

Interviewer: Okay. You ready?

Interviewee: Yep.

Interviewer: [...]. How would you describe yourself as a writer when you first began here at University of Michigan?

Interviewee: When I first started, I feel like I would try to delve into it without making an outline and without trying to get down main points. I would just start writing, cuz in high school it's kind of—I don't know. I wasn't really told to make an outline too often, and we would always get revisions on essays, so to be honest, it was like, okay, I'm gonna do it once and get a grade and then they're gonna tell me how to fix it, but then—do you want me to talk about after when I started here, how it changed?

Interviewer: Sure. Yeah, you can talk about now.

Interviewee: Then [English course]—I took Freshman Writing, and my professor stressed making an outline, making a thesis statement, waiting to do your intro until you were done with everything else, and just writing the paper and having each sentence of each paragraph—having the first sentence be, go back to your thesis, kind of. So if you just took the first sentences, it makes what your paper is about.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. Kind of like a topic sentence?

Interviewee: Yeah, mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. Do you have specific language, specific terms or words that you have come to use when you're thinking about your writing or you're thinking about the ways that you write?

Interviewee: I guess I use certain verbs a lot. Do want examples?

Interviewer: Sure.

Interviewee: I use the verb “eradicated” a lot. I always try to use active voice, I guess.

Interviewer: Did you learn about active and passive voice in [English course]?

Interviewee: Yes, mm-hmm, to use active over passive as much as you can. The paper that I had to write this term for my history class, she stressed that a lot too.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. Before when you were talking, you said the thesis, and you were talking about different sentences, so those are some examples of terms. Do you have other writing terms that you—when you think about the ways that you write—

Interviewee: Right.

Interviewer: - that you think about?

Interviewee: I try not to start sentences with “it” or “these” or “this”; just be more specific and never say like, “during this period.” Say what period you’re talking about, and as concise as possible too, because I feel like even now I write and then I’ll read it out loud to myself and there are so many words that can just be crossed out, like the word “interesting” or “very” or “really.” You never really need those. I don’t know what else.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: Okay.

Interviewer: How would you describe yourself as a writer now?

Interviewee: I think I’m a much better writer than when I started. There’s always room for improvement, but I like writing papers now. It’s enjoyable, and I try to start them—in high school, I would not start up a long time before it was due, but now I give myself a week to—cuz a lot of times I need to get books or whatever, go through them, write down page numbers, and write a thesis, which changes 20 times probably the whole time I’m writing—but I don’t know. I think [English course] and then just every class I’ve taken, most of them I’ve had to write a paper, and my GSIs [Graduate Student Instructors] always go over things and have office hours for that to help you succeed.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. Okay. This next question is kind of similar, but maybe you have something else to say. To what extent would you say that you’ve grown as a writer?

Interviewee: I think a lot. I mean, I wasn’t used to writing long papers before, either, and now eight to ten pages isn’t difficult. It’s like I want it to be that long, cuz I feel like I always wanna write more, and it wasn’t like that before. I definitely put a lot more effort in now than I probably did on my first paper in [English course], especially cuz the grading in college is different, too. They expect a lot more, so you have to live up to higher standards.

Interviewer: What would you attribute the growth to: the grading at the college level?

Interviewee: A lot of practice, I think, because I remember my sophomore year, first semester, I had like ten papers, and it sucked at the time, but it really helped me. I had to learn how to write a paper, and then it made it easier for the next time, especially that semester. That really helped, just practicing.

Interviewer: Were those papers similar, or were they all for different classes?

Interviewee: Three of them were for a psychology class, so I guess those were kind of the same, and then I had a history class that had like three. Then I was in [education program], which had a long one. I don’t know my fourth class, but I guess kind of social

sciences—but the Psychology, I remember them being—we had to code a TV show and then report our results, so it was kind of different than a history paper where you're arguing something was, but they were kind of similar, I guess.

Interviewer: Could you even see connections between the types of papers that were different like that, or was it more learning to write in different places?

