Interviewer: This is ***. It is February 13th, and I'm here with *** […]. ***, […] I'm just going to ask you some questions about your experience with the Minor.

Interviewee: Okay.

Interviewer: Things you've learned, and sort of discuss some of those things. Things about the course, things about the future, comments and suggestions you have for the Minor.

Interviewee: Sure.

Interviewer: We'll just go ahead and get started.

Interviewee: Okay.

Interviewer: Okay, so the first question I have is how would you describe yourself as a writer when you started at the University of Michigan?

Interviewee: In what way do you mean?

Interviewer: How—what would you say about your writing experience and how comfortable you are—

Interviewee: Okay.

Interviewer: - or anything like that.

Interviewee: I'd say as a writer, I was pretty, I guess diverse. I was comfortable doing creative or academic—like just—I was comfortable writing a variety of genres. Writing's always been something I've been pretty comfortable with. Coming into it, I was pretty comfortable just with my own writing. Anytime you start a new writing course I think you're a little nervous and you stack yourself up against other people. That didn't last long actually in this class. I felt really comfortable pretty much from the second class, I think.

Interviewer: Well, that's great to hear. How would you describe yourself as a writer after taking that class?

Interviewee: I guess I—it just continued—I became a lot more confident. I guess in doing—again variety—of things, I didn't really exactly know what to expect with this course. I guess it was—I thought it was going to be a traditional rec comp studies sort of thing and that was not the case at all.

Interviewer: How was it different from a traditional rec comp [composition]?

Interviewee: Well, I just imagined like "This is how you write an essay. Blah, blah, blah." There ended up being "There are a lot of ways to write an essay." You can't just make it like this and there are a lot of things you can use, like new media. Which is really cool—coming from an art background my freshman year—with interest in graphic design.

We had this project, our remediation project where we took one piece of work from a different class and remediated it in a different form. I got to make a mock Rolling Stone article and actually in addition to writing it, compose the whole thing, like edit it and make it look like an article which was a really cool experience for me. I got to marry a couple of different interests of mine. I don't know, I just feel like I—after it—I don't know much—I guess confident is the word that comes to mind. I don't know, I guess I have a better understanding of what I like to do.

Interviewer: That's important. That's really important. Have you developed any new ways of talking about yourself as a writer or how you learned to write or your process of writing?

Interviewee: I don't know about how talking about myself as a writer, I guess the go to word is creative, a fiction writer. Definitely when I talk about process, I think about process a lot now. That's due to [Instructor]'s 08: 12:50(phonetic) course also. I'm a [tutor] at Sweetland so I was taking the tutoring seminar at the same time, so I learned it was like a really process oriented semester.

Interviewer: That's pretty intense.

Interviewee: Yeah, no, it was really cool though. I really liked it. The process is almost more interesting like from the final product for me.

Interviewer: How so?

Interviewee: Just any time I'm writing, I'm just like reflecting, I'm like what does this mean, where is it going, like how am I getting from A to B to C and eventually to Z. I was used to second guessing myself as a writer, I guess, but that's because before it was like second guessing myself, like am I doing this write. Now it's, I changed a little bit. It's like am I doing this as well as I could. Looking at like how I'm working with a paragraph and linking ideas and stuff.

It's just, I'm constantly reflecting on how I could be doing things better. And if I know I'm not doing something right, I've got to go back to this here, I work with it, tweak it a little, make it molded to how I envisioned. I don't know. This is all sounding very abstract.

Interviewer: No, no. It makes a lot of sense. How did you get to that point where you were thinking more about process, you use the word reflection, how did you get to that point?

Interviewee: You know, as much as I hated it during the class I think the blog actually helped a lot.

Interviewer: Oh really? How so?

Interviewee: At first I thought it was busy work, I thought "This is dumb, I don't want to do it." Having to just be responsible for your own words where everyone—because you write a paper, the only people who ever read it are you and your professor. Like writing a blog, for people that you've come to respect throughout your (inaudible 5:33). I don't want to look like an idiot.

