

Interviewer: So, this is ***, and I am interviewing ***. Did I pronounce it correctly?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: [...] As I mentioned, we are looking at sort of, students development as writers across time, and so this is just—we start out with just some sort of baseline questions.

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: The first is: How do you describe yourself as a writer?

Interviewee: I was never a great writer, so I am not one of those who can write ten pages without stopping. My grammar is not as good as it should be, so I never thought of myself as a great writer at any time.

Interviewer: Okay, and is that an image you think has changed in any way while you have been at [University of Michigan], or do you see yourself sort of changing in any way based on classes you've taken?

Interviewee: I have been improving, after I came here. Since I was required to take [English course], and then afterwards I took [higher level English course] as well, but then from last semester—so, I took both in freshman year. I didn't take any [Literature courses] here, so I feel like last year I was improving. Then as I stopped writing, I kind of went back to where I was, but right now I am taking a class at Ross, which is [Business course].

Interviewer: What is that?

Interviewee: It is like a business writing class.

Interviewer: Oh, okay.

Interviewee: This is more like what I want to do, since I'm in business. It teaches me how to write for business purposes, like emails and cover letters. It is different from before where it used to teach me how to write like argumentation stuff, and then stories and essays. Since the writing requirements for business is a lot lower than—you can use less vocabulary, and it is just more like talking. I feel like it is easier to do it for business writing, and because it is easier, I feel like my writing skill is not as good as first year.

Interviewer: That's interesting. There's a couple of questions later on about writing experiences in your major, so we will sort of circle back to that idea too.

If you think about sort of your growth as a writer while you were at Michigan, I just kind of want to make sure that I am understanding. You talked a little bit about, like you felt

that there was growth over the first few English classes, and now a different kind of growth, or how do you sort of put the whole picture together?

Interviewee: The first two semesters it helped me with writing. I don't know if it is real English, but like they are both real, it's just like writing in a more—now is more analytical. But, then back then it was more make it pretty, and make the reader more interesting.

I guess I am seeing two aspects of writing. One, to make the reader interested to read, and then the other one to tell someone what I am trying to tell them, like persuade them what I am trying to say.

Interviewer: Would you say that there's goals that you have right now for yourself as a writer? Either generally, or in your specific field?

[...]

Interviewee: So, we start to learn grammatic English in secondary school, which is after sixth grade. Then here you don't really learn grammar, it's just there as you're growing up. So, I feel like I missed that period to learn grammar, since I didn't get to grammar back in [city], and then here everyone already knew a little about grammar. I feel like right now I can still use some help with vocabulary or grammatical areas.

Interviewer: Okay. Interesting. So, that would be an area that if you have an individual goal, it would be to kinda fill those gaps?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: So, a couple of questions about transfer. Meaning, sort of how something you learned in one class has been applied in another or useful in another. The question is: Thinking about writing experiences here at UofM [University of Michigan] or other schools, if that makes sense, what do you think it means to write well?

Interviewee: To write well here is to have no error, so people can understand what you're writing easily. I also took [Asian Studies course] where we have to write three essays.

It also means to bring up evidence to show what you are trying to say. Instead of saying you should have something to back it up and to elaborate on what the author is trying to say. That is good writing, if you can do—if you can build that bridge with the evidence with what you are trying to say, also making it interesting or choosing a good topic and thesis.

Interviewer: Good. Very nice. We started to talk about this at the very beginning. So, you took [English course] as your first year writing requirement.

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: Did you take [Writing course] also, or just [English course]?

Interviewee: No, just [English course].

Interviewer: Can you talk a little bit about your experiences in that class? What you remember doing? What you remember taking away from it?

Interviewee: Well, [English course] was hard for me, I feel. At first I thought it was okay in high school, but coming here, everyone is so good at writing that it was harder for me to catch up with other people. We had, I think we had three essays. I feel like I was getting better. My first one wasn't as good, but then over time I got a little better. It still wasn't great, but it still got better.

Then, during that time, we had peer review for each of the essays. I thought that was helpful, cuz you know what other people think about instead of like, just you. I also went to Sweetland, so they helped me on grammatic errors.

Interviewer: When you said [English course] was hard, it got some better. What aspects did you find difficult? Like, what did you think was hard?

Interviewee: It's just the expectation of the class. Cuz everyone is different on their writing levels since they just come here from different schools, but the expectation was higher than I thought it would be, so it was harder to adjust to that expectation. Also, I wasn't sure what they were expecting as well, since it is your first class. Well, I took it first semester. So it was like my first English class and my first class in college, so I did not know what was expected of me.

Interviewer: Is there a way to sort of summarize what effect you think that experience had on you as a writer going through that class, trying to figure out those expectations.

Interviewee: When I was going through, I realized I was not as good of a writer like for a college level. Afterwards I decided to take [higher level English course] to try to be better at writing so I can do better in college.