Interviewee: I feel like I always use the same skills, but I just apply them differently. Like for history, I know that—at least the history classes I've taken, I know that it's like—my professors have told me, assume that I don't really know anything about the topic; but for psychology, they've kind of said, "Assume we know the basics, but just go in on what you're talking about." It's different in that way, but I definitely use my same rules when I'm writing, and I do an outline all the time and stuff like that.

Interviewer: Okay. What are some of the goals that you have for yourself as a writer?

Interviewee: My freshman year, [English course], I don't remember what I got on the first essay, but I did end up getting an A minus or an A in the class, so I feel like I improved even over the semester, and that was just a big accomplishment to me. I'm a psychology major, so getting those essays back and doing well always makes me feel good. A goal is to keep improving, I guess, because like I said, you can never—you can take a paper and polish it ten times but there's always more things you could do, but eventually you have to be like, "This is my—I'm done." I just think keeping on with what I'm doing, and—I don't know, maybe learning new ways to write or something.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. Do you think those goals have changed over your semesters here at Michigan, or have they remained [cross talk 7:56]?

Interviewee: At the beginning, I feel like I didn't have goals with writing. In high school, writing was just like—it wasn't a big deal. We had papers once in a while, but in college, it's definitely a big deal, so I feel like at the beginning I didn't really have any, but now ...

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. Okay. Thinking across all the writing you've done here at Michigan, what do you think it means to write well?

Interviewee: I think having a good argument and being able to support it, really. I mean, you can argue anything, but if you don't have support for it, it's not gonna turn out. That support can be books or peer review journals or stuff where other people have, I don't know, stated their opinions, and then you use that to—because you could—really with any topic, you can argue so many different—usually there's two main sides, but there's always more things, but as long as you have research to back up yourself, then you can write well.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. What do you think is the most important thing in learning to write?

Interviewee: I think learning not to cut corners, and not to try to take shortcuts. If you have a research paper and your professor's like, "Okay, you just need two books" or something, why not get more? It's hard to not do more, because with college you have so many other things to do, but it's important to—it makes it easier for you in the end if you start off strong, definitely, and you make yourself be disciplined. It definitely helps you later.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. Do you think that's stuff that comes mainly from you as the writer to make you go that extra mile?

Interviewee: Mm-hmm. I guess some people are more driven, but I think that everyone has it in them. Maybe once you learn that you can't cut corners once, or you make a mistake, then you learn from it.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. Okay. You mentioned your [English course]. What did you learn in that class that you continue to use in your writing? You mentioned a few things, but maybe you can repeat them.

Interviewee: I mean, that was the first class that I had where we—one of our essays was on Girl Talk, the band, and copyright. That was just so strange to me, to be writing about that. I never wrote about [inaudible 10:34] but it was cool. It was really interesting, and it made me realize that you can write about anything. I keep talking about high school, but we would have to write papers on Hamlet or stuff like that that wasn't that interesting to me, but then taking that class—I don't remember the other two essays we had, but that one just sticks out cuz it was so—just different from what I was used to.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm, learning that you could write about multiple topics?

Interviewee: Yeah, as long as you can—there's always stuff you can find, but just not limiting yourself, I guess.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. Anything else from the class that you continue to think about or use?

Interviewee: It's so long ago now. It's going by so fast. I mean, we would have to bring our paper in a week before it was due, I think, and then trade it with every—not everyone, but trade it with—we had a team of three of us, and we would peer review, and that helps. My roommate and I still do it. Every time one of us has a paper, we give it to the other one, because someone else—it's different. When you're writing, you know what you're trying to say. Even stuff you don't have written down, you know it in your head cuz you read about it, but somebody else that's reading it for the first time maybe has no idea. If they think it's a good argument, then it probably is a good argument.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. Is that something that you started doing after that class?

Interviewee: Yeah. I never did it before, mm-hmm. Even in that class I thought sometimes it was annoying having to bring the essay in a week before and having other kids read it, and if it wasn't your best work it didn't always feel good to get all these comments, but it definitely helps.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. Did you have any language or terms that you used in the course to talk about your writing?

Interviewee: We read some—she told us to read *The Elements of Style* by I don't know who, Strunk and something.