At the same time, being urged to just be casual was really nice. It let me not filter so much because my first couple of blog posts were really formal and after a while I just stopped caring about the formality of it. I still kept worrying about saying intelligent things and sounding not like an idiot, but the voice, I guess the voice came through more.

There was this one thing part where we had to go back through a post and see like how they changed, which I thought was—it didn't seem big at the time—but even talking about it now, that was a big deal because I got to see—I don't know—it made me more aware I guess of myself as a writer. Then also like of an audience, which I guess was the biggest thing because it's really easy to get wrapped up in your own writing, and thinking this makes sense to me, but then have –and doing sort of like accidentally completely alienating your audience. I don't know, the whole blog just like really—that helped a lot although I hate to admit it.

Interviewer: Yeah, what are your goals for yourself as a writer?

Interviewee: Well, all of my—any professor that I have a huge amount of respect for and who I've recommended to people in the past have been writing professors. I am planning on after graduating going into a PhD program where I would like—English—where I would eventually like to get also my MFA [Master of Fine Arts], in fiction writing but the eventual for me I guess, would be to be a professor at a university teaching because I just want to do, inspire others in the way like many, the writing people—the writing faculty here at Sweetland, but also just like a university at large have inspired me to be a writer, not something else.

Because that was like there was, it's just—I don't know—it's just something that was really cool and completely changed the direction of my life and I would like to help someone in the same in it, like a number of my reading professors have helped me I guess. This Writing Minor is getting me to understand my writing better but also understanding writing as a larger entity I guess better. Which is cool.

Interviewer: Has that goal or yours to become a writing professor, has that changed since you entered the Minor or was that a goal of yours before you started the Minor?

Interviewee: It was a—definitely there before the Minor—now I feel like it's even more, like I have to do this. I just—I don't know. This semester, I'm not writing very much and it sucks. That's just one thing I've learned, I don't have a paper due until right before spring break. I just haven't had to do any writing and I don't have—like I was taking (inaudible 6:25) class last semester.

Like three English and three Writing, it was like I was writing all the time and to go from all of it to nothing, it makes me really, I need the writing and doing something involved in writing. Tutoring's helped with that a lot. It's gotten me to where I like talking about writing. I get really excited about it because I'm a huge dork. I know, it's just really cool. Definitely just the right—the Minor's helping me just by keeping me close to writing I think.

Interviewer: That's a great way of putting it. When you think about some of those experiences you had last semester and in earlier years here at university, what do you think it means to write well?

Interviewee: God, what a great and scary question.

Interviewer: It is, isn't it?

Interviewee: I'm definitely not a prescripivist, like I don't believe in formal grammar necessarily. There's like—I believe in it, it exists obviously—but I don't think it's the focus of a paper. I actually get really mad when people bring stuff into the center to work on grammar. Or professors mark people down full grades because they had the commas misplaced in their paper. It's stupid to me.

I guess good writing to me is a writing—how do I put this without sounding like fluffy, with using dumb words? It's authentic I guess. It's authentic and it communicates the intent of the writer effectively in whatever form that is. I mean, if I can understand what you're saying without misinterpreting what you intended—I guess to me—that is the hallmark of good writing. I don't believe that there is—it's a—

Interviewer: It's a hard question.

Interviewee: It is. You have to qualitatively come up with an answer. There is no check list for this is good writing. I don't—man—I don't know. Good writing is writing that makes you want to read it.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: There you go.

Interviewer: What do you think is most important in learning how to write?

Interviewee: Having a good understanding of yourself is really strong because voice is one of those things that I think can make or break a paper. You can have the strongest argument or whatever. All the evidence, all the analysis, but if you don't have—if you're not in it, I'm not going to care. At least personally.

Interviewer: You mean you as the audience?

