Interviewer: This is ***, and I'm here with ***. What is today? Today is Friday, May 4th, thank you. The first questions I have are pretty general. The first one is how would you describe yourself as a writer? Yeah, how would you describe yourself as a writer when you began at U of M [University of Michigan], and then how would you describe yourself as a writer now?

Interviewee: When I began at U of M, I was a decent writer. I could write on my own, and make my sentences flow like to connect things, but I was more of a five-paragraph, right-out-of-high-school writer. Now, I'm much more of a researcher. I'm able to state things and find something that – find research that can support my ideas and my opinions. Most of the papers that I write are research papers. I like that much more than writing just a story.

Interviewer: Creative writing?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Do you think of yourself as a research writer?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: What type of research writing do you do?

Interviewee: Well, this semester, past semester—

Interviewer: Let me just make sure that's working. Seems to be, yeah.

Interviewee: This past semester in [Washington] D.C., we did a research paper, and so we came up with our own research questions, so mine was does the number of—does the amount of funding to children in Child Protective Services affect the number of [inaudible 00:01:43] protect? I collected the research for funding to CPS—I collected the research for the number of women charged with failure to protect, or attempted to collect that information—collected the information for how much each of the counties I was looking at, what their budget was compared to the CPS budget—total budget. Compared the number of children to—in each of those counties by CPS, compared to the number of children who were living in homes of domestic violence, so that those numbers were all relative and could actually be compared to one another. I also looked at population size. That's one type or research I've done.

Interviewer: When you write up that research, are you the single author usually?

Interviewee: Yeah, for that one, I was the single author, yes.

Interviewer: Okay. Yeah, that's interesting, so right away, you define yourself as a research writer. A lot of other people who do this study have trouble with that first question, but it sounds like you very much—you've kind of shifted from your first year.

Interviewee: Yeah, absolutely. My first year writing class was a lot of creative writing actually, so it was—

Interviewer: Was that [Writing course]?

Interviewee: [English course].

Interviewer: You did [English course], and it was still creative writing.

Interviewee: Yeah. I had a very difficult time with that, but since then, with my political science and women's studies classes, it's mostly all research papers, so I've kind of fallen into that.

Interviewer: All right, great. The next question is related. To what extent would you say you've grown as a writer?

Interviewee: I've grown a lot. In high school, I was very timid, and I did not have confidence in my writing abilities. Now I specifically look for classes where there's papers, not exams, because I know that writing is my strong point; exam-taking is not. I have a lot more confidence in my writing now.

Interviewer: What would you attribute that confidence to?

Interviewee: Well, I think it's grades, you know, writing and getting grades back, and realizing that I can write, but also after—my freshman year, my undergraduate writing class really helped me in my writing, but more just made me realize that that was not the type of writing I did. Once I started taking mostly political science and women's studies classes, and worked on my other writing, I realized that that was more my suit, and that I should have confidence in that, not in creative writing. In the research, I can do that, and I had confidence in it. Then just talking to other students, and when they would have questions about things or be unsure, realizing that I could answer those questions.

Interviewer: What kind of questions were they? They were about their writing specifically?

Interviewee: Yeah, and things like what's literature review? How do you write a literature review, you know, like I've never done that before, asking questions about what a literature review entails, or how to start a research design, or anything like that.

Interviewer: These are your peers asking you these questions?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: How did you figure out how to write a literature review, if you don't know?

Interviewee: Well, that was—I took one political science course, it was like [Political Science course]. It's research design. I took that my sophomore year, when I was still pretty young here. In that course, we learned how to do all those things, which really helped me in the rest of my career here. Then when I went to Washington, D.C., we basically went through all those same stats, but since I had gone through it already—

Interviewer: Oh, interesting, so it sounds like that [Political Science course] was really important.

Interviewee: It was, yeah.

Interviewer: You've learned how to write a literature review in that class. Do you remember what else you learned?

Interviewee: Yeah, we learned—well, we'd do an annotated bibliography, a literature review and a research design, the only part that's not included in that—and we do the limitations of the research that you're doing.

Interviewer: That was a separate paper? I'm just curious, the limitations?

Interviewee: No.

Interviewer: It's all part of the same—

Interviewee: It's all part of the same paper, yeah.

Interviewer: Would you learn these things kind of step by step?

Interviewee: Yeah, exactly. The first thing we did was like the annotated bibliography, based off of some of the research we had collected on our topic, and then we would—then we did the literature review, analyzing the literature we already had, and then made our research design, and then moved on to the limitations of the study. We didn't actually conduct the study in that class.

Interviewer: Did this take the entire semester to put this together?

Interviewee: Yeah, and meanwhile, we did other things while we wrote all the papers.

Interviewer: Was this—was any of this—any part of this research writing familiar to you, as you were learning it in [Political Science course], or was it all—

Interviewee: No, it was all new.

Interviewer: What is an annotated bibliography, and you learned in that class.

Interviewee: Yeah, right, which is why I totally understood the frustration and confusion of my peers when I was in [Washington] D.C. because they were just thrown at—in that class, it's more thrown at you, like you're supposed to be familiar with what these things are. Whereas, in [Political Science course], it's really a step-by-step process, so it's teaching you it.

Interviewer: I can see that would give you a boost of confidence. The next question in the general part is what are your goals for yourself as a writer, if you have particular goals as a writer, and then how have these changed since you've entered U of M [University of Michigan]?

Interviewee: My goal as a writer is to actually—I wrote one paper that was on the—based on book Beloved, and it was my favorite paper that I ever wrote actually.

Interviewer: I would assume not in a political science class.

Interviewee: In a women's studies class, yeah, and that's like my favorite people. I read it every semester and rewrite it every semester.

Interviewer: You re-read it, or re-write it?

Interviewee: Both.

Interviewer: You re-write that paper every semester.

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: Interesting.