Interviewer: Strunk and White?

Interviewee: Strunk and White. I read that in high school so I had it, and I don't remember what all is in there. I know there's a lot of grammar. Then we read another book, *How to Write a College Paper*. I don't know who that was by. There's probably a lot of books called that. Just those two, what they had in them kind of ...

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. Did you take [Writing course]?

Interviewee: No, just [English course].

Interviewer: Just [English course]?

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Okay. Are there other experiences that you've had, either in the classroom or it could be outside of the classroom too, that you think have had an effect on your writing?

Interviewee: I took [upper level English course] my second semester of freshman year, and I feel like the writing for an English class—I could be wrong, but it's the most different from all my social sciences, cuz I'm a psychology major, history minor. In writing for English, I took the class cuz it was on Oprah's Book Club. I like to read, and all the books that were on the list sounded so interesting to me, and it was a Humanities credit, but the papers we had to write explicating something from the text, it was a lot different than what I was used to, so it was harder. I remember going to office hours, emailing my GSI, being so—I felt like I was annoying her. I know I wasn't—but all the time. It taught me how to write an English paper. I don't know, English classes, they have a little higher level, I think, than—higher expectations. My roommate is an English major, and her essays, she will work on them for like weeks. A history paper, I can write it in a week, no problem. I feel like that class pushed me a lot and definitely helped me become more effective.

Interviewer: Do you use what you learned in that class in your other classes where the papers are a little different maybe?

Interviewee: Yeah, definitely. Like social sciences; I think their expectations are a little lower, so just knowing what I learned from that English class, I think it's helped me just become better, because maybe someone that only took [English course], which—I feel like a lot of people that aren't English majors or interested in English will just take [English course], so I think taking another English class is beneficial. Then we do have to take upper-level writing, but most people do that in their major, so it's kind of different.

Interviewer: Anything else that you think has had an effect on your writing?

Interviewee: I've gone to Sweetland freshman year. I went this year to write my personal statement for the internship I have this summer, and they helped me a lot. I just read it out loud, and she—words that I needed to explain or expand on them, it helped. I ended up getting funding, so the fact that I had a good personal statement was definitely very good, and just the resources we have here; there's so many, so I think you can succeed if you use them. GSI's office hours, professor's office hours, they'll help too; and friends, like I've said. They can help a lot.

Interviewer: How has your writing process changed as a result of what you learned, either in that class or going to Sweetland—or has it?

Interviewee: I definitely write an outline now, always, because before, I would just try to start writing and it didn't have a form or it didn't have—but that was fine in high school. It was kind of like free writing in high school, I feel like, and like I said, we would get to do rewrites, so I was cutting corners and not learning how to write. I don't know, now I always make an outline. I always write some kind of thesis and then start writing. While I'm writing I try not to be perfect, because you can always back, but if I notice that—sometimes I'll notice that I used the same verb in two consecutive sentences, and I hate doing that. It just bothers me when I read it, so then I'll change it then instead of waiting. I've made myself do that as I've gone along, too, just so it's easier when you edit it later.

Interviewer: Okay. If I use the term “reflective writing,” what does that mean to you?

Interviewee: Like reflecting on something, some experience, or maybe kind of like free writing, which we did in [English course]. Sometimes she would just say, “Get out a piece of paper.” I feel like the creative writing classes maybe do that, too.

Interviewer: In [English course], was that reflective writing, do you think?

Interviewee: Once in a while she would have us just get out—the first week of class, I remember having to reflect on our writing in the past, and then at the end—the final paper wasn't—it was like we had a final paper; then we had to do a reflective essay over the whole semester. That might have been our final exam or something—but just writing on how you've changed, I guess, and reflecting on the experiences and what it taught you.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. You did those two activities. The next question is if you've used it in class ever, or on your own?

Interviewee: That class, I've never—never has a professor in another class told us to reflect; I mean, besides reflecting on your participation in class. I don't know if that counts, but not really—

Interviewer: Not on your writing?

Interviewee: No, hm-mmm.

Interviewer: Have you ever done it on your own?

Interviewee: Honestly, no, not after [English course].

