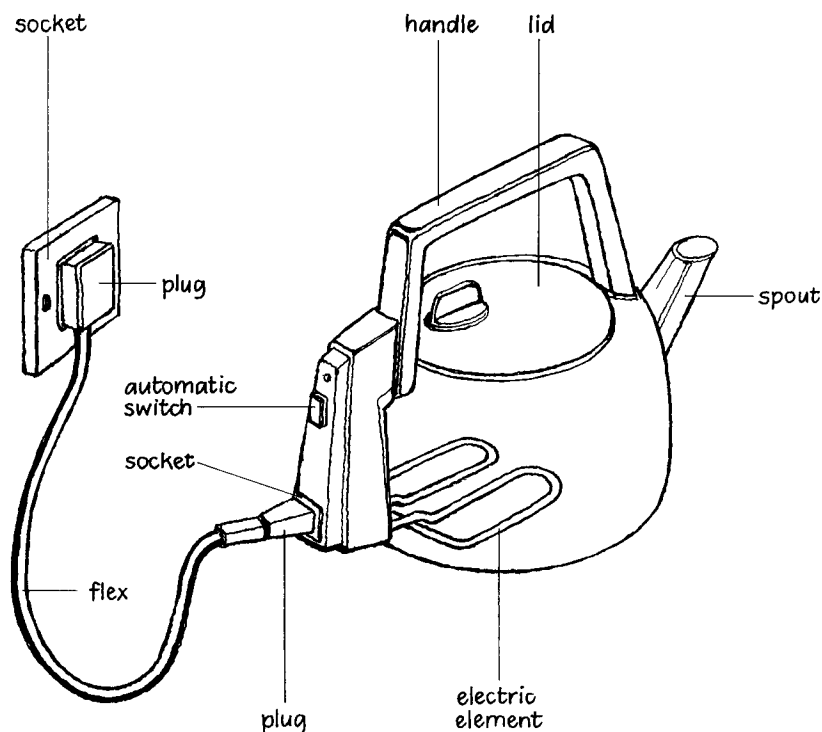
In addition to the fields of crops, the village had a hay meadow, usually near a stream. The hay was used for winter feed for the animals. The animals were kept on the common land on the outskirts of the village in good weather, and in bad weather they were brought into barns, or even into the villeins' houses.

(Adapted from J. Lockhart Whiteford *British History for the CSE Year*)

- b) Reorganize the text, rewriting if necessary, so that it offers better guidance to the reader about the spatial relationships it describes.

Consolidation

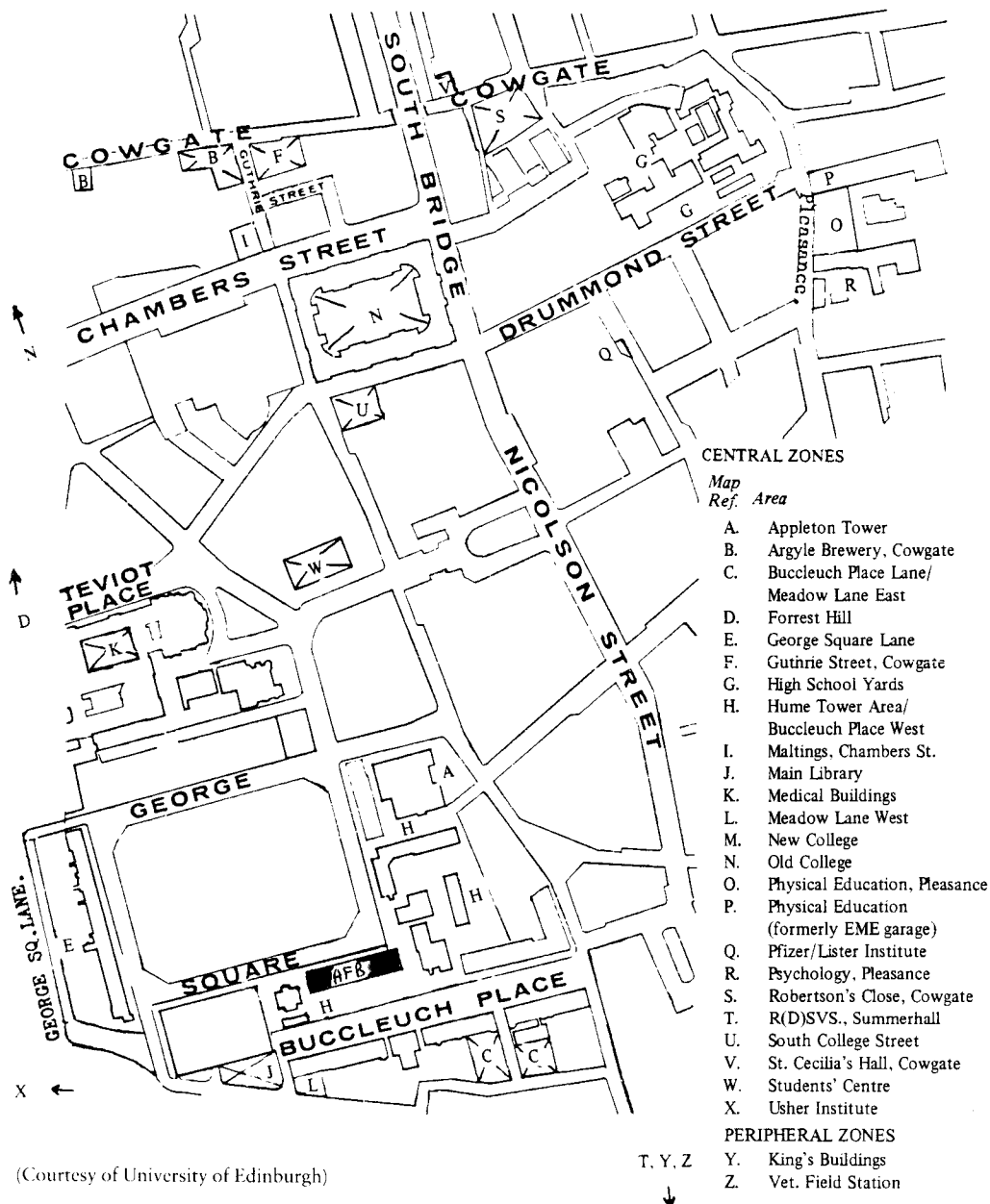
- A In some countries (the USA, for example) electric kettles are virtually unknown. Write a short text (imagine it is part of a letter to a penfriend in America) describing the main parts of an electric kettle and the way they fit together. The picture will help you.