Interviewee: Yeah, so I think that's something I would like to do more of, even on my own time, is taking books that are like Beloved, that have so many layers, and really take some time to really digest, and writing papers on them for my own time, and doing this outside of class, not needing the class pressure to do something like that. I think that I would like to do more things outside the classroom.

Interviewer: So, yeah, I struggle with that myself, so it's basically a matter of developing a kind of internal motivation or internal discipline, to force yourself to do it.

Interviewee: Right, exactly, so definitely to do that more, changing from when I got here. That's a huge change. I don't think I would ever have said that before. In high school, I definitely had more confidence in like my math and science abilities, writing—I could do—that was fine, I did AP English and everything, but it just wasn't like something I enjoyed. I wouldn't sit down and enjoy writing. In high school, I was more confident in my test-taking ability, not my writing ability. I felt that writing was way too subjective,

and I didn't like that I couldn't predict how I was going to do. Whereas, now I feel that writing is something I actually have control over, and I actually really enjoy it.

Interviewer: Well, you know, I was gonna ask you more about that. Your goal for yourself as a writer then, is to keep doing it, but to keep doing it out of some internal motivation because you know you enjoy it.

Interviewee: Right.

Interviewer: What part of it do you enjoy? I mean if you could put your finger on it.

Interviewee: I think it's the fact that I can get my thoughts out and really organize them. I mean especially that's how I feel with the books that I read, is that sometimes there's just so much going on, and unless I'm reading it in a class where we sit down every day and talk about what's going on, you don't get—understand the full effect of it. You don't really get everything out of the book that you can. I think that writing really helps to get those thoughts down, organize them and really experience the book fully.

Interviewer: Yeah, I understand that. I was just thinking to myself that's really hard, too, though. I mean sitting down, just you, the book, and the computer, and organizing your thoughts, it's hard to do it, but it's—that's a kind of difficult pleasure for you then?

Interviewee: Yeah, yeah, it is.

Interviewer: Okay, great. Shifting to another set of questions, so thinking across your writing experiences that you have had, what do you think it means to write well?

Interviewee: To write well? This is a hard question. I guess I don't really know. I just like, after a few years, you kind of figure out what works and what doesn't. That's kind of hard to answer in words.

Interviewer: Yeah, I know what you mean. Don't really think of what you think other people think it means to write well, but like for you.

Interviewee: Okay, well, normally, I have to do some outside research from—you know, from whatever classes. Even if we're given things to read, I always prefer outside research as well. I think that having lots of support—the more support you have for your argument, the better. I never think that hurts. I think that a lot of the things here are just structural people. I know my—a lot of my professors get really frustrated with the small structural things, you know, citing correctly, having paragraphs that flow, knowing when to separate paragraphs, not thinking that you just have to have a five-paragraph paper, having a thesis statement. I think a large part of it is structural.

Interviewer: You mentioned your professors value that. Is that something you think, yourself, is part of good writing?

Interviewee: Yeah. I mean I—most people hate the practice of having to cite things, but also understand that it's completely necessary, and usually save it until the end. Yeah, I mean I—it would frustrate me to see a paper turned in, if I was a professor, and having to read papers and thinking like you know, I shouldn't be sidetracked by these small problems.

Interviewer: Right. I was just trying to think—so it's a matter of writing quality, in a way, right, but that quality is part of, I think, maybe making your writing very disciplined. If all the citations are there, it's well-structured, the grammar's not all over the place and things like that, then that appears to be good writing because then it reflects that you were—basically, it's not sloppy.

Interviewee: Right, yeah, and I mean there's clearly a lot more to it, but I think that that is—tends to be a huge part because I mean if that first stuff isn't done, then it just distracts from whatever it is being written about. You can have the most beautiful piece of writing, and have all the grammar wrong, and you're gonna miss the writing.

Interviewer: Right. Yeah, I was just trying to think through it. Yeah, that's true. Yeah, most people, when they come in here, don't talk about grammar and structure and things like that, but I do think that's definitely part of it.

Interviewee: Well, I'm sure it's part of also I grew up in a family that's like really OCD about that kind of stuff. If my sisters edit a paper, it's like all red, in caps, like, "What are you thinking, ***? You should know these types of things."

Interviewer: Do you attend to that kind of stuff as you're writing, or what's your process like? Are you a drafter? Do you get everything out?

Interviewee: Oh, I'm not a drafter, no. When I write, it's like I'm writing for real.

Interviewer: You would say you revise, kind of as you go?

Interviewee: Yeah, and I mean I do always go back and read because you know, obviously, you make mistakes as you're going, and especially once you just get into like, "I just had this really great thought; I just need to write it all down." I do still go back and read, but when I'm writing, I'm not writing it like, "Well, this sentence is not really how I would like it to be."

Interviewer: You are saying that?

Interviewee: No, I'm not like that. If it's not—if it's a sentence I don't like, I will sit there for two hours trying to make it the way I want it to be.

Interviewer: Oh, I see. I do the same thing. I'm glad that a lot of students don't do that, so maybe you have friends who just draft everything.

Interviewer: Yeah. Have you ever tried to do that?

Interviewee: I have. I've had a class where I had to do that, and the first one was just—well, first outline, like really, really rough draft. You revise that draft, and then revise that draft, and then you revise that draft one more time. That was really hard for me. I almost felt like I was trying to make my first draft not up to par, so that I could actually revise it and continue to revise it.

Interviewer: When you—basically, you're making sure that the quality of the writing is good as you're drafting? You're attending to like the sentences, probably the structure of the paragraphs. Do you ever go back and like restructure the entire—

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: You do that as well.

Interviewee: I do, yeah. I mean I have to really take time to think about it before it's on the paper, and normally, I would have to like do a reverse outline once I have it, so where my—the flow is just not working. I have done that before, too, as well.

Interviewer: Okay. I like you talking about this, but I should probably move on. The next question is what do you think is most important in learning to write?