Interviewee: Yeah, like me specifically as an audience. If I can't see a glimmer of a personality or something in your work it just feels like cold, like—I don't know—it might just be me being artsy fartsy fiction writer. Definitely just revisit everything. Thinking, thinking is the best thing you can do. Don't just do, think about it. I don't think you can write without thinking, first of all I think it's thinking on paper.

Always think and always question yourself. Not like don't berate yourself, like this is stupid, why am I doing this. Like, why am I doing this? What is it doing for me? How is it affecting me? How do I want it to affect an audience? Read a lot.

Interviewer: Did you take the [Writing course] class?

Interviewee: I did not, no.

Interviewer: Did you take then the first year writing requirements?

Interviewee: Yes, I took [English course] my first semester.

Interviewer: Okay, that makes sense, you're fiction.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: What did you learn in that course that you continue to use?

Interviewee: You know, it may not be anything specifically about writing a paper, actually. It was the importance of getting a second opinion and collaboration. The best thing that we did in that class—we did a ton of work shopping, and I was so nervous. In high school work shopping is ridiculous. You send it to people and everybody's like "This is so really good. Here you missed an apostrophe." This is not helpful. I assumed that's what it was going to be. Because it was my experience with it. Then it wasn't.

People were really honest without being brutal. They were just helpful and I think that was facilitated well by my GSI [Graduate Student Instructor] whose name I'm forgetting right now. I guess the importance of having a second set of eyes, seeing—having someone else see your work. It is a help, but it doesn't make you less of a writer. Because I think a lot of people feel like you're really intimidated or you're bad for seeking help with their writing. Like they aren't good enough.

I did a project about that in [Writing 300 level course] last year. A lot of people have a really negative perception of the writing center and the tutoring center because they think "I'm a good writer, why would I have to go there?" It's like you don't have to, but it's—why not? Why wouldn't you want to talk about your ideas? You're not the only person at play in your writing. There's a reader and a writer.

Interviewer: Definitely.

Interviewee: That's probably the most important thing I learned I guess. To learn that it's okay to collaborate.

Interviewer: That's a good thing to learn. Now the questions are going to shift a little bit. We're going to talk about specifically about the Gateway Course, which is the courses you took last semester. The [Writing 200 level course]. I would like to know first of all—and I think you've sort of alluded to this already—but just to get it explicit. What impact has the writing, the Minor Gateway course had on your writing overall?

Interviewee: It's definitely—I was confident as a writer before—I'm really confident right now. I will look—I can just write something without hesitation. A lot of times—like I said—I would second guess myself. I'm like this is stupid, why are you doing this? The focus has shifted. I guess the tone of the questions have shifted, but they've stayed the same. Again, this is why are you doing this instead.

I'm a lot better at coming up with ideas and synthesizing, I guess quickly in a way that I feel like is effectively communicated through my writing after the course because you're in it so much. You're always writing. Man, I was exhausted at the end of that class. Yeah, I just—confident—I just feel like my writing's better. I don't know how to put it, it feels better. I feel more confident about it. I feel like I'm doing something more effectively now.

Interviewer: How does that confidence affect your writing?

Interviewee: I get it done faster that's for sure, which is nice. It doesn't mean that it gets done fast, but I save a lot of time. Also I don't mind having people look at it or talking about it with people now. I don't mind reading out loud, I guess. I was invited to do a reading at The UGLI [Shapiro Undergraduate Library] last Thursday night and I was freaking out about it but I got up on the podium and I just read it and I was fine. That was not bad and I don't think I could have done that last year, ever.

I guess I'm more also apt now to—I guess apt is a good word—I'm more apt to pursue riskier ideas because of that. I feel like I can handle them now. Before I would take on really big things and just fail, crash and burn because I just didn't have the confidence—the combination of the confidence and the skill to tackle something as complicated as I wanted to. Now it's not a problem. I find myself pushing my writing in both terms of content and my approach to that content, I think. With much more gusto.

Interviewer: That's a good thing. How would you describe your experiences using the new media writing, sort of the blog and the remediation projects and all of that? You talked a little bit about that earlier.

