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Cover Page Footnote

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How Can a Culturally Responsive Discussion of the Five-Paragraph Essay Help Asian American Students Write Well?

Yuemin He and Catherine Megliola Gaiser

The five-paragraph essay is highly controversial, and yet it has also been a useful format for composition. In this essay we explain why, despite its limits, students need to go along with the format to make what use and get what advantage of it. We then demonstrate that valuing the philosophical, historical, cultural, and educational backgrounds of our students can help navigate away from the restrictive nature of the format and lead to equitable learning for all students. Finally, we introduce a few curriculum designs and instructional practices to expand the epistemological and pedagogical frontiers of the format. In short, we conduct a culturally responsive discussion of issues students with non-Western backgrounds--Asian American students in particular--may encounter when writing the five-paragraph essay. By sharing student learning-focused approaches, we aim to improve Asian American students' learning experiences.

The five-paragraph essay has been a staple in US K-12 school and college composition teaching and writing. This standard essay format is a useful scaffold (Sztabnik, 2017). Last year history professor Zachary M. Schrag at George Mason University wrote a typical five-paragraph essay to expressly defend the usefulness of this writing format as "building blocks" for students to learn to develop longer essays . However, the five-paragraph essay has also been under fire as it functions as **"**an anti-perplexity machine" (Elbow, 2012, p. 308), leaves **"**no room for the untidiness of inquiry or complexity and therefore no energy in the writing" (Bomer, 2016, p. xi), and approaches taken by writing teachers are, to quote book author and educator John Warner (2018), "not nearly challenging enough" and should be "killed" (p.142).

As writing instructors teaching community college students who often struggle to develop an adequate grasp of academic writing, we do not intend to engage with the debate directly. Instead, we aim to, first, unfold difficulties students with non-Western cultural and educational backgrounds, especially Asian American students, experience when crafting this type of essay. Second, based on our findings, we share in the spirit of culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) some curriculum design and instructional practices. We hope this discussion can lead to recognizing and valuing the cultural,

community, and family backgrounds of our students as strengths as well as respond to the exigency for academic discourse on reshaping the five-paragraph essay in theory and praxis.

From Cultural and Thinking Differences to Writing Differences

We are starting with a personal story as stories not only present personal references but also broader meanings. Thus, we echo CRP experts Gloria Ladson-Billings (2021) and Geneva Gay (2018) in believing the power of personal narratives to expand epistemological and pedagogical boundaries.

In 2002, when I (Yuemin) was drafting my dissertation, I noticed that my professor would suggest that I add a topic sentence to my body paragraphs or move the last sentence of my body paragraphs to the beginning of those paragraphs. Since the absence of a topic sentence occurred so often, once my professor left a note on a page: "Every paragraph (almost) needs a clear + overarching topic sentence. You rarely have one."

This comment illustrates the difference between deductive and inductive writing. The deductive style of writing is often characterized as a top-down approach. Specifically, Laurie Kirszner & Stephen Mandell explain that deduction "moves from general statements, or premises, to specific conclusions." By contrast, the inductive style, sometimes called bottom-up, "begins with specific observations (or evidence) and goes on to draw a general conclusion" (2017, p. 125 & 137).

Below is one occasion where I (Yuemin) wrote inductively rather deductively.

> All the poems we have examined expound directly Chinese religious (chiefly Taoist) or philosophical beliefs. Masters admires these beliefs though he was an atheist. He was receptive to them because they help to overcome adversity and maintain peace of mind. However, Masters's realization of their value is more often based on a comparison of the Eastern and Western religions.

> So there are many poems in *Lichee Nuts* where Western Christianity and Chinese religions wrestle with one another.
>
> Elmer Chubb—interestingly, one of the pseudonyms Masters once adopted—is a key persona in *Lichee Nuts*. He is pious, almost bigoted American Christian. He frequents Chinatown and misses no chance to preach. As a foil to the Chinatown men, he challenges Buddhist practices in poem 21: Do the Buddhist priests have books to follow? What good morals do they preach? What kind of salvation do they preach? Hip Lung, tired of Chubb's insistence, says that the Buddhist sage Huen Sha preaches to his people by resigning preaching and encouraging people to listen to the singing of birds outside the temple. What is subtle about Huen Sha's preaching, it can be inferred, is that he makes people realize in nature "the peace of beauty in hearts at one with nature" (poem 20). This has to do with the Buddhist transcendence of discrimination, which perceives everything in this world as interconnected. Human beings are connected with nature, and the best way to approach truth is to transcend the sense of *I* and *we* and be with nature. Elmer Chubb is by contrast too instrumental in his approach, insisting on using holy books, preaching morals, and following idols. He cannot get the subtlety involved in the sage's doing. This, on the one hand, leaves Hip Lung and the wisdom embedded in Huen Sha's story isolated; on the other hand, it stresses the ignorance of Chubb and celebrates the Eastern wisdom. The final result is that few would like to identify with Chubb even if they could be firm believers of Christianity. To question some Christian practices and to tilt victory toward the East is exactly what Masters does here.