Interviewee: To me, I think the most important thing is learning how to find other sources that support your thoughts because your thoughts aren't valid until you have support for them. I think that's a necessary skill to know how to navigate, you know, the Michigan Library to know how to really search for sources that are legitimate, and not Wikipedia.

Interviewer: Partly, it's learning how to support your argument, and then logistically, it's learning how to actually do the research that would help you to support the argument.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Do you think this kind of learning could be made like explicit in class, or do you think you just have to figure it out for yourself?

Interviewee: No, I think it would definitely be made explicit in class.

Interviewer: Was it made explicit to you—it was in that [Political Science course], or did you learn the—

Interviewee: Yeah, but I had learned the library and how to do like, you know, really work the library before that class. That was not in a class. That was more just—I mean I knew how to get to the library, and that you could search things, but when you just kind of explore the [University of Michigan] Library website, you learn a lot more. I would say the most of it, I learned on my own, and then it was like a review. Once we got to

[Political Science course], they went over everything again. They had a librarian come in and do everything, you know, show us all cool things on the website that can really help you.

Interviewer: Okay, so learning—I was just thinking learning to write well then, for you, is basically learning how to do the research, so that you can support an argument.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Are there other things about learning to write well with actually writing itself?

Interviewee: Yes. I mean because that's a very specific type of writing. That's only going to help you if you're doing research. If you're doing creative writing, that's not going to help your writing. I would say the two biggest things to me are the learning how to research, and just knowing the grammar and the structure of writing and making sure you know how to cite correctly, and you know the difference. You know when you're writing out sentences and comma splices, and those are all important things, I think.

Interviewer: That kind of stuff can be learned in the class, would you say?

Interviewee: Uh-huh.

Interviewer: Okay. Easy question, which first year writing requirement course did you take? It was [English course].

Interviewee: [English course], yeah.

Interviewer: All right. You've talked about [Political Science course]. Think back to [English course], and what did you learn in the class that you've continued to use in your writing, if anything? You may have trouble with that because you said you did a lot of creative writing?

Interviewee: Yeah, it was on like personal stories and narratives, and then that was the class where we would write one draft, and rewrite it and rewrite it, and rewrite it, which I guess is something I did learn. Before that, I would have never, ever had rewritten a draft so many times. I mean I would not even have thought about it. I have learned to accept that that is something that I can do. There's always room for improvement. Before, it was more like when I did a draft, it was minor things that I was looking for. I guess I have become more open to restructuring the entire paper, and realizing that there are more larger changes that can be made.

Interviewer: Were you doing that drafting in class, or were you forced to do the rewriting and stuff at home?

Interviewee: You do it at home.

Interviewer: What were some of the things you wrote in there? You said actual—would you write stories, or personal narratives?

Interviewee: Well, like one of—yeah, one of them was about like an object that was the most important—like an object that was really important to you, and the story behind it. It was a terrible class for me because I don't like writing stuff like that.

Interviewer: A lot of people come in here, and they don't remember at all what they wrote in [English course].

Interviewee: Oh, no, I hated the class. I remember.

Interviewer: That's what I was going to get at, so it stuck in your mind because it was really difficult.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Very interesting.

Interviewee: I remember we did one paper that was like somewhat research, but it had to be based on—you had to intertwine your personal story, so I wrote about divorce. You had to write it, but intertwine your personal story and research off the topic. That was really difficult for me because I just felt like the two shouldn't go together, and it was just—so a lot of it, even the research part included some kind of personal story in it.

Interviewer: Do you remember what your instructor explained, in terms of why you're doing it that way? Why is it important to do that?

Interviewee: I think at that point, we were trying—she was helping us try to figure out how to use—like do research and use the library to find research. I don't know if maybe the title of the class was some kind of personal narrative class, so she had to keep that in there. I really don't remember, but I know she was trying to make sure we knew how to do research if we needed to.

Interviewer: Is it fair to say that even at the time of [English course], you wanted to be doing research writing?

Interviewee: Yeah, because in my senior year of high school, that's the kind of writing I started finally doing, and I realized how much I loved it.

Interviewer: In high school, you learned—

Interviewee: In my AP English class, did a research paper, and not like the same model that I did in [Political Science couse], but we would go to the high school—or the college nearby, and we went to their library, and we used JSTOR [digital library] and actually

searched for articles, and that's when I started realizing this was much more interesting to me than personal narratives.

Interviewer: That's interesting. Do you remember what your research paper was on? Was it on literature?

Interviewee: Yeah, so it was on the book Revolutionary Road.

Interviewer: You were searching JSTOR for critical articles, and then using that to write up your own paper.

Interviewee: Yeah, exactly.

Interviewer: Yeah, so then you came into [English course], and you're writing personal narratives. Then the instructor used personal narrative as a way into research writing.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: You wanted to skip over the—

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, I was just thinking, I guess a lot of your classmates may have thought in the opposite way.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: I'm guessing that; I may be wrong. Did you take [Writing course] before [English course]?

Interviewee: No.

Interviewer: Okay. This question is what's your concentration, and have you had an opportunity to do writing in your concentration? We've already talked about this.

Interviewee: Yeah, both my concentrations, basically all writing.

Interviewer: You do writing in women's studies, and political science?

Interviewee: Uh-huh.

Interviewer: Is it research writing in both areas?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Do you do other types of writing, other than the research?

Interviewee: No.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: I mean—well, I mean they're not so much research papers, but everything that I do requires, I would say, the same amount of research and support. The paper I wrote on Beloved for women's studies, it was about literature, but then what I focused on was about the construction of womanhood in the 19th Century, which required research support and discussion how that was unattainable for escaped slaves during that time.

Interviewer: Basically, it sounds like you've written multiple types of research writing.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: You've gone out and actually done empirical investigations and collected artifacts and written research from that?

Interviewee: Well, I started the process of that, yeah.

Interviewer: Started the process of that, and then you wrote literature-based research papers. What—do you remember other types of research writing you've done?