Interviewee: Incredibly frustrating. I don't—I think it was a combination—I never had experienced a class with a living syllabus before which was weird for me because everything was changing. I don't know when anything was due. I'd never want to I guess fight back against the use of technology. I think it's a really cool thing that we're doing. I think it's important. I think it's really, really futile to "Oh, I don't like to use new media so I'm not going to" it's like "Cool, see you, eat my dust."

It was frustrating because I don't feel like we had enough of an immersion into—like we hit a bunch of different kinds of new media things really quickly—but we didn't really get a good sense of any of them. We had these little presentations that we did and each person would tackle a type of new media and do a presentation on it.

The problem with that is a lot of people weren't familiar with these things so it was like the blind leading the blind. A lot of the times I felt like I had a distinctly unfair advantage over a lot of people. I've—I worked—I'm from [city] and in the summers I work at [University] working on websites for the college engineering.

Interviewer: Okay, cool.

Interviewee: I have a decent technical background, even as an art student, I was a technical person, working with computers and stuff. I knew how to build a portfolio and use HT Now. I knew how to record sound and add video and shoot it and I knew how to do a lot of stuff that other people didn't. We did little workshops and stuff but I feel like starting in earlier with the technology, like making expectations about how we're supposed to use technology really clear. I think a lot of people came into the Writing Minor not understanding that new media would be like a huge focus of the class. I was also—I was one of those people. I didn't know what to expect. I think setting up expectorations for what the class is going to be like earlier would help people a lot and I think having people that actually know what they're talking about present on topics relevant to new media would help immensely.

Interviewer: You mentioned the portfolio.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: How would you describe your experiences creating the Gateway Portfolio?

Interviewee: Conflicted.

Interviewer: How so?

Interviewee: It was really awesome and I have a portfolio now. I have my own website, but at the same time, it was really hard. It was really hard. Again, it's one of those things—it can—we all understood that we would have to make a portfolio at the beginning but we had no idea what that meant. I think day one or maybe day two introducing "This is a portfolio. Here's how we're going to be doing it."

Just having an idea of what we're doing and have it be a continual project through the semester I think would have helped immensely. We started maybe two-thirds into the semester. Personally, just with everything else, it's just—for me it wasn't enough time to come up with a good idea and make it a reality.

Interviewer: Were your struggles more with the creation of the electronic bit, or were they with the writing elements of the portfolio?

Interviewee: It's all of it together. When you put something on a website for everyone to see, you're not going to want your writing to just be. You're going to want to go back, revise it, make sure it looks pretty. Also, technological aspect of it took a really long time. I think it would have been nice to have—we did this in class, where we messed around with different editors. The Whizzywhig stuff and (inaudible 20:11) coding seminar.

Again doing that earlier might have helped a lot because I wanted hand code mine but then I felt like it was just going to take too much time. I messed around with Google sites and stuff and I hated everything that I was doing. There was just not enough control so I ended up wasting a large amount of time experimenting with different things and ended up just hand coding it anyways. Sat down and got it done and it was really awful.

Interviewer: What was pretty awful, the experience or the website?

Interviewee: Just the experience of coding it like all the way out. Because at that point, since we started so late and I had been working with different things and trying to make it work—and this is probably partially my fault too. Definitely partially my fault. By the time that I finally decided what I was going to do and how I was going to do it I—it was maybe two days until it was due. I was up for like 21 hours straight coding. That sort of sucked.

In the end, I like it. I look at my portfolio more than I remember the experience of having to make it. It's definitely something that needs to be—I love that aspect of the class—it's something that's really cool that I think I can actually use. Also, it helped you realize who you are as a writer I think. Again, starting it earlier would have been—personally—starting it earlier, personally and in the course I think would be immensely helpful.

Interviewer: Can you talk a little bit about the impact that creating the portfolio has had on your writing in particular?