In this example, the first paragraph sums up previous analyses of some poems, which means the writing is done in an inductive manner. It also shifts the writing into a new direction with the transition that "there are many poems in *Lichee Nuts* where Western Christianity and Chinese religions wrestle with one another." The second paragraph therefore begins with the analysis of one concrete poem and eventually concludes that Masters intends to question some Christian practices and to tilt victory toward the East. This paragraph contains a post-positioned topic sentence, which

is a conclusion, and the paragraph reads clear and logical. However, the professor suggested addition of the topic sentence, "[t]o show the conflict between Chinese + Western belief practices, M [Masters] introduces the of figure of Elmer Chubb, a pious and bigoted American Christian."

These cases suggest that American readers are more receptive to writings that present information in a deductive manner and this expectation has shaped how an introduction of an essay should end (with a thesis statement), how the body paragraphs should unfold (with a topic sentence), how to end the essay (by repeating the subordinate points and thesis), and eventually how the five-paragraph essay has become the monolith at the center of English classrooms. Since the above paragraph does not satisfy that expectation, it needs to be "fixed."

Indeed, composition and composition teaching may not everywhere be interpreted and experienced the way it is defined by Western models in the English language. Researchers, such as Jianping Chen (2008), Karen Glaser (2013), Xinghua Liu and Clare Furneaux (2014) and others have discovered that although there are commonalities and shared understanding between the so-called "Eastern" and "Western" perspectives on college writing, it is increasingly recognized (such as in Gish Jen's elaborate account of her father's writing in her book *Tiger Writing*) that many Eastern, or non-Anglophone, writings, have distinctive features and perceptions due to deeply embedded philosophical traditions, cultural values, and educational systems. For instance, in China the inductive approach has been the staple for essay writing. Schools and coaches at various levels have been training students to write in the Chinese equivalent of the five-paragraph essay in an inductive manner. Top-rated essays from the Chinese college entrance exam display this preferred format and pedagogical approach. Amusingly, the practice has also been criticized for its formulaic characteristics.

To further illustrate that, let us fast forward from the early of this century to spring 2022 and cite a student example from our community college classrooms. I (Yuemin) was using *The*

Address Book: What Street Addresses Reveal About Identity, Race, Wealth, and Power by Deirdre Mask (2020) as a reader in my first-year English composition classes. The second assignment (Appendix I) requires students to imitate Mask's chapters to write about one specific type of address. One student wrote about fictional addresses. After group work and class discussions, prewriting, and student-professor conference, the student's first draft reads:

Fictional Addresses in Real Cities

What does 221B Baker Street mean to someone? Nothing if the person doesn't know who that address is associated with. The same could be said about 4 Privet Drive. However, to fans of Sherlock Holmes and Harry Potter, respectively, both locations are a must-visit. But aren't Sherlock and Harry fictional characters? And so, how can anyone visit a place that only exists in readers' imagination? The answer to that is though characters are fake, the sites themselves are real. They are just not where one might expect to find them.

221B Baker Street, at the time of Sherlock Holmes' creation in 1881, used to be a purely fictional address. Back then, Baker Street house numbers only extended into the 100s. But as time went on, the street was renumbered, and now had 200s in it. But there was still no building with the famous detective's address, even without a B. That, however, didn't stop the Sherlock Holmes International Society from opening the Sherlock Holmes Museum in 1990 and putting 221B Baker Street on its address plaque. There was only one problem. According to Jimmy Stamp, it was illegal to display a different address when the townhouse they had chosen to open the museum in still had its original, 239 Baker Street, in London's database. The problem lasted all the way into 2000s, when by the special permission of the City of Westminster, the Sherlock Holmes Museum was finally granted its desired address. And today, all of the mail addressed to Holmes or his companion Dr. Watson ends up in the correct place, despite its physical location being between 237 and 241 Baker Street.

4 Privet Drive is a similar situation. Though it never became a real address like 221B Baker Street, it holds sentimental value to Harry Potter fans as the home of Harry's cruel uncle and aunt Dursleys, where he spent 11 years before going to Hogwarts. And like Sherlock Holmes' imaginary address, it also has a location in the real world. The house at 12 Picket Post Close, about 40 miles from London. According to Karen Hua, when Warner Brothers were first filming *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, they had rented the now iconic house for two weeks before building a replica on studio grounds for later films. Since then, the house had undergone renovations and now only the exterior is a reminder of a place where Harry was so reluctant to return every summer break. But to true Harry Potter aficionados, the exterior alone is enough to pay $620,000 if it means they can experience the beginnings of a great magician.

In connection to Deirdre Mask's *Address Book*, she mentions that in Great Britain, people who live on streets with religious connections tend to be more religious themselves. Then, she asks the question: "Do you live on Church Street because you are religious and want to live near a church? Or do you become more religious because you live on Church Street?" (87) And, similarly, in the cases of 221B Baker Street and 4 Privet Drive, the question is whether people move there because they are fans or if they become fans by moving there.

