

Interviewer: This is ***. I'm interviewing *** on [...] March 29th [...]. Hi, ***.

Interviewee: Hi.

Interviewer: [...]. The first set of questions really are just about how you think of yourself as a writer, sort of your impressions of your abilities at this point in your career. If we start there, how would you describe yourself as a writer?

Interviewee: Right now, I guess, after coming to [University of Michigan], I'd say that writing has become a centralized strength within my academics. It's something that I enjoy, that I think I'm somewhat good at, that I've seen a lot of improvement with.

Interviewer: That's great. Is there a way to describe the role of writing in your life? [Crosstalk 00:53] out of school?

Interviewee: I guess right now it's more based on school, because I haven't had that much time to do any free writing or anything creatively by myself. But I could see it evolving into something more than a school-based—

Interviewer: That's interesting. How do you mean that?

Interviewee: I mean, I guess I don't know eventually what my career's going to be, but I know that I'd like it to involve an element of writing. Whether it be like maybe doing something with journalism, maybe eventually writing a book, maybe like doing screenplays for TV shows. Something like that. I'm not exactly sure. Yeah.

Interviewer: That's great. Thinking again about your sort of, you're a junior?

Interviewee: A sophomore.

Interviewer: Sophomore. Since you came to school last year, can you talk a bit about sort of your growth as a writer?

Interviewee: Yeah. I guess coming from high school, I had no confidence with writing at all. I thought I was a terrible writer. I hated it. Yeah, I guess I just had no good experience with it, and all the feedback I would get would just be a grade. It wouldn't be like, I guess, ways to improve. I was very, I guess, insecure about writing. Then I took the [English course]. I just had an amazing teacher, a great experience. I guess each assignment, I got the feedback and it gave me more confidence. By the end, I was like, "I guess I'm a good writer!"

Interviewer: That's great. If you could identify goals for yourself as a writer at this point in your career?

Interviewee: I guess to do, one goal would be to do writing that isn't assigned to me. Like, more personal writing, or just to take the time to not do stuff for a grade but more

so just to write. I guess also I mean, obviously there's areas to improve in. Goals would be to take different type of writing classes, on maybe different topics. Hopefully I'll have room in my schedule to do that.

Interviewer: That's great. Thinking about your writing experiences across [University of Michigan], maybe reaching back to high school as well, what do you think it means to write well?

Interviewee: I guess before [University of Michigan], I would think it was more like just the structure of just like grammatically it was written well. But now that I came to [University of Michigan], I've realized that everybody can basically do that, so that's not what sets you apart. But more so like the argument within your writing, and I never—I guess like I never thought of writing as like being a way to argue something, which I was always kind of good at. I guess that's where I see a good writer, as like teaching you something when you read it, or you write something and you're like, "This proves a point."

Interviewer: That's great. That's a nice way to think about it too. These next couple questions circle back on the first year writing requirement. You mentioned you took [English course]?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Did you also take [Writing course]?

Interviewee: I took—no, I just took [English course] and then [English 200 level course].

Interviewer: You already indicated that was a positive experience. Can you talk a bit more specifically about experiences in the course? You touched on feedback a bit, types of assignments, types of activities?

Interviewee: Originally when I signed up for the course, it was because it was about [a rapper]. It was about one of his albums, so all the writing came from either analyzing the music or reading related texts to the hip hop culture, which I thought was personally really interesting. I guess the assignments would come from either reading a text from anywhere from like an actual I guess, like not technically a textbook but more like a socio [sociology] point of view, to reading actual lyrics and having to build arguments off of it. Then eventually it would like build up into being three songs, or the whole album, but it was like a slow process to get there.

Interviewer: That's sounds like a really interesting—

Interviewee: Yeah, yeah, it was really interesting.

Interviewer: Then the kinds of writing that you were doing in response to the readings?

Interviewee: We did a lot of blogging on the C-tools [learning management system] site so you could read other people's responses as well as post your own. We did a lot of, I guess a lot of it was conversational-based. We did some free writing in class. We did a lot of group exercises and peer revising. Yeah.

Interviewer: Some, did you also have to prepare more traditional academic essays at all?

Interviewee: Oh, yeah. I mean, the last one was a research essay on any topic that was related to hip hop in any way. Then some of them were building, like, what do you think the main argument of the song is? How do you bring in other texts? It was a lot of like bringing authors in conversation with each other. That wasn't something that I did prior to that, so that was challenging at first for me. But, yeah. It builds on each other, I guess.