Interviewee: I think so. Especially where I'm concerned with my creative writing I think. I just kind of used to write things and never really understanding if I had a distinct personality that was coming through. In making that portfolio I realized I did. It's like—it's not like super out there—like especially transgressive or anything, but my writing is kind of weird. I'd say it's like, there's weird things that happen, but that's any piece of writing I guess. Maybe it didn't help me so much realize who I was as a writer but how I want to present myself as a writer.

Interviewer: Can you give me an example?

Interviewee: […]. I just think straight forward to the point like less is more a lot of occasions in fiction writing. That's reflected in my portfolio. I think I used three maybe four colors all throughout. It's a really clean design. It's mostly text, because I feel like text is really important to me. I didn't—I purposefully—did not have images on my site because I just feel like they would almost detract from my—and I realize that you can relate text to image together to create something much more powerful but for me that wasn't a goal I guess. Anytime I did have an image on my site it was actually just text that was converted into an image. I guess, I'm kind of realizing things now actually.

Interviewer: That's part of what these interviews are good for.

Interviewee: Yeah. I guess they're just focusing, clean, neat, straightforward. Heavy emphasis on text and the written word I guess.

Interviewer: Since taking the writing Gateway course and making the portfolio and pulling all of those pieces together, how would you say your writing process has changed?

Interviewee: I actually draft things now. Which is nice. It's nice, it's like a blessing and a curse, I guess. Because I was always that kid—and I still am in a lot of ways—that would just write the paper the night before it's due and turn it in. I tried that last semester—not in this class, but in a different class—and got the worst grade I've ever gotten on a paper and hopefully the worst grade I ever will get on a paper. That was a big clue, like you need to grow up and be a real writer. I guess, I don't know.

The fact that we had to do so many drafts of everything in the Writing Minor helped a lot. I don't think I ever brought a completed draft to the class on the first day, which is like, which is always okay, which is nice to know. It's just like—a lot of times when you're just working—that's the thing. You're just working through things. You have no idea what you're doing. I guess that's one thing I do. I stopped and started again a lot, like I just am constantly—I don't mind just like having a couple of paragraphs to work with, stopping and taking a break and then coming back to it. Which is something I'd always hated before.

I'm not—I'm also less hesitant to just completely get rid of pieces of paper. It's really easy to get attached to a piece that you like. It's so, I wrote it so well, but it's not

working. I don't know. It's desensitized me to that a little that I don't mind just chucking away this morning's work. Like you're not helping me.

Interviewer: That's an important skill and one that is very difficult.

Interviewee: It's so hard.

Interviewer: Yeah, it really is. The more attached you are to it the harder—

Interviewee: It's so bad. I want—I've cut things and put them in other works. I've saved them, like I'll come back to you.

Interviewer: Yeah, you're really pretty; I'm going to come back to you.

Interviewee: I didn't forget you.

Interviewer: The writing, the Gateway course really emphasized reflective writing in many different forms. How would you describe your experience with that kind of reflection?

Interviewee: Incredibly helpful in a way—again—I thought I—a lot of the writing might seem like busy work. Just kind of a think they were making us do. I didn't expect—for some reason, I don't know why—a lot of them to help personally with my own writing. They did, just like reflecting on it, again, thinking. It's all about thinking and thinking about what you're doing. Being aware of yourself and your writing. That helped a lot.

I might not be—I don't make self reflective comments on my papers now in the way that [Instructor] had us do when you have the comment tool. I will insert things in my writing when I drafting like in bold or highlights. I'm like this is doing this here and just kind of mapping things out. I don't know. I do a lot of writing in pen on paper—talking—just writing my ideas down. Thinking about how I want to have things go so I have a record of it. I guess that helped. I guess that's the way the reflective writing impacted me.

Interviewer: Are you still doing any other kinds of reflection in your current writing.