Interviewee: A lot of it in women's studies is literature, and political science, I took a contemporary issues class, and a lot of that was like using—what we read in class was mostly news articles, and then we would be writing basically prescriptions for how to fix whatever problem we were talking about, so healthcare. You would use the news articles, but also it would actually be helpful to do more outside research because a news article is not enough information to write an entire prescription for a country's healthcare system. I would do more research to try and kind of support my ideas. Even when, I guess, the research part isn't totally required, I find it helpful to still do. I find that that is respected by professors.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's what I was going to ask you. Have you had assignments where you're not allowed to do research?

Interviewee: No, not not allowed. I mean in the contemporary issues class, we weren't expected to. It was never said that you had to do outside research.

Interviewer: But you did it.

Interviewee: Yeah. Well, a lot of my ideas were also—I tend to include my women's studies perspective into political science, so I would really focus on the effect for women in these things. That might not be covered in our reading, so I think that, yes, my research was necessary.

Interviewer: In your writing, have you made a lot of connections between the two areas?

Interviewee: Oh, yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: Do you think partly that that making connections is what helps you to be successful in your learning?

Interviewee: Yes, absolutely. I think that that gives me—I mean every political science class that I've done in women's studies, I've found a way to kind of overlap the two, and it's been extremely helpful. I mean for myself because I can—sometimes political science isn't as interesting to me, but once I kind of take the women's studies perspective, I can find a way that it interests me. When it's interesting, writing is not an issue any longer.

Interviewer: Have your professors commented on your taking, for example, women's studies perspective in a political science paper?

Interviewee: Yeah. In my contemporary issues class, a lot of the times, the discussion section was mostly just a debate, like a long debate on whatever the issue was. My GSI [Graduate Student Instructor] always commented that she liked that I was able to—because I work in a domestic violence shelter, and one day, one of the kids was talking about how we should make—you know, give more incentives for couples to be married because he was saying that the nuclear family was falling apart, and this wasn't good for children. I just kind of said that, "Well, one out of four women are experiencing domestic violence, so that's not such a great idea because that just creates more barriers for them to get out of such relationships." She commented that that's not something that most of the students would have thought of as an issue to that. I mean there's several other issues to that idea, but—

Interviewer: Was she saying this in a positive way?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, so I would imagine that being able to move different perspectives around, you're bringing something, I guess, to the class that the professor didn't anticipate. They may enjoy reading your writing more in a way, you know what I'm trying to say?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's interesting. Do you get a sense that your classmates do similar things, or your friends who are double majors?

Interviewee: Yeah, absolutely, I think that you can tell when someone's a double major because just like they bring—you would have never have thought about like what they're talking about, when you're thinking about what you're doing. I'm trying to think of like a

better example. Well, like international relations students think more of like the global effect of something, rather than just the local, and so I think that that's always an interesting perspective to add. I think that whenever you have the double major, they're able to really weave together those things.

Interviewer: Yeah, I remember when I was in undergraduate, taking a literature—English literature course, and I was writing on the novel The Movie Goer, by Walker Percy, and at the same time, was taking a philosophy course, where I was learning about existentialism for the first time. I basically wrote a philosophy paper for the literature course. I just did it. No one told me that it's okay to do that. No one encouraged me to do that. Have you ever been told or encouraged to do those things?

Interviewee: Told or encouraged, no. I wouldn't say—well, encouraged, yeah, after I initially have done it.

Interviewer: Never in advance.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: If you're taking a women's studies course—

Interviewee: Yeah, never in advance.

Interviewer: Interesting. It seems like that should be encouraged.

Interviewee: It should. I agree.

Interviewer: I remember thinking, "Is it okay that I'm doing this?"

Interviewee: Yeah, sometimes I'm like, "This is really not quite what we were supposed to do." I mean because I remember—I don't even remember what the topic was for that paper. It was the contemporary issues class, and went like a page detail about how we needed universal childcare, which I don't think that's ever discussed in class. I remember when I got the paper back, my GSI was like, "This is great that you have considered this and looked at this." I was like, "Okay, that's good." When I was writing it, I was thinking, "I think it's important, but we've never talked about it."

Interviewer: Yeah, well, keep in mind, you're at U of M [University of Michigan], and it's interdisciplinary, for real. A lot of schools say they're interdisciplinary, but U of M actually is. They would encourage that, but it's interesting to me that you haven't been in a space, like [English course], or some other space where they say, "Be sure to do this because it'll help there." Maybe it's just understood students will do that. I imagine there are a lot of students who don't make those connections. I'm getting way off topic, so post-active interview. The next set of questions is about writing experiences. We've talked a lot about this already, but one question is what experiences have you had both in

and outside the classroom that have had an effect on your writing? I was thinking that outside the classroom would be your experience in [Washington] D.C.

Interviewee: Yeah. I did a lot of writing in D.C. for my internship, which was very—which was different writing, but also still research-based, but more like memos or just quick facts because I worked at [a National center]. They always publish like these fact sheets, so it was more just like facts, which is much more dry. You're just simply—I at least, was simply finding the facts that would be included in these fact sheets.

Interviewer: Is that what they're called, fact sheets, not memos?

Interviewee: Well, when they publish it, they like are saying it's a fact sheet about childcare in 2012, yeah.

Interviewer: You were writing on sort of informal memos full of facts.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: Then that would be turned into whatever they ended up publishing.

Interviewer: Had you ever written things like that before?

Interviewee: No.

Interviewer: Was it more—was the writing itself in the fact sheet supposed to be good at all? What did the writing entail?

Interviewee: The writing, I mean it was most—it was literally like bullets of facts, most of what I was doing. It did not require a whole lot of thought with my writing.

Interviewer: You must have loved that because you got to do the research.

Interviewee: Yeah, that's exactly what it was, it was more researching and finding which facts were really important, that could really have an effect on the audience. That was more—that was like the more important part than the writing.

Interviewer: Okay, so you wrote fact sheets. What other things did you write?