Interviewer: This is great. So the combined effect of those experience, how do you think that affected you as a writer?

Interviewee: I guess, going back to the other conversation, on just building up the confidence. Because if it would have started at a research essay, I would not have been capable of doing it. But I guess just gradually getting to that point and having the instructor keep us aware of where we were going the whole time. Like, okay, we're going to start with a two-page essay, or a three, and then we're going to work up. That, I think, was helpful for me.

Interviewer: That's great. Are you still making use of what you learned from the writing experiences in that course?

Interviewee: Yeah. [Crosstalk 06:27] I think that was like the building block for my writing experience.

Interviewer: Interesting.

Interviewee: I don't think if I—I don't know if I would have had the same experience if it was with another class. Like, I don't think it was just the [English course]. I think it was my specific experience with this class. But it definitely made me change my idea of what I wanted to major in. I took another course with the same instructor that, my second semester freshman year. She suggested I—I think that's how I actually came across the writing minor, because I had such a good experience with that.

Interviewer: That's great. Who was it?

Interviewee: [Instructor].

Interviewer: That's great. Yeah, that's terrific. Moving ahead, then, shifting to think about your major area, what is your concentration?

Interviewee: Communications and writing.

Interviewer: Okay, so you're in communications.

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: Have you had an opportunity to do writing yet in the concentration—?

Interviewee: I haven't officially declared yet. I'm taking my last requirement now. There is a writing element in communications, but it's not the kind of writing that I enjoy most, I guess you could say. It's a little bit more structured. The class I'm in now is [Communications 200 level course], so it's a lot more like scientific kind of writing, like very bland, to the point. It's not as much thinking of your own ideas, but just summarizing articles, research. I guess I haven't really gotten to the point where I can judge what kind of communications writing there will be. Maybe in the upper level it will be different.

Interviewer: That makes sense.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Do you have a sense of how confident you feel about approaching writing in the concentration area?

Interviewee: I mean, I did well in the writing in the other two comm [communications] classes. I mean, I'm confident about it. I just don't, I'm not a hundred percent confident about the major in general. I just kind of thought it was the best option for me. Cuz originally I wanted to apply to the business school, but after taking econ [economics] I realized that wasn't the right track for me. This is kind of like the next best thing, if that makes sense.

Interviewer: That's great. No, and it's a really wide field.

Interviewee: Right, right.

Interviewer: I mean, I think you can probably find a space in there—

Interviewee: Do a lot, yeah.

Interviewer: - that's going to be interesting. That's great. We want to talk a little bit about the gateway course for the minor in writing.

Interviewee: Okay.

Interviewer: When did you take that course?

Interviewee: I took it last semester, yeah.

Interviewer: In the fall? Okay. It was [Writing 200 level course]?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: It's sometimes called something else. Your sense of what impact that course has had on your writing over all?

Interviewee: I was actually surprised at how much of it was conversation-based and not so much writing. I mean, it was obviously a writing class, but we started each class with my professor, [Instructor] would pose a question to us. It would just be like completely different each time. Then we'd have, like each of us would answer that question. We'd go around. It was, I guess a lot of building different perspective. I think that worked its way into my writing, because like just from listening to people, I, it's like, that's an interesting way of thinking of it! I think that that was surprising to me.

Interviewer: Were there aspects, for instance, about the writing process that you worked through? I mean, everyone approaches the course differently.

Interviewee: Yeah. I mean, I guess a lot of it was like, I'd never thought of writing as the whole process of revision and—I'm used to just turning in a paper and then moving to the next one. Kind of how [Writing 200 level course] was. But this one was more like everything could be revisited. There's no definite end until the end of the course, and even then I guess if I wanted to go back now, I could. But it wasn't as focused on that final produce, more just like the process and showing improvement from one draft to another.

Interviewer: That's interesting. Thoughts about the impact taking that course has had on your sense of yourself as a writer?

Interviewee: I guess, well, that course also did a lot of focus with online writing. We had to have a Wordpress [content management system] or blog. I'd never had a blog before, so I guess as a writer, just knowing that there's different mediums for writing and that you write for different audiences. Obviously, my approach with a blog was a lot less formal, cuz we were required to like talk with our whole class as a cohort out on a blog. The way we addressed each other was a lot more like, we—it was like, kind of like a funny tone, or like stuff you wouldn't necessarily feel comfortable talking to a professor that way. I guess it was just interesting to see the different audiences you could write for.