This essay is clear – first asking questions and then using "show and tell" strategy to unveil what happens in individual novels before drawing a conclusion. However, it is clear only when readers are receptive to an inductive manner of presenting evidence, and they are patient (enjoy delayed gratification), interactive (evaluate the evidence while reading), and flexible (not expecting the usual topic sentences). However, if the essay is evaluated according to the five-paragraph essay format, it fails to include a clear thesis (only has thesis questions), topic sentences in the body paragraphs, and a third example. I (Yuemin) relayed this feedback to the student, targeting a five-paragraph essay as a final product. I suggested the student add one more example of a fictional address and some critical thinking that the three examples can lead to, esp. in relation to the reading

of Mask's chapters. That way the essay would be long enough to meet the length requirement, and if the source information were better integrated, the essay would be effective. Below is the student's new version.

Fictional Addresses in Real Cities

221B Baker Street and 4 Privet Drive may not sound so different from other addresses. However, to fans of Sherlock Holmes and Harry Potter, both locations are a must-visit. But aren't Sherlock and Harry fictional characters? And so, how can anyone visit a place that only exists on paper? The answer to that is though characters are fake, the sites themselves are real. And many fans, believe it or not, go as far as sending letters or even placing a bid on the place. This raises the question why people are willing to pay real money just to live by the address of their fictional heroes.

One example of a fictional address with a real location is 221B Baker Street, the home of the literary world's greatest detective, Sherlock Holmes. At the time of Holmes' creation, however, 221B used to be purely fictional. Back then, in 1881, Baker Street house numbers only extended into the 100s. But as time went on, the street was renumbered, and now had 200s in it. And yet, there was still no building with the famous detective's address, even without a B. That, however, did not stop the Sherlock Holmes International Society from opening the Sherlock Holmes Museum in 1990 and putting 221B Baker Street on its address plaque. There was only one problem. According to Jimmy Stamp, a writer for Smithsonian magazine, it was illegal to display a different address when the townhouse they had chosen to open the museum in still had its original, 239 Baker Street, in London's database. The problem lasted all the way into 2000s, when by the special permission of the City of Westminster, the Sherlock Holmes Museum was finally granted its desired address, despite its physical location being between 237 and 241 Baker Street. Thus, the identities of people living on Baker Street were transformed, because now, every time they look at the plaque that says 221B, they can imagine the famous detective sitting inside, about to close another unsolvable case.

4 Privet Drive is a similar situation. Though it never became a real address like 221B Baker Street, it holds sentimental value to Harry Potter fans as the home of Harry's cruel uncle and aunt Dursleys, where he spent 11 years before going to Hogwarts. And like Sherlock Holmes' imaginary address, it also has a location in the real world. The house at 12 Picket Post Close, about 40 miles from London. According to Karen Hua, a writer at Forbes, when Warner Brothers were first filming *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, they had rented the now iconic house for two weeks before building a replica on studio grounds for later films. Since then, the house had undergone renovations and now only the exterior is a reminder of a place where Harry was so reluctant to return every summer break. But to true Harry Potter aficionados, the exterior alone is enough to pay $620,000, because it transforms the identity of the people living inside by letting them imagine growing up as future magicians.

In addition to 221B Baker Street and 4 Privet Drive, 123 Elf Road is an example worth mentioning. This time, it concerns Kris Kringle or Santa Claus as he is better known as. Every year, children around the world send thousands of letters to Santa, describing what they want to get for Christmas. And each letter always gets a response. But Santa being a fictional character, who actually responds to all those letters? The answer is the U.S. Postal Service or rather members of its Operation Santa program. Since 1912, they have been hand-sorting letters addressed "To Santa, North Pole", and sending them to families or organizations that can satisfy each request. However, according to Kim Frum, the spokesperson for the Postal Service, sorting the letters by hand was time consuming and so they had to come up with a solution. That is how 123 Elf Road was born. Whenever a computer sees that address, it knows to send the letter to Operation Santa and a child could now expect to receive his or her Christmas gift so much sooner. Though 123 Elf Road doesn't have a physical location like the previously mentioned two, it still transforms identity, because by thinking of that address, kids can imagine Santa sitting in his home on the North Pole and writing each one of them a letter. Thus, the idea of Christmas Magic lives on.

> These three examples are not too different from the one in Deirdre Mask's *Address Book:* in Great Britain, people who live on streets with religious connections tend to be more religious themselves. Mask also theorizes whether they live on Church Street because they are religious or if they became more religious by living on Church Street (87). And with fictional addresses, do people move there because they are fans, or do they become fans by moving there? But that is the question of which came first, the chicken or the egg. What's important is that places change identity. Human beings' relationship with an address transforms based on who or what they associate it with. And association with the unreal is no different. In the cases of 221B Baker Street and 4 Privet Drive, people value the otherwise ordinary houses more because of its connection to the fictional universe, as they can now experience it while staying in the real world. And in the case of 123 Elf Road, it is valued not because of how it looks but rather because of its symbol as a place from which magic comes to life.

Evidently, the student converted the original inductively written body paragraphs to deductively written ones though his topic sentences can still be stronger. He also delved deeper into the meanings of those examples. Later, when asked if he was aware of the five-paragraph format and why he was writing the way he had, the student replied that he was not aware of the format, and he had been writing the way he felt right. The student is Eurasian by origin, had studied in a Canadian grade school before settling down in the US. He now considered himself Asian American.