Interviewee: Yeah, that's what those comments in the papers are. Just reflecting on what I want it to say and how it—how I want it to say what I want it to say. Then examine it. Does this actually do what I want to do? It's just—I guess—my whole process of writing now is kind of self-reflective in maybe not in such an explicit way as we did in the course. I'm—again—it comes back to second guessing myself in a better way, which is what I learned.

Interviewer: It makes a lot of sense. You mentioned—the next set of questions are sort of about the future—and you mentioned that you want to be a writing professor, so what kinds of writing do you think are going to be most valuable for that career path?

Interviewee: Well—again, it's a big answer—

Interviewer: It is.

Interviewee: - 'cause I would like—like I said—I would like to have my PhD and also at some point go back for my MFA because I can't imagine writing without like having one or the other, 'cause writing to me is like this big thing. I'm a creative writing major with an English major—minor in writing. I like writing. All of it would, I guess I'm wondering what do you mean by what kind of writing.

Interviewer: I'll be honest with you; I mean there's more than one way we could read this question. I think we could read it as a genre.

Interviewee: Okay.

Interviewer: The genres of writing but I think there are other ways that we could read this question too.

Interviewee: Right, that's what I'm wondering.

Interviewer: What other ways do you think we could read this question?

Interviewee: Well, I mean, the obviously like you said, genre, you've got your fiction, you've got your academic, you've got your poetry and journalists but there's also smaller things. You've got reflective writing like in poem writing, just things that you're writing because you need to write. I don't know. I think it's any form of writing would help you become—or at least help me—achieve my goal. Because anytime you're writing you're developing an understanding of whatever type of writing it is you're doing.

Interviewer: How would developing that understanding help you in your career goals?

Interviewee: I guess to help relate to people doing the same, there are students struggling with the same things that I can understand. A wide array of writings I guess, or how to write or ways of writing, ways of understanding I mean. I can then—I can't impart knowledge onto people but I can help them arrive at that knowledge on their own. Help them in ways that other professors I guess have helped me. That would I guess be the most helpful ways that these forms of writing could help shape my career.

Interviewer: That's great. If you could tell your teachers one thing about writing or how to teach writing, what would you say?

Interviewee: Shut up and listen.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: No one wants to be told what their writing should be because that's no one else's place to determine, but the writer's. I think the best teachers that I have, have sat down with me and talked to me about what I wanted to write and how I wanted to accomplish it. Then given their feedback from impressions that they're getting. Like I—maybe clarifying ideas—one thing that helps immensely, is when you talked to someone about your idea and they just spit back to you how they interpreted it.

I had professors that it's like, no—last semester I had a professor, who won't be named, but she's was like "You can't get an A on a paper in this class unless it's stylistically perfect." I'm like "What the hell does that mean?" How brazenly arrogant for you to determine style. It just rubbed me the wrong way. I've had professors like do similar things before. I don't—I understand that you have a higher degree than I do—like I am a lowly undergrad, but the same time I know how I want to be treated as a person and as a writer.

You telling me—again—I don't know. I don't believe teaching—especially writing something like you give to someone. Knowledge is not like a commodity to be given to someone but you have to help them understand writing on their own terms, and so just stop leaving your ideas of writing at the door and listening to the student. That is how you can help them.

Interviewer: That's a great answer. Last question.

Interviewee: All right.

Interviewer: Any other comments you have about the Writing Minor, the course? Anything in general?

Interviewee: Maybe one suggestion I would have is send out an email at the beginning of the semester reminding people to—of all the things that they still have to do. Even on an off semester, 'cause I completely forgot to blog for all of January of this year. It's like "Oh no, oh my god, what am I doing? [Instructors] are gonna kill me." They didn't, which is nice, but just having that reminder, I know, we're adults, but having that reminder would be really handy. I think to just remember to meet with your advisor and to blog through times and all that.

Interviewer: That's good feedback. Thank you. Anything else?

Interviewee: I don't think so, no. I'm enjoying it so far, and am looking forward to Capstone.

Interviewer: Well, thank you so much, ***. I really appreciate your time.

[End of Audio]