Interviewer: How did that compare then? Did you feel like one built on the next or...

Interviewee: Yes, so they were kind of related. They are both argumentation, so some of them I even used—I asked the teacher and she said it was okay, so I used one of the essays that I wrote in [English course], but then I made it better. It does build on each other, and I don't really remember that much, but I remember the second time it was easier since I knew what a writing class required. I went to the professor—like [English course] I didn't know you are supposed to go to the professor and ask him about opinions. I figured it out and then so second time I went to her and then asked what she thought of the essay. So yeah, it was better.

Interviewer: To get feedback that way, yeah. Then thinking about either the first year writing class or [higher level English course], the way it built on it, are there aspects or things you learned from those classes that you're still using in other classes?

Interviewee: Writing is just something—it's like a skill set. As I was getting more comfortable, I feel like I can write with more confidence.

Interviewer: Sure, absolutely.

Interviewee: Using what I learned I feel like now I can better say what I am trying to say. So when I write other people will understand better.

Interviewer: Great. The next questions sort of builds on this idea. It also picks up on what you were talking about your work here at Ross. The question is, your concentration, are you a business—

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: - concentration or major now?

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Have you had opportunity—it sounds like you have had opportunity to do writing in your major. You described some of that already. Other kinds of business writing that you have encountered so far?

Interviewee: Well, so far we are doing more like, oh MO, like it is a management class. So, the final is basically all writing, like telling—

Interviewee: MO? Management organization?

Interviewee: Yes, yes. It is like elaborate on what the case is about. So, you have to read the case, and then say "Oh, what are the take-aways from it?" So, you like you need to explain the evidence using the evidence to build upon what you try to say, so that helped.

Interviewer: Okay, great. And that is a class you have already completed?

Interviewee: Mm-hmm. [Management Organization course].

Interviewer: Would you say confident writing in your major area, or how confident do you feel when you are doing that kind of work?

Interviewee: Well, I thought I did okay, but then the curve was really harsh for that class. So, I thought I did okay, but I feel like now when compared to other class mates, I am still not as good at writing.

Interviewer: When you are talking about for the curve, that means for the writing specifically, not just like the grade for the overall class or...

Interviewee: Well, it's the whole class, but the final and the midterm was in writing, so I think that's part of it as well.

Interviewer: A couple of questions about writing experiences. Some of these may sound a little like ground we have covered, but it is just to give you other ways to think about it. So, think about experiences in and out of the class room. Would you say that your writing process has changed as a result of these experiences in any way, or...

Interviewee: From the first two classes or from everything?

Interviewer: Yeah, either experience in the class room and in class or outside the class room if there is writing you do outside the class room?

Interviewee: Oh, like how it changed?

Interviewer: How you think maybe you have changed? Like, what influence it's on your writing or the process you go through as a writer.

Interviewee: Now I think in [English course], we started to learn to build upon your thesis, so now when I write I try to bring everything back to the thesis at the end. Instead of going on, and on, and on, every paragraph I will at least state how it is related to what I am trying to say. That way it is easier for the writer—I mean for the reader to understand. That helped a lot because sometimes I go too far out, and it doesn't make sense, so using that, I try to keep myself on track of what I am trying to say. I feel like they understand it more too, because I bring it back.

Interviewer: That's great. Definitely that kind of structural influence you're saying?

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Anything else about your writing process from school work, from writing outside of school that's changed or evolved [Cross talk 13:24]?

Interviewee: Sometimes I free write, just to write for a long time. Instead of just trying to sit and think of the perfect way to say something, which never worked.

Interviewer: In a way, would that be like warm-up for academic writing or for other kinds of writing?

Interviewee: We don't write that much in business, so it's more for my Asian class.

Interviewer: Sure

Interviewee: This is—I feel like, it actually has not helped me in English, because I don't write so I don't practice. Like right now, I am not taking any other than [Business course], so I feel like because I don't write as much, the improve—or it got worse.

Interviewer: Like practicing anything, right? Sure. Great. So, if I use the term “reflective writing”, what does that mean to you?

Interviewee: Reflective writing. Did we learn that in our [English course]?

Interviewer: Pardon?

Interviewee: Did we learn that in [English course]?

Interviewer: Some [English] classes use reflective writing, I don't know did it...

Interviewee: Reflective writing. Is that like reflecting what you understand, or like when you see something you try to reflect what it means? Hopefully, that is not too off, but I'm not sure.

Interviewer: No, but do you remember doing any sort of—anything like an instructor called reflective writing?

Interviewee: I know we did. Okay [English course] we write, and then afterwards you write a page about what you write, the process you took to write. If that is reflective writing, then we did. That is the one page essay that we had to write after we write. How the first draft is different from the second draft. Like what you went through to write.

Interviewer: Yeah, absolutely. So, did you find that to be helpful to your writing process or...