Interviewee: The other—most of what I did was all researching, so it was just, again, my supervisor would ask me to look up alternatives for financing. I was in [a financing department], and so I would go through research and see what it was. Another thing she asked me to do was to look up messaging for childcare, what's the best way to promote childcare through the media. She had like stacks of paperwork and articles on this, so I went through all that. I kind of—I found what worked and what hadn't worked, and what

was the most recent, and what was past ideas, to see how those ideas worked. From there, it was just writing up like a memo about what worked and what didn't work, and what we should be doing in the future. It was not like writing a ten-page paper or anything.

Interviewer: You worked there all summer, or how long was that?

Interviewee: For the semester, so it was four months.

Interviewer: Oh, the entire four months. Oh, I missed that part. You were actually living in D.C. for an entire semester.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: At that time, were you doing other types of writing?

Interviewee: I was doing the research paper, as well, while I was there. Then I also had one other class that I was taking, which had a couple papers that I was working on as well.

Interviewer: When you were taking these classes, it was—you weren't actually meeting with the class.

Interviewee: Yeah, we were. It's—I'm sorry.

Interviewer: It was taking place in D.C.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: The Political Science Department has a Michigan-Washington program, so—

Interviewer: I didn't know that.

Interviewee: Yeah, they have like, you know, they have professors there, so you have like multiple classes you can pick from for taking, and we're all doing internships as well, so you go to the internship, and you had the classes at night. Then Fridays, you had classes and no internship.

Interviewer: That's great that you had this experience.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: I think I wish I had had that. You applied for this? You were selected?

Interviewee: Yeah, yeah, it was an application process. This is—it was actually this program that made me decide to come to U of M. I heard it and I was like, "Okay, yep, I want to do that."

Interviewer: All right. Okay, great. Do you do other types of outside school writing? You mentioned you would ideally love to kind of write for yourself.

Interviewee: Yeah. I mean writing on my own, I would like to do. Right now, I'm really not doing it. I am really good at finding excuses for myself to not do that.

Interviewer: There's no way you have time, I think. I mean I would be amazed if you did.

Interviewee: Yes, so as far as writing, I mean I write—when I read books, I find it impossible to not write in the margins. That's like absurd to me.

Interviewer: Oh, not doing that is absurd, just blankly reading?

Interviewee: Yeah, but otherwise, I don't really do any writing outside, I mean small things at the shelter, but that's more about working with survivors, and in there counseling with them.

Interviewer: You're not like a blogger?

Interviewee: No, I'm not a blogger.

Interviewer: Are you a Facebook-er?

Interviewee: I Facebook, yeah, but mostly when I Facebook, it's like political events that pertain to rights of women.

Interviewer: Okay, so you're not writing like [cross talk 00:35:22] wall posts.

Interviewee: No, like a couple sentences.

Interviewer: All right, so moving on, if I use the term reflective writing, what does that mean to you? Have you had teachers use that term?

Interviewee: No, I haven't. I would think that that's something. Actually, I wouldn't know what that was, but it sounds like something creative writing, so I wouldn't like it.

Interviewer: I think it could be more general than that, so even your margin writing, when you're reading is—you're kind of reflecting on while you're reading.

Interviewee: Okay.

Interviewer: It's not like just personal narrative type reflections.

Interviewee: I see.

Interviewer: Are you required in any of your courses to do that type of reflective writing? Do you get read this text, and then write a response?

Interviewee: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: What are those called, like a short paper?

Interviewee: Writing responses.

Interviewer: Writing responses.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. What types of things are you asked to write? I mean what do you respond to?

Interviewee: Well, I had a women's studies class, and it was from this thought, and you—basically what it is, you explore all the different types of feminism that there are, and so each week you read about a certain type, and then what we would do is write a summary of what it was. That, I think was just her way to make sure we read it. Then you would write your actual response to it, which could be anything, your personal experience that you may have had, I mean questions that came up while you were reading this. It was very open-ended. I had one other class—it was another women's studies class where we did reading responses. We did the summary, and then the same thing, was an open-end response to what you thought, your reactions.

Interviewer: Apart from that, when you read, you write notes in the margins. Do you—I'm trying to get a sense of what your actual writing process is when you write research papers, so are you an outliner?

Interviewee: Yeah. Well, okay, so what I do is when I read, I highlight, and then I write on what I've been reading. Then also, I go back and I write down everything that I highlighted in my notebook. Then when it's time to write a paper, what I do is go through my notebook, and I put like those little sticky note things, and tab them. I normally—whatever point that's going to be, so I mark my points, point one, point two, point three, four, whatever it is. Then I put in the sticky note whatever point it's gonna be, so point four.

Interviewer: You number your points.

Interviewee: Yeah, and so that's—like right on the outside of the notebook, and I go through the whole notebook and I do that. That's—then from there, I will outline, but I'm using—and that's basically the process that I use.

Interviewer: You have the outline. Do you stick to the outline when you write?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: You adhere to it strictly.

Interviewee: I mean the outline is not like—I don't even write sentences in my outline really. I mean I might write like my intro sentence, and then just write like make sure I say this or this. My outline is very brief. It's more just like okay—most of what my outlining is, is when I go through my notebook and figure out what I want to use.

Interviewer: Everything I can relate to except the notebook. What's the notebook, like a physical spiral notebook.

Interviewee: Notebook, yeah. I have like—I rewrite everything that I highlighted, and so when I go through everything that I highlighted, which is already the important part, to me, of the text, and I find like what in there I'm going to use. I put the tab right next to whatever that point is.

Interviewer: How long did it take you to work out this process?

Interviewee: I started doing that in high school. I didn't know how to note-take, and so this is just what I started doing. I mean I can take notes in class fine and not write down every single word, but this is just—I find that this works best for me when I'm studying for a test, and when I'm writing papers because I completely remember everything that was—that I read.

Interviewer: The outline you write, do you do that on the computer, or is it—

Interviewee: No, by hand.

