

Permaculture Women's Guild Online Double-Certificate Design Course

Site Assessment and Observation: Sample Questions

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Tips to remember:

- Alternate between passive and active observation
- Look through zones
- Look through sectors
- Look for patterns, flows, relationships, waste, and stagnation
- Zoom In/Zoom Out/Birdseye/Wormseye

Start with these questions and/or write your own:

Where are you, exactly?

Who owns the plot or has power over it?

Who are the neighbors?

Who is responsible for maintaining the boundaries and the access?

Who were the previous occupants, and how did they use it?

How are you connected to your land, and how is your site connected to the larger ecosystem, bioregion, and interspecies culture?

What is the cultural context? What were the indigenous uses of your site?

Is there evidence of ethical problems? What are they?

Do you see permaculture principles at play? Where?

Do you see patterns? Where?

Do the patterns repeat? How?

Put on your "invisible structures x-ray vision" glasses.

Do you see personal, social, cultural, economic, and otherwise "invisible" structures? Where? Do they intersect? How?

What problems do you see? Potential problems?

What are the patterns of human flow? Where are the zones? Where do they blend and intersect?

What are the natural influences? Where are the sectors?

What can you find out about your climate and biogeography?

Where are the microclimates? What are they?

What are the rainfall patterns?

Are there times of extreme weather? What kind?

Fire and flood hazards? Potential catastrophes?

What are the water sources?

Where does water gather on your site?

Where does the water go when it leaves your site?

How do you pollute water? Where do you waste it?

What kinds of soils do you have?

What kinds of weeds? Trees? Bushes? Find all of their names.

Do any of the plants look sick? What are the symptoms?

What wild plants can you find? Are they edible? Poisonous?

What are the neighbors growing? Are they friendly?

Which plants are self-seeding?

Which plants are native?

Which plants dominate the space? Which are less successful?

What insects, amphibians, spiders, and worms are there?

How many local bird species are there? What do they eat?

Are there wild animals that come through? Which?

What is the landform called? What are its characteristics?

Are there contours and changes in elevation?

Are there any ocks, berms, ditches, swales, gullies, holes that will come into play?

Bodies of water nearby? Where? How are they in relationship to the site?

What sorts of earthworking has been done in the past? Why? Did it solve problems? Cause them?

What about the built environment? Buildings? Benches? Fences? What's there now?

Were there any structures that have been torn down?

Is there any potential for contaminants in the soil such as lead paint, automotive oil, or agricultural chemicals?

How are humans using the structures?

How are other species using them?

How do the structures direct, interrupt, and influence flows, zones, sectors, boundaries, and microclimates?

How are the structures in relationship with each other, and with the biological aspects of the site?

What sorts of technologies are in use? Where? What problems do they solve? What problems do they create?

What are the modes of transportation and communication used?

What are the uses of electricity, gas, combustibles? Firewood?

Are there already permaculture-like systems in place? Shared resources? Closed-loop connection?

Is money being made on site? Other types of capital being generated? Which?

Where does the waste go?

And so on! Now, go forth and OBSERVE!!