Interviewer: Was that similar in any way to the online writing you were doing in the [English course]? Or was that more like C-tools responses?

Interviewee: Yeah. Well, the [Writing 200 level course] was graded, so—

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: I think that element of knowing you're being graded and the teacher is gonna read it kind of, not intimidates you, but you're not gonna write as openly or like take a different tone. This was like, we got points for every time we posted in the blog, regardless of what was said.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: It could be about anything, so we had conversations about what iPod, or what app should I download on my phone, and why. It was just a lot more casual, I guess.

Interviewer: That's really interesting, great. You made reference to that, in itself, was kind of a working with other students in the class. Other experiences of working with other writers in the course, peer review, other collaborative work?

Interviewee: I guess just knowing that we had a class as a resource. In other big classes, it's more of like you don't have that connection, but we all, at the end we went to one of our teacher's poetry reading together. There was a relationship there. I guess when you're peer reading, somebody that you know has a personal connection to you. I think I took the advice that they gave me a lot more seriously than someone—for the [English course], where we had to peer review them, and write them a letter, and it was like a points thing. That wasn't, I don't think, as valuable a feedback, so I guess just—yeah.

Interviewer: It's a hard thing to build, that sense of just wanting to do it sometimes.

Interviewee: Right, right. Exactly, yeah.

Interviewer: It sounds like you were able to do that.

Interviewee: Yeah. Yeah.

Interviewer: Nice. The minor gateway course emphasizes reflective writing in different forms. How would you describe your experiences with this kind of reflective writing?

Interviewee: One of the main prompts was why I write, and we had to talk about like—it was a very open-ended question. We had no direction. At first, that was really hard, because that's a very broad question. I noticed my original draft, for my final draft, had like tremendous changes. I guess just becoming more reflective on who I write for, what drives me to write, why I write in an academic setting is different than why I write for a personal setting. It was just a lot more, I guess, personal.

Interviewer: That's great. Are you still using any kind of reflective practice in your current writing?

Interviewee: Not as much, no.

Interviewer: Or if it's been required in any other classes?

Interviewee: I'm in [Writing 300 level course] now.

Interviewer: Okay, okay.

Interviewee: That's also a big element with that class.

Interviewer: What form is it taking there?

Interviewee: I guess, well, it's also emphasizing the whole process of writing. We have to write observations, like basically for every class. That was kind of hard for me, because you're not supposed to reflect, you're supposed to observe. It could be observing something from class, so it's kind of like reporting it with no judgments. Which is kind of challenging, actually. It's harder to be reflective in that case, when that's the type of writing I'm doing. But I try to like be reflective without like judging, making a judgment based on it.

Interviewer: That's interesting. You've made a mention about blogging. The question asks about describing your experiences using new media writing, so blogs. Did you have a remediation project in [Writing 200 level course]?

Interviewee: Yeah. Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah. Anything like that that you'd wanna talk about your experiences with?

Interviewee: [...], I chose a piece that I wrote for [English course] on the [Rapper] song. It was an essay that I wrote an actual song. I thought that I wasted a lot of time in the essay explaining how the music sounded or what the lyrics said. I made an audio essay of it, with me reading it and then it cut into the actual music. That was something that couldn't have been done without new media. Otherwise, I didn't—I guess that was the only project where I was, this is why we, new media writing is so important. Otherwise, I was like, I could have posted this to a C-tool. I didn't get as great of an experience from my other writing on the blog.

Interviewer: Because it was—it didn't seem that different to you?

Interviewee: Yeah. Cuz it was just like, I guess it was just me pasting my essay from Word to a blog. I was like, I didn't really use pictures. For the essays that I chose like why I write, there wasn't really any like imagery or music or anything that could have been like implemented on line, that I couldn't have just grabbed myself.

Interviewer: I know, the audio essay is a nice example of where that came together.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: The next couple questions ask about the gateway portfolio. This is what we're going to maybe try and locate. Can you reach—?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Maybe through Wordpress? The first time I did this with a student, it's like, it's hard to put a lot on—

Interviewee: Okay, so—yeah.

Interviewer: There you are. Perfect. The first question is just general. Can you talk a bit about the most memorable aspect of your experience compiling this? It's really lovely. [...]. I'm going to be describing that we're doing [...]. We're looking at your portfolio right now. There's a picture of you, there's tabs that show where each category is listed. Talk a little bit about putting this together.