We can see that as the result of thinking and cultural differences, the differences between "Eastern" and "Western" writing are rather fundamental. Therefore, though the differences between the so-called "East" and "West" should not be viewed as a fixed demarcation based on geography, it is necessary that instructors who are used to Western way of thinking develop understanding of the alternative conceptualizations to respond to an increasingly diverse and globalized student population. This is critical when instructors are tasked to guide students with Eastern cultural and

linguistic backgrounds to adapt to the expectations of Western readers that include their instructors, publishers, colleagues, supervisors, etc.

So, rather than drawing on the over-simplified Western/Eastern dichotomy, we recognize the impetus of different philosophical and cultural traditions and narrow our focus to improve the learning experiences of Asian American college students of diverse Asian backgrounds. We believe pedagogical strategies informed by awareness of the differences can guide the students onto the expected course of five-paragraph essay writing. We also hope by spotlighting these differences in academic discourse, more interesting springboards to launch an active exploration of relevant pedagogies can emerge.

Understanding Differences to Enhance Instruction

Since we both work in a community college and are faculty leads in equity-based programs, we focus on Asian American students in community colleges like ours as part of our efforts to implement CRP in teaching. This responds to the gap we have identified from the literature survey: Elizabeth Guzik, Thomas E. Nunnally (1991), Kimberly Wesley (2021), David Labaree (2018), and Edward P.J. Corbett (1999) in their respective study all have confirmed English as a Foreign Language and English as a Second Language students' preferential attitude towards inductive thinking. As mentioned earlier, American critics have written much about the strengths and weaknesses of the five-paragraph essay format. However, the connection between Asian American students' difficulties in writing the five-paragraph essay and their experience of the two modes of logic thinking remains understudied. Therefore, bearing in mind that our students' cultural, family, and community backgrounds are strengths rather than baggage to teaching and learning, we strive to fill the gap. We will first exemplify how to teach these students to construct body paragraphs in a deductive manner. (To be comprehensive, we should also discuss the thesis statement and essay

conclusion, but that would be the scope of another essay) Then we move on to level the playground for all students by introducing a contrastive instructional method. Finally, we showcase strategies to expand the frontiers of the five-paragraph essay.

A. *Training students to understand the body paragraph construction for a five-paragraph essay*: Below are annotated body paragraphs. The source of each paragraph is indicated under the paragraph as well as listed in the reference. Uppercase, numbers, and bold type are added to the original to help annotate these paragraphs. The annotations on the left explain the usual structure of a body paragraph and how evidence with an effective topic sentence offers a smooth transition or "roadmap." During class, we can show one sample annotation to the students and then assign them to annotate the other paragraphs.

The topic sentence in uppercase (which is added) makes a claim about the effect of the cats of 2channel on Japanese culture. Because evidence follows the claim, this paragraph illustrates deductive reasoning.	THE CATS OF 2CHANNEL EXTENDED AN ANTIQUE FASCINATION WITH CATS IN JAPANESE CULTURE. **[1]** In Japan, shopkeepers and restaurateurs commonly place figurines of cats with beckoning paws, called *maneki-neko,* at their doorways for good luck. **[2]** Cat colonies are often allowed to live near Shinto shrines, and Buddhist tradition says that cats were once entrusted with guarding scriptures from mice. **[3]** According to folklore, cats can bring good or bad fortune at will, and the unfortunate person who kills a cat will be reborn with bad luck for seven lifetimes. **[4]** During the Edo period, owners supposedly killed their cats when the cats turned seven, lest the cats take on demonic features and turn on their owners.
The paragraph provides four pieces of evidence (numbers added) that show Japan's current and historic fascination with cats. In an inductive structure, the topic	

sentence would follow these examples, acting as a conclusion, not as a claim.

(White, 2020, p. 49)

This topic sentence clearly fulfills two functions: By referring to a preceding explanation of teknonymy, it serves as a transition; and by following a deductive structure, it makes a claim about indigenous conversational styles.

JUST AS THE PRACTICE OF TEKNONYMY IN MANY SOUTHEAST ASIAN SOCIETIES UNDERSCORES THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING IMMERSED IN WEBS OF KINSHIP, AND OF LINGUISTICALLY UNDERSCORING ONE'S CONNECTIONS TO OTHERS, SO DO EVERYDAY CONVERSATIONAL STYLES CONVEY SIMILAR THEMES. Aragon's contribution cogently illustrates that the absence of indigenous words for *please* and *thank you* in Central Sulawesi languages reveals much about social relations. Among other things, she underscores that the fact that so many indigenous languages in the archipelago lack these words does not mean that people do not experience gratitude. Rather, these words are not deemed necessary, as to utter

Instead of several examples, one elaborate example supports the claim made in the topic sentence. Specifically, the absence of words for "please" and "thank you" is used as evidence that "everyday conversational styles" in indigenous cultures are shaped by their societal goals of kinship and connection.