Interviewee: I don't remember it to be, because I thought it was just telling them what it was, but I knew what I did so it wasn't like I learned something new. It was just like putting it on paper—

Interviewer: [Laughter] Okay.

Interviewee: - and telling the instructor.

Interviewer: Have you done any kind of reflective writing like that in any other course or for your own benefit independently?

Interviewee: Well, for now we have peer reviews for the business writing. That's kind of reflective, but other than that not really.

Interviewer: Actually, the next question is about working with peers. So, you mentioning this example, and you have a memory of peer review from [English course] it sounded like. What have been your experiences with working with writers in other courses?

Interviewee: I feel like when you—it's not so much that they help you on your writing, but when you read other people's writing, it helps you even more. So when I read, I get a sense of what they are writing, and what I could do better in my writing, when I am reading theirs. While their feedback is not always the greatest, you also improve because you read their essay, so you see a new way of someone writing something.

Interviewee: That is actually a really useful way to think about peer review. I know it is something I emphasize in my classes. Have you ever done any kind of group or collaborative writing projects where people each do a different part of it?

Interviewee: Yes, for MO we had a project. It was like all semester long, and then it was ten pages. For us, we split it up to two pages per person.

Interviewer: How many people?

Interviewee: Five people.

Interviewer: Oh, five people. [Laughter]

Interviewee: Well, actually was it? I don't know. Cuz—oh yeah, it is. Five people for ten pages, and then we had one person, so we had six people actually. One person would put everything together and then edit the whole thing so it sounded like one person's writing. So that was kind of...

Interviewer: Oh, that is a great example. How did that go?

Interviewee: Ehhhhh, the grade didn't turn out well. Well, we were a little below average, but it was hard because you don't know what the other person is writing. At the end when we were like looking back at his feedbacks, it was either not enough information, or too much. Sometimes we say the same thing, but then we missed on other parts, so I didn't think it was the greatest to collaborate on writing.

Interviewer: Okay. That's interesting. It is an interesting project to talk about. It is very specific to that. If you were going to give someone advise about writing, what are some things they should think about when they are beginning a paper?

Interviewee: When they are beginning—oh, actually I did that for Ross essay, you know, to get into Ross?

Interviewer: Oh, right, right.

Interviewee: So, I was helping someone, and I just asked them things before they started writing. I was like “What are your goals for getting into Ross? Why do you want to get into Ross?” Instead of go into the prompt and then follow everything, I feel like you should just start writing everything that may be relevant, and then when you are writing, you can refer back to what you wrote at first to elaborate on it. Because, sometimes when you just focus on the writing you forget the big picture, and don’t remember what the point was.

Interviewer: It sounds a bit like your idea about free writing now too, that you will get down as many ideas as you can. See what you like.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: That’s interesting. So, question now about new media, have you had any experience with new media writing, so that could include blogs, PowerPoint, sound or video editing? Anything like that in any of your courses so far?

Interviewee: Well, we do a PowerPoint in our prep C.

Interviewer: What class is that?

Interviewee: MO again.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: Also like, Chinese, but it’s Chinese writing.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: For those, I feel like you don’t need as much writing skills, because it is just bullet points.

Interviewer: For PowerPoints? Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Interviewee: What’s the question?

Interviewer: Just if you have had any experience with new media? How, if you found the writing experiences to be different?

Interviewee: Oh, yeah, I found that it makes it worse. Cuz like when you do texting or IM [Instant Messaging], you don’t tend to use grammar, and so sometimes I’ll forget, [Inaudible 19:48], so it doesn’t matter what you text people, just read it. Or like “You are”, even if you type “You are”, it auto-corrects it so it is something else. So “you’re” and “you are” are always messed up when I text, but people understand now, so I don’t even pay attention to it. When I am actually writing, it like screws me up sometimes.

Interviewer: Oh, that's interesting. Any other kinds of digital writing? Have you got to deal with blogs?

Interviewee: Never anything like that.

Interviewer: Some classes incorporate 'em, and we're always just kind of curious to see how that comes up. [Cross Talk 20:25] departments.

Interviewee: Oh, I see.

Interviewer: So, were you asked to upload some pieces to the C-tool site?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: Can you talk a little bit about the choices you made? What you put up. How you decided to.

Interviewee: Well, I tried to put my best because I thought someone would read it. [Laughter] I put the ones that got the best grade in each class, but it wasn't anything particular. Since each semester, I only had like one class that required writing. The first semester I put a [English course] essay. Second one I put a [higher level English course], and then last semester I put the Asian. Those are the only class that required writing, since I'm not a writer person. So, this year I am probably going to put something on like [Business Writing course]. There's not 21:10 a strategy to it, I guess.

Interviewer: Of the three that you put up—the three essays then, can you talk to us a little bit about what they are? If one is different from the next or...