Interviewer: See, I'm surprised by that because I figure you're a lot younger than I am, and I do everything on the computer now. It sounds like you have this really kind of old-school—

Interviewee: Yeah, I like writing. I mean once I get to the actual part of writing the paper, I have to be—like my fingers have to be in the keyboard, but for the rest of it, I really like— I think that when I write it in pen, I just remember it a lot better.

Interviewer: You remember it.

Interviewee: Yeah. When I read and I write down the things that I highlighted, yeah, I remember.

Interviewer: That's, I think, reflection, so if you're writing your thoughts down with a pen, then that, I think, helps you to reflect on your thoughts, it sounds like. I'm just wondering if maybe—probably by the end of your senior year, you might be doing that kind of reflection on the computer.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Maybe not.

Interviewee: I don't know. I mean I've definitely thought about typing it, but I don't know, nothing feels the same as writing it down. Although, I really would like to stop because I feel like a waste a lot of paper.

Interviewer: Yeah. If you go to graduate school—do you have plans for that?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: You may, at that point, stop doing that. Another maybe different type of question, what have your experiences been of working with other writers in your courses, so doing like peer review work?

Interviewee: In [English course], one of the steps of the rewriting that we did was peer review. Then also, in my class in D.C., we did a peer review session. In [English course], I found the peer review not helpful at all because it was creative writing, and so somebody telling you their opinion on your creative writing about your personal experience, I mean that was my biggest problem with the class in general, critiquing somebody else's personal experience is really difficult to me. It was—we were all freshmen. None of us really knew what we were talking about. It was not very helpful, but when I was in D.C., and we did peer review, I was surprised because all of our topics for our research paper were very different. I was working with a student who was writing about nuclear power, which I had no interest in or no clue about, and she had no interest or clue about what I was writing about. I didn't think that the peer review would be helpful, but it actually was because although we were writing on very different topics, we were writing on the same style. I mean we had the same structure, and so it was very helpful to see what that person was doing, and to notice, you know, that worked a lot better than what I was doing. That was actually very helpful.

Interviewer: Would you kind of borrow strategies?

Interviewee: Yeah, so for them, with my literature review, I had sub-headings, which really helped to write down what I was talking about, and helped the reader, and give the reader a break from just a bunch of stuff. In hers, she didn't have that, and she was having a problem with the flow of it. As soon as she read my paper, I guess what she had written down was use sub-headings in the literature review. Then when we were exchanging ideas, I said using sub-headings in your literature review would be really helpful. She was like, "Write that down." Then also, it was helpful because since I had no idea what she

was writing about, and vice versa, we were able to say, you know, “Right here it gets a little confusing because you’re writing as if your reader knows what this is, so it’s hard to understand what’s going on.”

Interviewer: Have you had— I think experiences like that are positive, unlike your experience in [English course]. Have you had more positive experiences like that in other courses at U of M [University of Michigan]? Do you do peer review?

Interviewee: Most of my classes don’t include peer review. If I do peer review, it’s more like on our own.

Interviewer: Do you set that up on your own?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: You do?

Interviewee: Yeah. One of my women’s studies classes, we were having a difficult time with the final paper, so we all just decided to—three other students and I decided to just go to the library together and kind of work on our papers. Then afterwards, we just kind of switched the computers around and rotated them around, to just have each other look it over. Then we kind of got like, “Oh, okay, maybe this is more”— because the guidelines were vague, and we were having a difficult time with that, and so that helped us to figure out what we were even trying to write. I’ve done it on my own.

Interviewer: When you do it on your own, do you give revision suggestions?

Interviewee: It’s less like, “Oh, right here, the grammar.” It’s more just like, “Oh, okay, this is a good idea,” but I think, well, in this particular scenario, it’s more like, “Oh, this works really well, but I’m not sure this is exactly what she was looking for. I think you might want to tweak it so it’s more exciting than this.”

Interviewer: I think that type of revision is probably what your [English course] instructor had in mind.

Interviewee: Yeah, it was mostly—also, I just—that class, I didn't like, so I’m sure my entire—I’m sure I was just more negative about the entire experience than I should have been. It definitely was more grammar and which, most of the time, wasn’t even right. I had changes that were being told to be made, and then it was more like, “Well, maybe if you said it—maybe if you would have included some other detail here.” I’m like, well, you can’t just like make up details about your personal experience.

Interviewer: It sounds like some of the feedback you got there was kind of random.

Interviewee: Yeah. I think that people had a difficult time with it because it was just like—it was weird and it was like we all sat in a circle, and what we would do is just talk

about that one person's paper. It was just like—and none of us knew anyone, and so like we didn't know each other. That was really difficult, too, I think, to not even know who you're talking about, and so you don't want to offend anyone, so you're—it was—

Interviewer: It's interesting to me that a lot of students say they don't like peer review, and you said you didn't like peer review, but then you set it up on your own.

Interviewee: I like peer review in certain scenarios. I mean when I know the person and when I trust their writing style, that's very different than just randomly being assigned to someone. I think that sometimes people get very defensive in peer reviews. I guess it depends. I think that when you're more talking about the overall paper, rather than just like specific things in the paper, that it's much more helpful.

Interviewer: Yeah, I agree. I wish we could stop and talk about each one of these, but I have to go on and respect your time. My next question, if you're gonna give someone advice about writing, so imagine, perhaps, like incoming freshmen, what are some things you would advise them on?

Interviewee: I would definitely tell them to learn how to use the English library online. I would also say that they need to make sure they know how to cite properly, and that they know which style they're supposed to be citing in. I would also say that they should take detailed notes in class to help them when it comes to writing a paper.

Interviewer: What other things about the writing process would you recommend?

Interviewee: I would recommend outlining to someone. I would also recommend that they are open to revisions, and that they always reread their paper before they turn it in. That's like a huge pet peeve of mine.

Interviewer: Not—you mean having typos?

Interviewee: Yeah. That's really important, and if possible, to find somebody else to read your paper for you beforehand, whether that's a peer or a family member.