Interviewer: Okay. What have been your experiences of working with other writers in your courses, or maybe outside of your courses too?

Interviewee: In [English course] there was three of us, and I remember even meeting with them outside of class to go over things that they had written down, and we all had each other's numbers. When you kind of feel responsible—you're responsible for yourself, but I kind of felt responsible for them too, like making sure that if I saw something that they could do better, pointing it out and not just turning my shoulder cuz I felt bad to say—which I learned from that class, because before, I definitely didn't wanna put anyone down or criticize them, but it's constructive criticism so it's okay. Then like I said, my roommate and I now, we check each other's papers. My sister—[...]—she sends me her stuff and I'll check it for her. Then going to Sweetland, like I said, they've helped me a lot. I've had friends over the past two-and-a-half years besides my roommate that have looked at my stuff.

Interviewer: Can you talk more about what you would do with your roommate or a friend when you were looking at each other's work?

Interviewee: Like what I would do to her—

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: [Cross Talk 20:05] look for in her—

Interviewer: Would you sit down together and talk about it, or would you write on it, or what would you do?

Interviewee: She has an essay due tomorrow, for instance, and I was home this weekend, so she gave it to me today to look at it, and I told her I would by tonight. I'm gonna look at it and check for grammar. I always do that first. I read it through and just do grammar, and then I read it again once you know—cuz sometimes you'll read and then you'll make

comments and then they'll explain that later—so then I'll read it again and make more comments and maybe write—I don't know, but I always do sit down with her for at least five, ten minutes and just say, "This was good. These three things were good, but these three things could be improved on," which I learned that from [English course]. We had to say three things that are good and three things they could improve on, so I think that's beneficial.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. If you were gonna give someone advice about writing, what are some things they should think about when they begin writing their paper?

Interviewee: I think first of all, you should always give yourself enough time, because when you don't, it just puts stress on you and then you're just [inaudible 21:21] it before, and it's not even words because it's the last minute. Then make sure you know what is expected of you. Make sure you understand the assignment, and if you have questions, to ask—because even I still—I don't like asking for things and asking for help, but that's what GSIs and the professors are there for. Understanding exactly what they want, understanding the prompts—maybe you get a prompt or something—like for my history class, it was one question, but my professor went—he took one day out of his schedule to go over each of the three questions we could write on and explain exactly what he wanted, so that was perfect—but if you don't know, to ask.

Then if you need books or something, get them, and you can't read every page—there's no way—but look at the chapter. Look at section headings. See what you could use. Then get enough to at least start writing an outline, and write a thesis. I don't know. When I'm writing, once I have a thesis, it definitely helps me. Even though it changes, it definitely makes me feel better about the paper and know what I'm trying to argue and prove.

Interviewer: You mentioned outline a couple times. Do you think you would advise always doing an outline, or are there some times when maybe you wouldn't?

Interviewee: For Psych and History, I think I would always write an outline, but maybe for other classes, I don't know. I guess it depends on what kind of assignment it is. If it's a research paper or if it's an argumentative essay, I think it's necessary, but if it is—well, I guess even for [upper level English course], explicating something, you can say what parts you're gonna talk about. I don't know, sometimes—like for IGR, I mean, it was just reflecting on the class, so I didn't really write an outline for that. For [Psychology course], which is the [mentor program], we had to write a paper about our experiences. I think when it's more personal and it's a paper using "I" and stuff, maybe you can free write and see where you get, and then just see what else you have to include.

Interviewer: Okay. You mentioned your major, but this question's about your major, so maybe you could just say it again. What's your concentration? Then talk about the writing you have had to do in your major.

Interviewee: It's Psych, and for [Psychology course], like I said, we had to—one paper was watching on a show—you could watch any show that focused on adolescence, so I



did Gossip Girl. You would have to code—I don't know what we were coding for—some kind of behavior, like maybe deviant behavior or something. Then you would have to write your essay proving or disproving that deviant behavior is more prevalent in adolescence than adults or something. It's kind of like you write your intro, what you're gonna say kind of the same. Your thesis is what you're gonna prove, but then it's more—I don't know. For those papers I will put numbers in there, like "this percentage" or "this is statistically significant because"—and I think with History or with other papers it's more—you can put not your opinion, but you can put more of your analysis in those than, I feel like, in my Psych papers. In Psychology papers you have to be knowledgeable of different—you can always say "this happened," but it's not always gonna happen, I guess, so you just have to be careful.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. How confident do you feel about writing things in your major—in Psych, I guess?