Interviewee: I remember the second and the third. The second one is the one that I talked about where I started, at first in [English course], and then elaborate better. That was the second essay that I put in for [higher level English course]. Then third one was just one of them that I could find. It was basically I turned it in on CTools [learning management system] for the project, and then I turned it into C-link.

Interviewer: The second essay, if I might just sort of stay with that one for a minute. That was one where you were describing that you were able to take an essay you started—or completed in [English course], and then your [higher level English course] instructor allowed you to—

Interviewee: Elaborate more.

Interviewer: Was the idea of bringing work you have done before and figure out a new way into it?

Interviewee: Yeah, cuz the topic was kinda similar, so I asked her, and she said that it was okay. It was something that I liked, so I decided to put more effort into it with the newer skills that I learned second semester.

Interviewer: Yeah, and I am just sort of curious when you say you felt like it got better or improved, what aspects of it do you think changed? What do you think you brought to it on that second time that really changed it?

Interviewee: The second time is also more intense. So, when you write an essay there is always a deadline so it is hard to change it multiple times. When I am going through a second time, I saw what wasn't going well. Because if you read it after a while some of it doesn't even make sense. I will be like, "Why did I write that?" When I read it and re-wrote it, I used a different approach to it. I moved the paragraphs around to make it flow better.

Interviewer: Oh, sure. Okay.

Interviewee: That helped a lot. Just reading it again, and revising again. Instead of revising once, that was like revising three times. I also went to her to ask for—

Interviewer: Recommendation 23:36?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Great. Alright, well those cover the areas that we wanted to talk about. Are there any other comments that you would want to make generally about sort of writing instruction? Writing experiences that you've had, any other aspects that we have not really touched on specifically?

Interviewee: I feel like really as a freshman it is really hard so if you can—if you guys can help them, just like telling them "Oh, you should come." I knew that there was office hours, but I didn't know it was better to come. It was just like a thing that you go to if you need help, but I never needed help. Well, I thought I didn't need help. If you make it mandatory for once, then it could help the students just so they know what you guys do there, instead of—because I was afraid to go to not ask questions, because I don't know what to ask anyway. First semester I never went just because I didn't want to be going and awkwardly to sit there and not talk about anything. Yeah.

Interviewer: That is a great point you raise. Did you have a required writing conference with your [English course] instructor?

Interviewee: I think so. At the end I had.

Interviewer: Oh, but it was later.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewer: So, I think it was the last essay I went to her.

Interviewer: But maybe if that had been required earlier—is that your thinking?

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Okay, that is really useful feedback, and I know it is something—

Interviewee: Then, especially writing, you don't know what you get. Like, grading was different. It is really personal—not personal, but it depends on the teacher. Also you don't know where you stand in the class, so at the end I was surprised at the grade, because I was not sure of what I would be getting. I'll be hoping for a better grade, but it wasn't. Since, like there isn't a grade system I feel.

Interviewer: You mean like at the end of a specific essay or at the end of the whole class?

Interviewee: Yeah. So, I get grades back for the essays, but I don't know how that it is compared to—I didn't know if it was curved or if it was compared to other people. Since she talked about how homework grade helps you too, I didn't know how to add it up together as well. So...

Interviewer: Oh okay. You would have found it helpful to have a more explicit, sort of, "This is the grading set-up." Sure.

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: That probably varies, instructor to instructor.

Interviewee: That's true.

Interviewer: That is a good point to raise. Great. Any other aspects about writing experiences? Your sort of self-conception as a writer at this point in your career?

Interviewee: Writing is hard. It needs a lot of writing practice. It's good if you can always do it, at least one class in each semester. At Ross or like science, or even engineering, they do not need the first year, so that could be a downfall to those majors. It might help if they have something, maybe not for a grade, but maybe just to do it.

Interviewer: To reinforce that skill.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, that makes sense, and you've returned to that idea a couple of times about, while you were doing it, you felt like you were improving, and then it's less of an emphasis here so maybe, not as much.

Interviewee: I also know there is [English Language Institute courses] that I wanted to take, but it was like three credits, so I didn't take it [cross talk 27:13]

Interviewer: It would have been a big block of time.

Interviewee: Yeah, exactly, so if they had like mini ones. I was looking at the one credits, so if you had like—but the one credit was pronunciation or it wasn't something I was interested.

Interviewer: Maybe career students were actually most more recently immigrated.

Interviewee: I wasn't sure because on there it wasn't—I wasn't sure if it was for new people that came to the States, so I don't really fall for that, but I don't know if it is good for me since my grammar is not as good. I didn't want to go in a class that was boring, so I didn't try at all. I wanted to go to like an adviser, but I didn't end up going. It would be helpful publicizing the classes.

Interviewer: What's available? Sure. That's great. Well, these are all terrific ideas. I really appreciate your time.

[...]

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