In this case, the individual sentences that support the topic sentence cannot stand alone. Each is a necessary component of one piece of evidence.

words of thanks would be akin to preventing much valued interpersonal bonds of indebtedness to develop. In these island societies, she suggests, people see identities not as isolated, but rather as contingent on sociality. As Aragon writes, "Debts of significance cannot be released with a few fluffy words. Obligations are a state of being and a means to create relations… anew."

(Gillogly & Adams, 2011, p.10)

In this example, the topic sentence is in the middle of the paragraph.

The text in bold marks the beginning of the topic sentence. Because "this organization" refers to the preceding fact about the use of couplets, it functions as a transition.

My father, in any case, **[1]** using the couplet to organize his narrative, follows his introduction with a second section about the generation named after the first character, *guo*—his grandfather's generation. He devotes the next section to the generation named after the second character, *en*—his father's generation—and so on. **THIS IS AN ORGANIZATION** THAT WOULD ACTUALLY MAKE SENSE EVEN INDEPENDENT OF THE COUPLET, SINCE THE GRANTING OF THE

The underlined text, which marks the end of the topic sentence, makes a claim about recognizing family status. This claim is supported by the evidence in the last sentence of the paragraph.	COUPLET WAS TO BEGIN WITH A RECOGNITION OF MY FATHER'S GRANDFATHER'S STATUS. **[2]** He was, after all, the one who put this branch of the family on the map—the one who made its fortune, built its compound, and in many ways defined the Edenic years of peace and prosperity my father enjoyed in Yixing. (Jen, 2013, p. 18)

Taken collectively, these paragraphs demonstrate both the common and divergent components of body paragraphs that take a deductive approach. Individually, they offer clear examples of how to construct topic sentences and present evidence. Ultimately, they demonstrate that instruction and learning centering on deductive reasoning can be effective.

Since understanding the structure and function of strong topic sentences is essential to successful deductive writing, students can use the topic sentence in each of the annotated paragraphs as a model. The topic sentence in paragraph 1, for example, makes a clear claim about the effect of the cats of 2channel on Japanese culture. The topic sentences in paragraphs 2 and 3 have two distinct parts—a transition and a claim. By referring to a preceding explanation of teknonymy, topic sentence 2 begins with a transition and ends with a claim about indigenous conversational styles. Likewise, topic sentence 3 uses the reference to couplets as a transition and ends with a claim about recognizing family status. With some practice, students will recognize transitions and claims in other topic sentences they encounter.

Meanwhile, students can learn three ways to present evidence: The presentation of evidence in paragraph 1 is perhaps the most familiar to them because it mirrors the approach they often take: the list. Although each piece of evidence is independent from the other two, all three are nevertheless bound by and supportive of the topic sentence. This paragraph also offers an ideal occasion to unravel the complexity of making a seemingly simple list: What order should be used to organize all the evidence? What should be the unifying factor? How can they avoid repetitiveness while organizing the evidence? By referring to the doorways of shopkeepers and restauranteurs, the list in paragraph 1 starts with a modern example of the cats' role. As the list progresses, the examples serve to secure and elevate the cats' place in Japanese history as the paragraph moves from typical commercial establishments to shrines, folklore, and finally the Edo Period. To support the claim about linguistic styles among indigenous peoples, Paragraph 2 presents evidence as an elaborate example composed of a series of interconnected ideas that build on each other. The word "rather" suggests that the first sentence is needed to make sense of the second. This paragraph thus accomplishes two important tasks: It demonstrates how to present evidence as a discussion built around one idea rather than list of separate ideas, and it encourages synthesis and higher-order thinking for a cohesive presentation of evidence. Paragraph 3 shows how evidence can both precede and follow a topic sentence that is placed in the middle of a paragraph. Despite its "new" location, the topic sentence still contains a transition and a claim about family status.

All three paragraphs prove that while generally adhering to an established structure, a deductive approach can still accommodate flexibility and judgment for supporting a claim. Of course, what we have here is only one way to teach these skills. Myriad other ways (Appendix II), can be utilized in class, student-professor conferences, and office hours to achieve the same goal.

B. *Using contrastive conversion exercise, which is inspired by Robert Kaplan's theory of contrastive rhetoric in the mid 1960s, to raise student awareness of both types of logical thinking and writing:* This practice

> levels the ground for all students. It is vital for an education that responds to global communication, cooperation, and competition. We cite one example.

The following paragraph is from the introduction of *Everyday Life in Southeast Asia* (Adams & Gillogly, 2011, p. 4**).** Consisting of 24 chapters by Western authors, the book targets American audiences, particularly entrance-level readers in anthropology or other humanities fields.