Interviewee: Okay. I kind of, on the home page, I rate the three main assignments, which was why I write, [Topic of essay], [Topic of essay] which I kind of spoke about. Then I made each of those three assignments my three tabs. As a drop-down menu, there's a draft, a final version of each, and a personal reflection on each of them. I kind of stuck to just keeping what was in that course on here, which is why I didn't have my other writing, which could have been useful, but for now it isn't on here.

I guess the most memorable would be the [essay] that I kind of spoke about. Which, the only thing that was difficult about that was editing the draft of that to the final, because I was actually kind of happy with how the draft came out. I couldn't really think of any ways to edit it around, so there wasn't that big of a difference between those two as there was the repurpose and the why I write. I think there was a big difference with those two.

Interviewer: What were some of your aims for the portfolio?

Interviewee: I guess just to show the whole process of it was really important for me. And to show the difference between a draft and a final essay. It's not just editing the grammar. It was more actually seriously considering the feedback I got and trying to implement it, I guess, in the final draft.

Interviewer: How well do you feel the portfolio addresses those kinds of goals that you had?

Interviewee: I think it addresses it well. I don't know right now what the use for this specific portfolio would be, just because I, if I was to send like for an internship or a job, a writing sample, I don't know if these would be the assignments I would send them, personally. I think that there's other writing from my classes that I would think would be better fitting. I don't know how much—I guess for me personally, the whole process is very important, but I am wondering how important that process is for anyone else.

Interviewer: Right, on the outside.

Interviewee: Right, right. Because it's so focused on the final draft, so—do they really wanna see the growth you have, or do they just wanna see where you are?

Interviewer: Right, right. What can you produce. That's interesting. Do you think creating the portfolio has ultimately, then, had an effect on your writing? Like, as you're doing work now in the [Writing 300 level course]?

Interviewee: I guess it's just, I'm—it made me comfortable showing my work to a bigger audience. Because this was something that I had to show my teacher, my classmates. I got really frustrated while making it, though, cuz I had no experience with Wordpress [content management system]. I had no—every little thing, I had to Google and then try to figure out myself. Not that much of the class was spent on I guess producing this portfolio.

Interviewer: On the technical aspects of it?

Interviewee: The technical aspect. It was kind of like, our teacher was pretty surprised that with the generation we are, how incompetent we were on Wordpress. He just kind of assumed—you're young, you're in college.

Interviewer: [Inaudible 19:50] assumption they make—

Interviewee: Right, right. That's so—but we weren't familiar with it at all, and I think it was like an overall understanding that we were kind of lost when it came to how to make this look good and be effective at the same time.

Interviewer: We've talked a bit about reflective writing, but the question asks, "What was the impact of the reflective writing specifically in the portfolio?"

Interviewee: I mean, I guess it was just an opportunity for me to explain my thought process, why I did certain things. It was kind of, I guess, it almost felt like personal, at first, to write it. Because you're admitting where your weaknesses are, what your hesitations were when making the final draft. It was a little unnatural, but I think that it was really helpful for that to be a place to gage—instead of just looking from the final, or the draft to the final, you could actually see the steps that went into it, the thought process behind those decisions.

Interviewer: Okay. That makes sense. Other comments you'd want to make about sort of how you chose the archived pieces or your impressions of them when you look back on the project now with a little bit of distance, right? Cuz it's been a little time.

Interviewee: Yeah I guess, well—the way I chose them was simply, the three main assignments. If I was to use this portfolio, like when I go to the capstone course or something, I would obviously want to choose a wider range of my writing, from all

different classes. Cuz this is obviously just from one semester and one class. I don't know how much growth you can really see there, besides the individual pieces. Yeah, that's how I chose them.

Interviewer: It's interesting, too that you had a piece from almost a year earlier.

Interviewee: Right, right.

Interviewer: When you're thinking about sort of your growth as a writer?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: After looking back on that [English course] piece initially.

Interviewee: Yeah. I mean, I was like reading it out loud when I was recording it, and I was like—I cannot believe I wrote—like, certain stuff, I was like, that sounds good. Other stuff, when I was reading it, I had to change it to read it out loud. So I was editing my own writing. But I think that that was interesting to go back to something that was done so long ago. I'd like to eventually just keep revisiting the writing, cuz I guess it was a little bit inspiring. Like a year ago, I was here, and now if I was to write this paper again, it would probably be a little bit different.

