Interviewer: All right, so this will be recording us. Can I borrow—

Interviewee: Oh, wait, I got one.

Interviewer: In the reaches of my purse. Okay, so you ready?

Interviewee: Yes.

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

Interviewee: I did a lot of writing in high school. I was involved in, kind of, one of our rhetoric classes in which we had to prepare a long-term research paper in the second semester of senior year, and present it in front of the faculty administration. I'd say that I was pretty well versed in doing research and doing research papers. I definitely think that I've progressed as a writer from freshman to junior year now.

Interviewer: Okay. Talk a little bit more about that rhetoric class.

Interviewee: The rhetoric class, junior, we did it on John F. Kennedy and the assassination, and had to create our own thesis and take a standpoint. It took quite a long time. I think it ended up being 16 to 20 pages of actual writing. Then my senior year of high school, I did it on the Cora Matsu vs. United States case, which was about Japanese immigrants and their time in the internment camps […]. We went to a college library, [local] library in Grand Rapids, and got books over there, while doing research online on the internet, as well as—yeah, that's about it.

Interviewer: Those two papers really stand out in your mind when shaping you as a writer?

Interviewee: Yup.

Interviewer: Okay. Then talk a little bit about after that, and now, how do you see yourself as a writer?

Interviewee: I think that the beginning course, I took [English course] here as a freshman, and that got me back into the mindset of writing freshmen year. I really think that my comm [Communication] classes, that's my major, have really helped me progress, as far as looking at stats and learning to analyze that; and learning to differentiate between a scholarly source and something that's a blog or amateur status, and being able to really hone in on one independent, one really good rich source and write on that and use that, instead of using a whole bunch of sources. I think it's easier for me now when present to write a five to seven page paper. It doesn't scare me as much as it used to because, I don't know, just using the lot of writing skills.

Interviewer: Do you think the reason for that not being afraid anymore is, like you said, using a lot of skills, like doing a lot of writing; or what do you think the reason is?

Interviewee: I think it's just doing a lot of writing in general; yeah, a lot of writing and reading.

Interviewer: Okay. Have you developed a new language to talk about yourself as a writer, or how you learned to write since you've been here?

Interviewee: I would say, not so much. I know this semester I did a lot more opinion papers, so I guess I've kind of learned the difference between when's the proper time to use first person versus third person, and differentiate between opinion-based papers and actual research papers. Other than that, I don't think so.

Interviewer: Okay. You've kind of talked about this already, but I'll ask this next question anyway, see if you have anything else to say. Do you think you've grown as a writer over the past—since you've been at [the University of Michigan]?

Interviewee: I would say yes, and explaining yes is because I usually send my papers to my mom to re-edit and re-read it if someone in my class doesn't have time to do it. It's funny because freshman year, I would send her my papers, and she would rip them apart and be like, you know, you're missing this, you're missing this. Yesterday, I just sent her my final draft for one of my comm [Communication] papers, and she was like, this is really good. For the past couple of papers I've sent her, she hasn't had to make a lot of corrections, if any. Yeah, I definitely think I've grown as a writer, as far as just learning to latch on and create one thesis, and stick with that throughout; and then learning to just get all my thoughts down, and then go back and reorganize to make sure that everything's in an organized and coherent manner.

Interviewer: What would you attribute learning those things to?

Interviewee: I think it's just repetition of writing papers and getting feedback from professors. Yeah, just repetition, I think is the key.

Interviewer: Okay. So what goals do you have for yourself as a writer?

Interviewee: Well, as a comm [Communication] major, my major goal is to go into the more broadcasting side and being a journalist. I think that the skills that I've learned at [the University of Michigan], as well as in my comm [Communication] classes, will definitely help with that. Learning to stay—one of the main goals of my writing is to stay unbiased. I think that's really important, especially in journalism, is to just come from an objective standpoint, and not give one side of an argument more time than the other.

Interviewer: Has that always been your goal, or has that changed over your time at [the University of Michigan]?

Interviewee: I would say it's kind of changed. I think it's always easier as a writer to start off with something that really interests you, and go with that topic, and then you realize that you're leaning towards one side of an argument. I think that doing a lot of writing in the comm [Communication] department and just the repetition of it, that I've learned that you need to have strengths on both sides, if it's not an opinion paper. I think that's definitely changed since coming into [the University of Michigan].

Interviewer: Would you say you wrote more on your interests before?