> The colonial histories of the countries that comprise Southeast Asia differ dramatically as well: Burma was a part of the British empire in India and so tied to Malaysia and Singapore; Indonesia was a Dutch colony; Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia formed French Indochina; the Philippines was a colony of Spain, then the United States; and East Timor was a Portuguese colony, and later colonized and incorporated for a time by Indonesia. That Thailand maintained its independence was in part due to its role as a buffer state between British and French colonial territories, as well as due to the astuteness of its ruling kings in assimilating western technologies of governance such as mapping, as Thongchai Winichakul demonstrated in *Siam Mapped* (1994)**.**

Even though it is from a book introduction, this body paragraph follows the topic-sentence and then evidence format: makes its main point clear in the first sentence and all the other sentences lending evidence to prove this point. This is true of many other paragraphs in the same introduction. Together, they help underscore the central theme of the book--Southeast Asia (hereafter SEA) is a dynamic region of unity, continuity, and fluidity. They also conveniently unify the book's chapters as they discuss varied aspects of SEA everyday life. The final result is that we as readers hear a firm tone that leaves little room for doubting the point or theme.

Since teaching students to think critically is one of the most important goals of composition classes, while teaching the text, Yuemin took her students' understanding to the next level by putting them into small groups and asking them to find out:

1). How many countries were in SEA during the beginning of the 21st century?

2). How are the countries grouped together? Does each of the colonial histories in SEA support the point in the topic sentence?

3). Why is Thailand the last country discussed?

4). What does the fact that Indonesia was colonized by the Dutch but later it colonized East Timor reveal?

After group work, the students pointed out that Brunei, first a British protectorate and then occupied by the Japanese during WWII, was left out of the paragraph. They were then asked, "Was the country too unimportant to be mentioned? How does the omission affect the readers' reading?" They also believed that Thailand does not support the targeted point as neatly as the rest of the SEA countries in terms of their history. They realized why it not only takes the most space in the paragraph but also appears as the last piece of evidence. The trick, they observed, is by that time the targeted point has already taken roots in the readers' mind. As for Indonesia, they made comments about the complexity and self-serving nature of colonialism and human beings. This discussion made students aware that authors consider rhetorical strategies even when writing seemingly factual paragraphs. Students learned about the importance for readers to read vigilantly and to evaluate the evidence carefully. Some students exclaimed that they finally understood what critical thinking meant.

At this juncture, the students were put into groups again, and asked to rewrite the paragraph in an inductive manner. Their revised paragraphs showed their understanding that inductive writing begins with a presentation of evidence that must be persuasive and credible to hold the audience's interest until the main point is revealed at the end. Later, they voted for the version below:

> During the history of Southeast Asia, Burma was once a part of the British empire in India and so tied to Malaysia and Singapore; Indonesia was a Dutch colony; Vietnam, Laos, and

Cambodia formed French Indochina; the Philippines was a colony of Spain, then the United States; and East Timor was a Portuguese colony, and later colonized and incorporated for a time by Indonesia. That Thailand maintained its independence was in part due to its role as a buffer state between British and French colonial territories, as well as due to the astuteness of its ruling kings in assimilating western technologies of governance such as mapping, as Thongchai Winichakul demonstrated in *Siam Mapped* (1994). Therefore, the colonial histories of the Southeast Asian countries also differ dramatically along with the previous/above differences.

Then they were asked:

1.) What are the similarities and differences between the original and the new version?

2.) How does the inductive structure affect understanding of SEA?

3.) Comparatively speaking, is the new version more reader-centric?

4.) What can be learned about writing from the new version?

They reported the following:

1.) Some readers might wonder where the new version goes until they complete the paragraph.

2.) It becomes more obvious that Southeast Asian countries suffered from colonialism, but to varied degrees.

3.) The new version gives the readers time to think before the main point is revealed; some readers may agree to the point, and others may disagree because the same evidence does not necessarily lead to the same conclusion for each reader.

4.) Due to the inductive structure, the main point is reached less firmly, leaving room for doubt and debate.

This contrastive method is interactive, revealing, and thought-provoking. While the deductive approach is a teacher-centric strategy, the inductive approach is more student-centric. The exercise prepares students to be discerning and flexible readers, and conscious and resourceful writers. Asian American students will become aware of the expectation of their Western professors and learn to adjust quickly. As they write, they may realize that Western readers, including their professors, expect them to be firm about their point, which is not a small feat for many Asian American students who are inclined to valuing unity and harmonious relationship. Whereas, when reading a paragraph in an inductive structure, the other students will feel the need to step out of the comfort zone, and develop what John Keats calls "negative capability" (Hebron, 2014). And, to know the claim, they should skim to the end of the paragraph. This use of the contrastive method, then, shows students that there is more than one way to present and consume information in academic papers and gives faculty another "tool in their toolbox" as they strive to appeal to novice writers coming from different writing traditions.

C. *Opening up new frontiers for the five-paragraph-essay*: Believing that within the framework of the five-paragraph essay, there is still room to stretch epistemological boundaries, we researched for new tools and strategies to reshape the format. The attached assignment (Appendix III) is one of the products. We pair this written assignment with two readings: "Superman and Me" by Sherman Alexie (1998) and "Surrendering" by Ocean Vuong (2016).

Designed for first-semester college composition students, this assignment shows that the uncomplicated format of the five-paragraph essay makes it a good candidate for incorporating recent equity-based strategies to teach Asian American students and their peers.

