

FRQ Friday: Site & Situation

What is Site? – The exact placement of a settlement on the Earth. If you know its GPS coordinates, you can find it on your smartphone. Cities are part of the urban hierarchy. Where they stand in, the hierarchy depends on many factors: population, the number of services, and its sphere of influence. For purposes of this study guide, and the AP® Human Geography Exam, we will be discussing urban settlements or cities.

A city's site refers to the actual physical attributes of the place it occupies. The land could be flat or hilly. It could lie on a river or a lake. It could have a deep-water port. It could have obstacles for expansion like ridges or marshes. These are conditions that people consider when choosing the site of a city if those conditions are favorable for living. Cities with potential for growth have the advantage of a favorable site. Those favorable conditions would be access to a plentiful/potable water source, material for building homes and businesses, an abundant source of fuel for energy, natural barriers to defend the city against enemies and mother nature, climate, flora/fauna, and condition of the soil.

You must also consider the ability to trade when choosing a site for a city. Bodies of water were vital to trade in preindustrial times to allow trade through their ports. Most of the world's largest cities were settled on rivers, particularly in the location where they reach the ocean or sea. Many times, this was the first point that explorers landed. For example, the site of Sydney, Australia, took advantage of the superior, natural harbor, favorable for trade, and surrounding arable farmland. Rome, Athens, and Jerusalem were built on hilltops because they were a natural barrier for the defense of the city. History shows us that if these conditions are favorable for living, settlements develop and grow into major cities like New York and Paris.

Paris was founded on an island in the Seine River. This site could be easily defended and where crossing the Seine was frequent. When the settlement on this site began was probably during pre-Roman times, but it functioned as a Roman outpost for 2000 years. For many centuries, this favorable defense aspect continued to be vital to the growth of Paris, because the central government at that time was historically weak. In the end, Paris outgrew the island and started expanding its settlement to the banks of the Seine River, but that did not lessen the importance of the security it provided to the government.

The site of a city can also create challenges for its inhabitants as well. Cities located in climates that are inhospitable for humans or agriculture, or extremely rugged, puts the fate of the population in the hands of others, to provide resources they are not able to produce.

What is Situation? – Where a city is, in relation to its surrounding features. Those features could be natural surroundings (mountains, rivers, roads), nearby areas of productive capacity, the size of its hinterland (an inland area found behind a port and claimed by the power that owns the coast), the location of competing cities, and transportation routes. In other words, situation is the greater regional framework in which the city finds itself.

It is not just the encompassing human-made characteristics that are part of a city's situation, but also the natural physical features that surround the city. The growth of a city depends on the accessibility and availability of natural resources. Baghdad, Iraq had an extremely favorable situation because it had command of land between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Access to long distance commerce was also a favorable situation for cities grew up along trade routes. Examples are Xi'an, China on the Silk Road, Timbuktu, Mali on the Trans-Sahara trade route and maritime trade that helped Singapore prosper. Using Paris again as an example, its situation was advantageous to rapid growth. Paris lies near the center of a large and prosperous agricultural area, and as a growing market, interactions with these regions continued to increase. The Seine River is navigable by river traffic, with several tributaries navigable as well. This route led to the Lorraine industrial area and the area of coal-based manufacturing near the Belgian border. A radial road system was developed in the area during Napoleon's reign. Like Roman roads that focused on Rome, all of these roads led right to Paris.

The situation of a city is the most important factor for its future and whether it grows into a large city or stays a small town. As cities grow and develop, the predominance of these factors that make up their situation will determine whether or not the city will prosper in the long run or decline and become a victim to urban decay.

What is the Difference between Site and Situation? Now that you know what site and situation are, you can determine the difference between the two human geography terms.

- Site is the exact location of a city, you can find it on a map. The situation of a city relates to its surrounding features, both human-made and natural.
- The site of a city has features that are inherent to its location. The situation of the city includes characteristics that are external to the settlement.
- The site is the land that the city was built upon. The situation contains the surrounding areas of the city.

Name: _____ Date: _____ Period: _____

=====

AP® HUMAN GEOGRAPHY -- SECTION II -- Time—25 minutes --- Percent of total score—100

Directions: You have 25 minutes to answer the free response portion. It is suggested that you take 5 minutes of this time to plan and outline each answer. While a formal essay is not required, it is not enough to answer a question by merely listing facts. Illustrate your answers with substantive geographic examples where appropriate. Be sure to number each of your answers, including individual parts, in this booklet as the questions are numbered below

1. Almost half of the world's population live in cities, and the urban population is growing much faster than the rural population. This mass migrating into cities and urban areas is causing the form, size, and function of urban settlements to continually change.
 - A. **Define** the Site of an Urban settlement or city.
 - B. **Define** the Situation of an Urban settlement or city.
 - C. **Describe** favorable conditions of *Site* that might aid in the development of an urban setting.
 - D. **Describe** favorable conditions of *Situation* that might aid in the development of an urban setting.
 - E. **Explain** the *Site* of either Sydney, Australia or Paris, France.
 - F. **Explain** the *Situation* of Baghdad, Iraq or Xi'an, China.
 - G. **Identify** one difference between *Site* and *Situation*.