Interviewee: Pretty confident, but I'm in Social Psych this semester and we don't have to write any papers, which is nice, but it's also kind of—I'm taking [upper level Psychology course] in the spring, so it's like now I'm getting nervous for that class, but I feel like that class is a really good chance to become a lot better in this subject, because I don't know how many essays we're gonna have; probably a lot, and it's only a two-month class, which kind of—but at least I can focus on it. I think after that class I'll be a lot more confident.

Interviewer: Just from having more opportunities to write in that class, or what about that class?

Interviewee: It's the upper-level writing requirement, so I just feel like there has to be—I don't know, there has to be a lot of focus on how to write in this. We observe children. I'm most interested in Developmental Psychology, and in this class we do experiments with kids and then write on those, so I feel like it's different than reading about it and then writing on it, so I think it's a lot—if I were to go to grad school, I thought this is a good class that could prepare me for that.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. You said you feel pretty confident already, though?

Interviewee: Yeah, but I've only taken—the Psych classes I've taken that have had papers were mostly intro classes, so honestly, they were never that difficult. Then I took [Psychology course], which we only had one paper. That's upper-level Psych, but we only had one essay, and it was diagnosing someone with a disorder and saying why. I don't know, I think [Psychology course] is gonna kind of prove to me if I'm good and what I have to improve on.

Interviewer: Okay. Have you had any experiences with what they call "new media writing," which could be like writing a blog or using video or sound or PowerPoint even?

Interviewee: I had one class where we had to write in a blog. It was [Anthropology course], like [title of course] or something, but the blog was just reflecting what we read, so I don't think—I don't know. This summer I'm going to [country], and I actually have to keep a blog. I'm part of [health program] and we have to, so I mean, I guess that'll give me experience with it, but I've never done video stuff, or not really—I haven't utilized media too much.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. Okay. Do you think doing that blog in Anthro did anything to affect yourself as a writer?

Interviewee: Honestly, they were six-, seven-sentence things; not really. I mean, it was just—

Interviewer: What was the point of having it on the blog?

Interviewee: I don't even know. He wanted us to have to keep track of what we learned, I guess. It was just kind of summarizing what we read, so it was just—honestly, it felt kind of like busy work to me, but I mean, it was discussion. Sometimes in discussion you do have a little busy work, but it always helps your grade, which is good, but I don't know really what the point was besides just summarizing what we read.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. What are some of the ways you're thinking about the blog you have to do next summer or this summer?

Interviewee: I'm thinking it's gonna be kind of like free writing, like writing on my experiences. I'm glad I'm required to do it, because I feel like if I wasn't, I wouldn't wanna take the time out, but when I have this to look back on in months or a year, it's gonna be nice to see—cuz you remember things that happen, but you never remember exactly how you were feeling on a day or how you were feeling after something, so just having that to look back on—I don't know—will be cool.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. Okay. You've been uploading pieces of your writing to the archive—

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: - on CTools [learning management system]. Can you talk about that process and how it's been going?

Interviewee: I actually did the one for this semester today, and both the ones that I did for this year are for history classes. I don't know, it's kind of cool because I looked at the essay that I submitted last semester and then I looked at the one I submitted this semester, and they're both for history, and I feel like I used the same process for each of them, but I do think the second essay is a better essay, so it's just cool seeing how even—I don't know, I'm reading my old one and saying, "I could've done this better. I could've done

that better.” Now my new one, I feel like that is a good essay, but maybe in a year or a semester from now, I’ll read this one and say, “Oh, I could’ve done that”—you know?

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: It’s just kind of cool seeing how I’ve changed, I guess.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. Can you talk about each of the essays and why you picked each one?