Dr. Mary-Ann Winkelmes (2019) founder and principal investigator of TILTHigherEd, describes the language of college as a "code" that keeps students from succeeding. Transparent

Assignment Design demystifies that code by relying on an assignment framework that makes certain information transparent (p. 2). The sample assignment succeeds by making explicit the purposes of the assignment so students understand *why* they are doing work, *which skills* they will develop, and *what* they will learn; by providing specific steps so students know *what* to do; and by disclosing the criteria for success, such as a rubric, so students know *how* to do well. The economical format of the five-paragraph essay thereby provides a solid foundation for students to embark on conveying themselves through writing.

The assignment's focus on a student's community makes room for cultural and linguistic diversity and it, to borrow CRP expert Zaretta Hammond's words, "grounds the lesson" in a way that is "relevant and meaningful to students" (2015, p.15). Because the assignment requires identifying a community-based problem and proposing a solution, it entails the study of other communities (such as that of Alexie, Vuong, and student peers), and activates an opportunity for students to cultivate cultural competence that affirms and appreciates their own culture while also learning about one other culture. This assignment shows that the five-paragraph essay can accommodate an assignment that asks students to write about complex topics like culture and community and teaching that speaks to the strengths and interests of our students.

Moreover, this sample 5-paragraph essay assignment is flexible enough to implement Problem-Based Learning, a pedagogical practice whereby students learn "through facilitated problem solving that centers on a complex problem that does not have a single correct answer" (Hmelo-Silver, 2004, p. 235). The possibility for multiple solutions suggests that the problem is "ill-structured" (Savery, 2006, p. 13) and thus allows students free inquiry, including investigation into their personal experiences. At the same time, it casts us instructors as "facilitators" as we coach the students through their unique lines of self-directed discovery, research, and analysis.

Overall, the integration of new approaches in this assignment can intensify many students' sense of belonging, an essential component of student success: Asian American students are initiated to this format, and get a timely start. For those educated in Western traditions, recognizing the assignment not only makes them feel they belong in the college classroom, but also activates prior knowledge by creating connections between past and current assignments.

All these point to the conclusion that despite inherent weaknesses, well used, the five-paragraph essay's spare format encourages careful consideration of an assignment's purpose, the assignment's relationship to the course content summary, and the scaffolded assignments that precede it. Its limited number of body paragraphs help carve out space for teaching students to do focused revisions. Its flexibility, efficiency, and durability allow experiment with new pedagogies in a relatively low-stakes, low-risk environment. Finally, its affordances provide a solid foundation for students who progress beyond first-year composition to more complex forms of writing in their upper-level writing-intensive classes.

Challenging Ourselves, Changing Our Students

Readers probably have noticed that this essay cites many examples that are informed with and by Asian content. It is indeed an unspoken part of our effort to infuse Asian studies in undergraduate composition and exemplification of what CRP underscores: Education works best if students' diverse backgrounds are treated as strengths; teaching is more effective if what the students read is exactly how they are expected to write; since all students should be introduced to cultures, infusing varied cultures in curriculum design is a vital means to achieve that. Therefore, we end with these questions for our peers: How do you see your current course's relationship with the five-paragraph essay? Are there any cultural elements that are currently left unaddressed? How has your course already broken the five-paragraph essay format?

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APPENDIX I

Assignment: In Response to Mask's Line of Thinking

Topic: Addresses come in different sizes, shapes, colors, significance, etc. This is evident if we realize how long the list of adjectives that we can use to describe the word addresses. Here is a list that you can expand both horizontally and perpendicularly.

a) popular addresses: Hollywood
b) prestigious addresses: 1600 Pennsylvania Address
c) notorious addresses: Skid Row
d) humorous addresses: The Other Street
e) fictional addresses: Salem's Lot
f) copycat addresses: Bollywood,
g) online addresses: Wikipedia
h) immigrant addresses: Chinatown, Little Saigon, Little Italy
i) overused addresses: Main Street
j) business addresses: Parks
k) creative addresses: King Family

This assignment asks you to think over what happens at the intersection of a specific type of addresses (from the above list or at your own choice) and an issue of your own choice (employment, neighborhood security, school choice, immigration, influencer culture, environment protection, academic research, etc.) In chapters 13, 14, 1 & 2, Mask contemplates what happens at the intersection of addresses and issues of poverty, homelessness, wealth accumulation, and natural disaster management. Therefore, the chapters are excellent models.

Requirements: Based on the assigned readings, class discussions, and your own speculations, you will develop a specific topic to write an essay. Your essay should have an explicit thesis and express a view of yours. The essay should be double-spaced, in 12 pt. Times New Roman font, and at least three pages long (not including the works-cited). It should have an effective title and use the MLA documentation style to record materials from any source. The first draft and the final draft are due at the beginning of our class on March X and by the end of March XX, respectively. To receive full credit for this assignment, you must turn in a complete first draft and a revised final draft.