Unit 1 Spatial relationships

B The outline map below shows the main car parks available to staff and students of Edinburgh University. Write a text, intended to be part of a letter to an overseas student planning to attend Edinburgh University, telling her she will need to apply for a parking permit, and suggesting the best car parks. Her classes will take place mainly in Adam Ferguson Building (marked AFB and shaded black on the map, and located to the south-east of George Square).

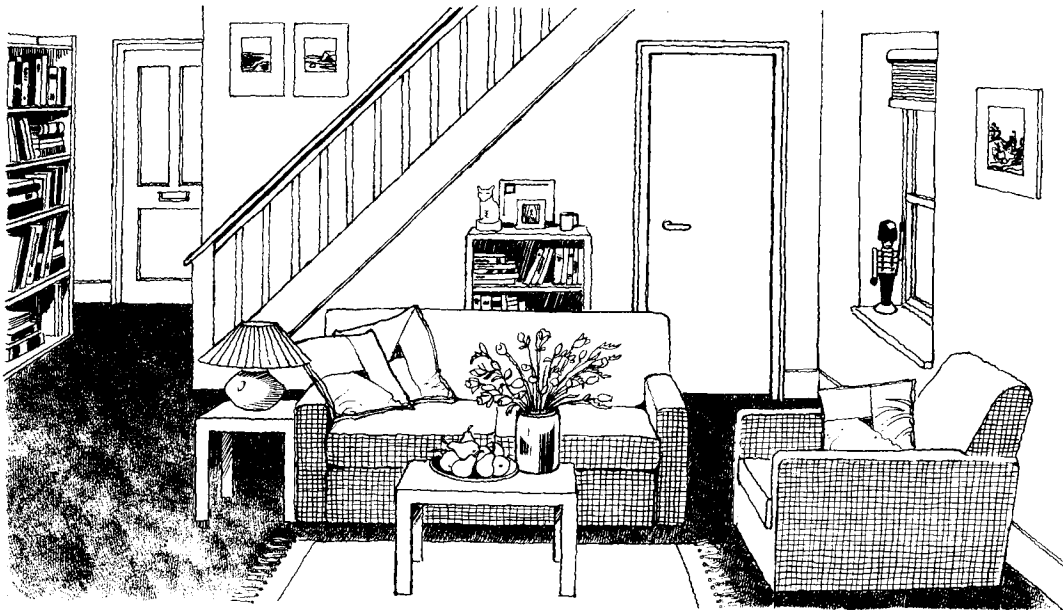
UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
CAR PARKING AREAS



(Courtesy of University of Edinburgh)

- C Imagine you are a dramatist. You have just written a drama, the major portion of which is set in a living room just like the one pictured below. Because dramatists never use pictures in their scripts, you have to write up the stage scene. Organize the description from the audience's viewpoint (near to far). Begin your description:

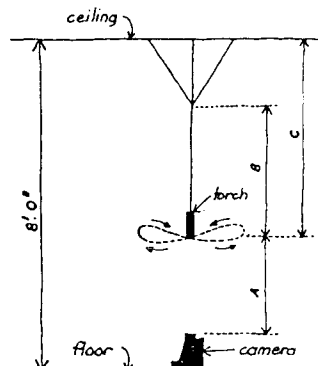
We are looking at a living room . . .



Looking back

Now that you have completed this unit you should understand how texts are organized according to a pedestrian's view and a bird's eye view. You should be familiar with some expressions of location and understand how these are used to guide a reader through a text; you should be able to use them in sentences and text.

p. 12 Making a physiograph using a camera



Making a physiograph: *A* is the distance between camera lens and the light bulb of the swinging torch; *B* is the distance between the light bulb and the point in the string at which side strings are fixed; *C* is the distance between light bulb and ceiling. The relation between *B* and *C* sets the pattern of the physiograph.