Interviewee: The one that I picked for this semester, I picked it cuz that’s the only essay I had to write, which is very strange, but that’s just how it turned out this semester. I had to write about why—it was for [History course]. It was the [title of course], and I had to write about why China lost its prestige as the wealthiest country in the 19th Century. I don’t know, I had like four books and then my textbook for the class, and then I picked it, like I said, really because it was the only essay I could’ve picked. I did spend a lot of time on it because it was our final exam, and it being the only one—I only had one essay to focus on—that made me able to spend a lot more time on it.

Then last semester I picked my final exam for [History course], which was [title of course], and it was about the media sources during the American Revolution, like newspaper stuff, and the Loyalists and the other side—I can’t remember what they were called—but just comparing how they were different. I picked that one because out of all the essays I wrote, I felt like I took the most time on it. I felt like that was my best work. There was nothing—well, I mean, now I see things I could’ve done better, but at the time I felt like I’ve spent the most time on it, I guess; and the other essays, maybe they weren’t as good or something.

Interviewer: You said you can tell the one is a lot better—

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: - then the one you did last term. Talk about what specifically you saw in differences?

Interviewee: I think this semester I’ve learned to be more concise, because I was reading that one and I was like, “Why did I leave that word in there?” or just little words that you just read it and it’s just—or I even caught some passive voice in that one. I think with history sometimes it’s hard to use active, but you should use active, but it’s easier to just say “was caused by” or something. I noticed some saying, “during this time period” instead of saying what I was talking about. Little things like that; I feel like my argument was still supported well, my analysis, but I did—I would say something and then I would say it in another sentence, like saying the same thing but just different words, like you already said it. That’s what the conclusion is for. I don’t know, just little things really that are more grammar related, but they take away from the whole argument.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. It sounds to me like conciseness is one thing,—

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: - and then specificity, like being real specific?

Interviewee: Right. Yeah, those are the two major things I think changed from the two essays.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. What experiences have you had in the meantime that you think affected that?

Interviewee: Well, my GSI for [History course], she gave us this seven-page grammar thing that she put together herself, and just reading that. Then every week we had to turn in 150 words on a reading from that week. You got a check if you did it no matter what, but she was very strict on giving you suggestions, and I took those and I'd use them the next time. When you have little assignments like that, it's really hard to try your best, because—but she definitely made it worthwhile at the end, because we were ready to write the paper if you used her comments and everything.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. Okay. Let's think a little bit about the future. What kinds of writing will be most valuable for your career when you're done?

Interviewee: I mean, I'm not sure what I'm gonna do. I've thought about teaching. I've thought about going to get a Master's in Education. I thought about social work, but I think just the whole social sciences—knowing how to form an argument is gonna be beneficial for whatever I do, but I just have to—whatever subject, if I choose a specific subject, I have to just remember things I've learned that can translate into good writing.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. If you could tell your teachers or other writing teachers one thing about writing or how to teach it, what would you tell them?

Interviewee: I think the thing that my professor did in [English course]; making other people check it, and making you have a rough draft, even. It's hard. When it's for a final paper, it's really hard to have a rough draft because that's your final paper. That's supposed to be all you, but at the same time we're supposed to be learning how to write. My [Geography course], we had this big presentation due last week, and we had to submit all semester two pages about just what we had been doing so far, and it forced us to do research and not wait till last minute, and then at the end it was easy to put the [inaudible 36:25] one together—so just teaching those kind of habits. The most beneficial way that they can find to do that is good, because somebody can learn to be a good writer, and I feel like everyone has it in them to be a good writer, but it's the bad habits that are really hard to break down, so if you can teach that, I think that would be the best.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. Okay, anything else you want to comment on, about the uploading to CTools or about your writing at all?

Interviewee: I just think the study is very interesting. I was telling my mom about it today, and she had said that that's so cool to see how—and like I said, looking at my essay from last semester, it definitely—it's just interesting seeing how it's changed.

Interviewer: Cool.

Interviewee: Yep.

Interviewer: All right, awesome. That's the last question.

Interviewee: Okay.

Interviewer: Okay.

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