Interviewer: Why do you stress taking notes in class?

Interviewee: That's like the only way. I can't—I don't know. Taking notes in class is what helps me remember what we learned in class, and then when it comes to writing the paper, I know it. I can remember like, okay, if I [inaudible 00:48:01] title of something, I know exactly what that was about, and I can go through and pick out what worked and what didn't. If you don't take those notes, I think that going—when you go back to write the paper, that's just a lot more work on yourself to figure out what it was about, what you want to include, what was important there, why it mattered. I think that if you're already doing the work to read it, you might as well do the work to take notes.

Interviewer: You're taking notes on what your professor is saying, on class discussions?

Interviewee: I would say class discussions and on the actual readings that you have assigned as well, especially—well, I guess—

Interviewer: Okay, so it's taking notes on the readings, not so much—

Interviewee: Well, the lectures are important as well because once—they have really detailed PowerPoint slides, once you hear it, it's gone. Yeah, so it's important to take notes while it's being said. I mean you can always cite that in your paper as well.

Interviewer: I think maybe that when you're doing the note taking, you're kind of reflecting what you may write, yeah?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: This question, have you had any experiences with new media writing, so for example, blogs, websites?

Interviewee: Yeah, I've had to do blogging.

Interviewer: Oh, you have, okay.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: For courses?

Interviewee: Yeah. I've done it for—I did it for my theater class in D.C. The theater that my—our professor, who was also the artistic director of theater belonged to—so that theater had a blog set up, and so when we went to plays at that theater, we would have to blog about the plays, which was a very awkward situation because you couldn't like critique the play.

Interviewer: Why couldn't you critique it?

Interviewee: It was going—I mean you could, but the professor had an issue with that because it was going on his website, and it was deterring from people seeing the plays if we critiqued the plays. Basically, you had to write fluff. Then I have written other blogs as well. For [Political Science course], we wrote blogs for that class as well, about the readings that we did. That, I liked a lot more because you could actually be honest. It was like you write—for each of those classes, it was like you write so many blogs, and then you do so many blog responses to somebody else's.

Interviewer: All right. Did the blogging lead to more formal papers or not?

Interviewee: No, neither of those classes.

Interviewer: Did you get grades on the blogging?

Interviewee: It's more like a you-did-it kind of thing.

Interviewer: Have you had to do PowerPoint presentations?

Interviewee: Yeah, in like a lot of classes.

Interviewer: By yourself, or you working in a group?

Interviewee: Most of them were in a group, but I've done some by myself as well, so like women's studies, women in the community. That's when I started working at the shelter. You start volunteering somewhere, and then you do a presentation about how that organization works and changes that should be made to it, to make it more efficient.

Interviewer: Is your PowerPoint like slide-making similar to your writing process, in that you work slide by slide, and make sure—

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Do you make sure like each slide is perfect before going to the next? Do you work like that?

Interviewee: Mostly, except for like the animation part, or like the [inaudible 00:51:32], and I save that for the end, but otherwise, it's mostly all there before I move on to the next one.

Interviewer: Do you enjoy making PowerPoints?

Interviewee: No, I don't.

Interviewer: Yeah, I mean I can sort of sense that you didn't, and you don't really enjoy blogging very much?

Interviewee: No, I don't.

Interviewer: You like traditional research paper writing.

Interviewee: Yeah, and I would like blogging if I got to pick the topic, maybe. Sometimes it's just like forced writing. The classes that I've had to blog in, what we were blogging about is something I'm not as interested about, so it's—when I'm not interested in what I'm writing, it's difficult to enjoy it.

Interviewer: Sure, sure. If you're in control of the topic, you can see yourself being a blogger?

Interviewee: Yeah. The other thing that I don't like so much about blogging in those classes, is that blogging, I also always think like this is on the internet forever, so that kind of freaks me out because if I ever change my opinion on something, it's like permanently there. That kind of scares me, too.

Interviewer: Okay. Yeah, I mean I'm not a blogger, too, and I've had the same issue. How do other people resolve that issue for themselves?

Interviewee: I don't know. I actually brought that issue up to our professor in D.C., and I kind of said like, "I feel uncomfortable responding to this on the internet." He was just like, "Well, it doesn't matter. It's just a blog." I was like—I don't know. I just think like—when I apply for a job, and if they Google my name and this blog shows up, maybe this isn't what I want—maybe my opinion will have changed by then. Maybe I don't know this much about me.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's interesting.

Interviewee: I'm not sure that— I think that people who blog probably just don't have that reservation. I mean obviously, they're blogging for a reason because they're very passionate about this thing, so they're probably not so concerned.

Interviewer: Yeah, I would imagine if— especially if you're being forced to blog about something—well, force is maybe too strong. If you're blogging about something you're not voluntarily blogging about, then you would be very concerned about how this looks to other people.

Interviewee: Yeah, especially when I had to hold back my critiques of things, so it's all like really positive, when I didn't always feel positively about the piece. It was—I kind of started like changing what my name showed up on there as, so that—

Interviewer: Okay, so we're beginning to wrap up, I promise. Have you been uploading pieces of writing to the study archives?

Interviewee: Yes, I have been.

Interviewer: Can you just tell me about that? How has that process been going?

Interviewee: Normally, I just pick my favorite piece from that semester. I usually do it from whatever semester I'm uploading it from. I've never done it from a different semester. I pick my favorite piece from that semester, and just upload it. I mean it's a pretty—it's not what my favorite pieces at the end of the semester, so it's not like a difficult decision for me.

Interviewer: How many things have you uploaded there?

Interviewee: I think two or three.

Interviewer: Two or three, okay.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: You haven't agonized on what you're putting up there.

Interviewee: No, not at all.

Interviewer: Okay. Pointing toward the future, what kinds of writing do you think will be most valuable for your career?

Interviewee: For my career—

Interviewer: If you're thinking in that way.