Interviewer: Right. And now you do have this sort of like place to go back to—

Interviewee: Right, and read it—

Interviewer: - in some ways it exists that way, too.

Interviewee: Yeah, that's right.

Interviewer: Really thoughtful ideas. Other comments at all about—more broadly, not just thinking about a portfolio—about your experiences in the writing course, or kind of your ideas about writing at this point in your college life?

Interviewee: I guess, just as a general statement, that I've been really pleased with all my writing that has come through Sweetland and [...] [English course] and [English 200 level course]. But I think it's taken a different approach, and when a lot of people ask me “What's the difference between a writing minor and an English major?”—there is a difference, I think. I feel like just in general, so far what I've seen is it's not as formal and you're not graded on so much a stricter rubric. It's more like the effort you put in is really heavily weighted, which some people like and some people don't. I think that I put more work into this class than I have into a lot of other classes that I've done just as well if not better in.

Interviewer: Thinking of the [Writing 200 level course]?

Interviewee: Yeah. [Writing 200 level course], yeah, definitely. Cuz it was all based on points, so he told us each assignment was based on a certain amount of points. You have, you can do 30 blog posts and then you've reached that cap of points. It was kind of like self-directed, like where do you want to end this? Cuz we didn't know what is the cut off for an A, a B, or a C. It was really motivating to me, I guess, because I wanted to get the A, but I didn't know what the A was. I just did as much as I like physically could to hope to reach that point.

Interviewer: It wasn't like—

Interviewee: He didn't give us a scale of 300 points is an A. He just said, these are—this is the max amount of points you can get within each assignment. You can just go as far as you want, basically, or as long as you want. He didn't give us any other—I think the whole class was really like, "What's an A?" We kept, cuz we're like trained to want that good grade. I wanted the A, so I just did whatever I thought—I guess I was very hesitant, like, is this good enough? Am I going to get the A? I did more and more. I think that was a good strength of the class, because I got a lot out of it, cuz I just did a lot of work, I guess.

Interviewer: That is very interesting, then. For the assignments themselves?

Interviewee: Yeah, for everything. There was three—the only three requirements of the class were to do each of these assignments. The why I write, repurpose and remediated, and to do the drafts. But you could revise it multiple times for more points. I might have done three revisions, but on my portfolio I only put one of the two revisions.

Interviewer: Sure, that made sense.

Interviewee: Then commenting on the blog, commenting, or writing a blog post is a certain amount of points. Commenting on a blog post is a certain amount of points.

Interviewer: But for the essays themselves, that grading structure motivated the students, then, to do at least one revision—?

Interviewee: Right. Right, right. And the final wasn't graded, it was just if you did it or not. There was no actual grade. We did get feedback from it.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: But I don't know if this is like an A paper or a B paper. It's just, I did it, so I got those points.

Interviewer: That's very interesting.

Interviewee: Which was interesting, yeah.

Interviewer: I mean, it really—I'm fascinated. It seems like it would certainly shift your way of thinking, that while you were still wanting a certain grade, in some ways that's not what you're writing to.

Interviewee: Right. It wasn't as important. It was still, I think that was still the motivation behind all the supplementary work, like the blog posts or there was writing articles on—we have a personal Wordpress as well as this one, and the personal Wordpress we could write ten articles on whatever we want, on anything we read normally, like the New York Times, whatever it was. That was more just like, I wanted to, I got to write about what I like to read, so it was interesting to me. Yeah, it wasn't as much writing to get the A, it was just writing to write it, but you still want to write it well. Which was interesting.

Interviewer: Very—I was just asking the follow up questions to sort of hear about then how that shifted your motivation within the class.

Interviewee: I guess my motivation would be not only to do well but to produce meaningful work. Because there wasn't so much pressure on the grade, but there was pressure on to do something that was meaningful to you personally. We had to talk a lot in front of the class, like, why did you choose this topic [...], why did you choose this essay [...]? What was the effect of that process for you? We had to be able to back it up.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: Our decisions.

Interviewer: Very interesting, yeah.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Other comments more generally about sort of writing, writing at school, writing outside of school? Your life as a writer?

Interviewee: I think that was pretty much—I can't think of anything else, really.

Interviewer: Great. We really do appreciate your help.

Interviewee: Yeah.

[...]

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