Grading Criteria: Your essay will be evaluated by

a) if the basic length, title, format, and draft number requirements are satisfied (10%)
a) how deep the critical thinking extends (10%)
c) how effective the writing is in content and language use (60%)
d) if the essay properly integrates research from Mask as well as other sources (10%)
e) what kind of relationship it forges with its targeted audience10%)

APPENDIX II

1. Provide students with several topic sentences and, in groups or independently, ask them to identify the transition and claim in each one.
2. Provide students with several topic sentences and, in groups or independently, instruct them to work backward to create a topic sentence template.
3. Provide students with two consecutive paragraphs and, in groups or independently, ask them to connect the transitional part of the topic sentence (in the second paragraph) to the corresponding information in the first.
4. Provide students with several paragraphs and, in groups or independently, ask them to identify the author's method for presenting evidence (list, elaborate, or compare/contrast).
5. Provide students with several paragraphs and, in groups or independently, ask them to determine if the author's evidence adequately supports the claim made in the topic sentence.
6. Ask students to examine the body paragraphs in their reader/textbook and find one or two to write an analysis of the writing strategies employed by the author to get a "behind the scene" perspective, very much like what this essay does right now.

APPENDIX III

Assignment: Proposing a Solution to a Problem

BACKGROUND: Writers, such as Sherman Alexie and Ocean Vuong, are often inspired by their childhood challenges. Alexie grew up on an Indian reservation near Spokane, Washington. His writings invariably incorporate issues Indian reservation suffer--poor schools, inadequate healthcare, low employment, and high rates of substance abuse. Vuong, who emigrated from Vietnam to Connecticut when he was very young, lived in a lower-income Vietnamese neighborhood with his single mother and grandmother, who spoke no English. Vuong began his American education in ESL classes, and when he "graduated" to non-ESL classes, he was treated poorly by his teachers and his peers. His poetry and prose reflect these experiences. More importantly, both writers share these challenges with their readers as they offer solutions to those problems to help their communities.

Because every community, including mine and yours, has problems and because you are writers, you already have two things in common with Vuong and Alexie.

ASSIGNMENT: For this assignment, you will write a five-paragraph essay that identifies a problem in your community and proposes a solution. Your community could be your neighborhood, school, workplace, place of worship, club, or any other place where people gather. As for problems, some affect many communities, but to different degrees. For instance, the hardships that Alexie faced in his community exist in other U.S. communities as well. Other problems are specific to communities, such as what should be done to help Amerasians and Vietnamese Americans negotiate with their multilayered identities, or whether an afterschool program should be provided in Chinese for a Chinese American community.

If Alexie were assigned this essay, he might write about the high rate of unemployment on Indian reservations. After researching the topic, he would propose one way to increase job opportunities for his community and use his research as support for his proposal. Vuong might show that some elementary schools lack of adequate resources for ESL students. Then, after careful research, he could explain one way that schools could improve educational opportunities for those students and use his research as support for his proposal. To brainstorm, you can start from current issues listed in the table below. Some, like social media use, can cause problems while others, like domestic violence, *are* problems. Consider how these issues affect your community. You can certainly propose your own choice of issue too.

Low AAPI Student Graduation Rate	Freedom of Speech	Domestic Violence

Privacy and Minority Invisibility	College Tuition Increase	Immigration
Wide Applications of Artificial Intelligence	Youth Social Media Use	LGBTQ+ Rights
Online Learning	Mental Health Issue	Body Image

PURPOSE: The overall purpose of this assignment is to learn to use writing as a tool to address a problem in your community. The solution will demonstrate your efforts to conduct effective research, make sense of your experiences and those of your community members, and approach reality in a well-informed, creative, and wise manner. Below are specific skills and knowledge you will accumulate as you work on this essay.

Skills

- Cultural Awareness – Becoming knowledgeable of the culture in which the issue exists
- Problem-Solving – using research and personal experience to propose a solution
- Inquiry – knowing what questions to ask to get the information you need
- Research –knowing how to locate relevant and reliable sources
- Critical Thinking – Making sense of what you learn and applying it toward a solution
- Writing with a purpose and to an audience – Knowing what you are writing and for whom

New Knowledge

- Ways an issue can affect a community
- Dynamics between selfhood and community, thinking and praxis, etc.
- Knowledge construction, accumulation, application, and expansion

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STEPS: Writing an essay is like following a thread, or strand, of tasks that lead you through the writing process. Here is the strand for this essay:

S	**Select** an issue or topic that interests you.
T	**Think** without doing any research. Write down your own ideas about the issue so you'll have a record of what you think.
R	**Research** the library's website to find books, videos, and database articles about your topic.

A	**Accumulate** sources for working a bibliography (a list of your current sources).
N	**Note-taking** as you conduct your research and keep track of your sources.
D	**Draft** your essay according to the "Criteria for Success."

CRITERIA FOR SUCCESS: A successful essay includes the elements listed below:

- The following paragraphs:
  - An **introduction** that identifies the issue and the community, provides general information about problem and whom it affects, and ends with your proposed solution.
  - **Three Body paragraphs** that support your proposed solution. Each body paragraph consists of a topic sentence and evidence that supports the idea in the topic sentence.
  - A **conclusion** that restates your proposed solution and summarizes the main ideas you learned from your research.
- Research
  - that supports the idea in the topic sentences.
  - that is smoothly integrated with signal phrases and in-text citations to pinpoint its use in your essay.
  - that is neatly documented in a works-cited to indicate the sources you used.