Interviewee: Well, I want to do public policy, so being able to research is going to be the most helpful, I think, which is good because that's what I like to do.

Interviewer: Have you written like policy papers?

Interviewee: No. I'm not—I mean obviously not in policy school, and so that's unfortunate. I didn't plan on going to school for public policy until just this past semester, I realized that law school was not for me. I haven't really explored the type of writing that I actually will be doing in that job, until the internship. That's like the closest I got to— because we were doing a childcare policy, and so that's like the closest I got to it.

Interviewer: Do you have plans to go to graduate school, or are you not?

Interviewee: Uh-huh. I want to do Teach for America and get a Master's in Education, of get a Master's in Social Work, and then go on to get my Master's in Public Policy.

Interviewer: Oh, do a Master's in Social Work, and then—why that step?

Interviewee: Well, I want to take a couple years off before public policy, and kind of need to as well.

Interviewer: Then do another master's in between?

Interviewee: Yeah. Well, I just like school, so I would not like to stop going to school. If I'm gonna take two years off, and I can get another master's, then I kind of would like to continue just learning. Social work, I mean obviously I'm interested in because I'm interested in all the things I'm interested in, so I would like to have both social work and education. If I did Teach for America, I'd want to do pre-K. After this semester, it really explained the problems in the system. I think it would be really interesting to do that, and then social work, my sister's a social worker and as much as I would hate to actually be a

social worker for my job, I would love to learn—you know, go through the entire process of social work school.

Interviewer: Yeah, I was just wondering if it would be hard to do that if you don't like see social work as your ultimate career. If you see it as a step toward—

Interviewee: I think that—well, with public policy, I think it's really important to understand whatever it is that you are trying to—whatever protective issue you're trying to look at. Most of the issues, like they're out of social—it's all social policy, so I think that that only would further my ability to succeed in public policy, is to really understand the issues that are going on, and how to analyze them.

Interviewer: Okay, great. Last question, so reflecting on what we've talked about, your writing and so on, if you could tell your teachers one thing about writing, maybe your [English course], or not, so your disciplinary teachers how to teach writing, how to talk to students about writing and so on, what sort of feedback would you give?

Interviewee: I think that the most important thing is to find a way to use like your personal interests in your writing, so whatever you have passion for. Even though that might not be specifically what the paper is about, to be able to find a way to take a different perspective or something like that on the paper is really important. For me, when I'm writing a paper that I'm not interested in, the paper is not going to be quality writing. Once I find a way to have an interest in it in some way, and still follow the guidelines, that's when I write well.

Interviewer: Have you had teachers tell you this—professors say, "Write what you're interested in"?

Interviewee: No, unless it's like really open. I mean, I guess, like in D.C., we got to pick our research question, so it was—you were writing about something you were interested in, but otherwise—

Interviewer: It sounds like what you're saying is like if you're given a prompt—

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: You're sitting down with a prompt, trying to figure out what to write about. Then at that point, they could say, "You know, one way to approach this prompt is really to write about something you care about."

Interviewee: Yeah, and I don't think that that's said because it's sometimes—I mean saying that might be difficult because people would take it away from the prompt. I think that there's a way you can follow the prompt precisely, while still having your interest. Everything that I wrote, everything that I write, I take on the women's studies perspective. For like political science, like with my contemporary issues class, it was all about how would you fix the healthcare crisis; how would you fix social security?

Everything that I wrote about would be—I always was sure to include the effect that it would have on women. That's the way that I found my interest in it because I wasn't interested in healthcare before—you know, on healthcare policy before that, but once I really included its effects on women, I found myself doing like hours of research outside of class, just because it was interesting to me.

Interviewer: Have you gotten the sense that your professors give you space to kind of tweak a prompt?

Interviewee: Yeah. I've gone to professors and said, "I did this instead; would that be okay?" That's usually fine. A lot of the times, you're given like a one, two, or three option, so you're able to kind of work with whatever you have.

Interviewer: I lied. I actually have a final question. It's something that I'm really interested in. One pet peeve for people who teach writing, I guess, any professor that we have, is when students say, "I wasn't sure what you wanted for the assignment," or they send us a draft and say, "Is this what you wanted?" Can you get a sense of why we wouldn't like that sort of way of talking about writing?

Interviewee: Well, I mean yeah. I mean if also, like a prompt is made, so that it's not like all going to be the same paper. If this is what you wanted, that kind of makes it seem like it's just this one like right way to do something.

Interviewer: Right, so I mean that wasn't actually my question, but—so it sounds like—so what you're saying is that writing well, or for you to enjoy writing, you have to have your own kind of take on things and your own passion. You have to be interested in what you're writing about. Then when a student says is this what you wanted, then what we're hearing is, "I'm just going through the motion of writing this paper." I'm just wondering how—like what advice would you give to instructors for how to push students away from that style of thinking.

Interviewee: I think it's difficult because a lot of times, that is how you feel as a student, is like you're probably writing just because you have to write, and I think that's why it's so important to say, find like your own way to interact with whatever this topic is, and to find your own passion for this topic. I mean maybe originally, you're not interested in whatever you're writing about, but find whatever your passion is, and just see if there's a way—I mean my passion is a lot easier because it can be used for a lot of—for basically anything. I think that it's really important to find some way that this means something to you personally, outside of this class.

Interviewer: Yeah. What would you say to students who would say, "I don't really have a passion"?

Interviewee: That would be difficult.

Interviewer: Difficult question, right.

Interviewee: I would probably ask them what they do outside of the classroom, to see if they seem to have some kind of special interest that could be used. I don't know.

Interviewer: Yeah, because it's such a painful, excruciating process to take a prompt and try to figure out what to sort of spit back to the professor that they want to hear. Getting students away from that thinking would seem important.

Interviewee: Yes, I agree with that.

Interviewer: Any other comments or questions?

Interviewee: I don't think so.

Interviewer: Okay, thank you very much.

Interviewee: Yeah, thank you.

[End of Audio]