Interviewee: Yeah. I mean, I always want to do research that really interests me, because that's the only way I find I can actually get through a paper. Yeah, I think that it's definitely important to me to focus on my interests, but also broaden my horizons and become more well-versed in the subject, other than just maintaining one standpoint on an issue.

Interviewer: Okay. Do you think because of all the writing you've done at [the University of Michigan], what do you think it means to write well, how would you define that?

Interviewee: I think what it means to write well is to really be engaged with your subject, and create a thesis that is meaningful, and being able to present two sides of an argument and just flesh that out in the paper.

Interviewer: When you're learning to write, what do you think is most important?

Interviewee: I think the most important is probably to just go with your gut instinct about things, and to really start with something that you're really interested in, and then really just dive into research and you might find that you're really not interested in it at all. Then going from there, I think it's important to outline your thoughts, and then just—I don't know, for me, I usually just start writing; sometimes, I don't even do an outline. I just start with getting my thoughts out, because sometimes people get so much anxiety about, oh, am I putting this in the right spot, or like, where do I start. Sometimes I find doing the introduction is the hardest part, so sometimes I just start with usually a general thesis in mind, and then go back and tailor it. I think it's just important to write your thoughts out first.

Interviewer: Say more about that, you called it outlining your thoughts. Do you make a list, or what do you do?

Interviewee: Usually, I don't do a formal outline. I know that some of my classes have asked me to do, what are you going to say in the introduction, what do you want your body paragraphs to be, your sell points, and then what do you want to say in your conclusion. I've found that it's easier for me to just conceptualize in my head; like, I just want to introduce the topic, I want the thesis to be really clear at the end, and then just let the paper flow from there, as far as using my thesis as the backbone, and just start writing. Then I'll go back and rearrange things within the paper. As far as a formal

outline, I think it works for some people; but I think for me, it's just easier for me to flesh out the paper and just go through it than creating a formal outline.

Interviewer: Do you find that when you start with a thesis like that, sometimes it changes, or does it often stay the same?

Interviewee: I would say that usually my thesis stays the same; sometimes, the ordering of it goes a little different if I have certain points in it, just because I think it's really important to start out with one of your stronger points, and then hit with one of your lesser strong points, and then hit home with one of your really strong points just to keep the reader really interested. Other than that, I don't think that it usually changes, unless my research is completely off, and definitely have to go back and change it, but I think it stays the same.

Interviewer: Okay. This next question is about your first-year writing requirement. You said you took [English course]?

Interviewee: Right.

Interviewer: Can you talk more about what you did in that class?

Interviewee: For [English course], I forget who my professor was, but we did a lot of—it was a really earning morning class, I think it's 8:30 or 9:00. We did do a lot of argument-based papers, I think. We also did some reading of poetry. I think we touched on a whole bunch of different genres of writing, but I think that the final paper was the one that probably stood out the most. I think it was about the benefits that student athletes receive. I remember that she really made a point to make sure that we had that hard core thesis, as well as really good evidence. We also did, I remember with each class, we had some sort of grammar lesson. I think one of the one's we spent the most time on was the colon and the semicolon. Yeah, I think just little things of tweaking writing, as well as we did peer reviews, class reviews, and some group work stuff. Yeah, I think we had to do group reflection papers every week or so.

Interviewer: What, from that class, do you use when you write now, or if anything?

Interviewee: I don't know. I don't think that I really learned too much from [English course], other than it was just kind of a refresher course in grammar. I think that most of my success as a writer began in high school with the rhetoric class, and then the English class was just like a reinforcement. I really think that my comm [Communication] classes kind of pushed me to be the writer that I am, just because we've done so many research papers from so many different angles of writing on statistics to writing about different media portrayals, anywhere from an opinion to a reflection paper to a full out research paper that has an abstract and actual conducted data in it.

Interviewer: You said twice that those comm [Communication] papers have been more helpful than the [English course] papers.

Interviewee: Right.

Interviewer: Why do you think that is?

Interviewee: I think that just in general, I don't know. I think the English classes are more a generalized class in the fact that, especially in the introductory courses, it seems just like an overview; whereas, in comm [Communication], you really have to make sure that you're doing things correctly. I don't know. I just feel like the expectations for the comm [Communication course] papers are higher than the expectations for the English class papers.

Interviewer: Do you think what you were saying about how your English class went with the workshop and getting feedback from each other. Did you do that kind of thing in your rhetoric class in high class, were they similar in that way?

Interviewee: Actually, in high school in my rhetoric class, we had one person or an authority figure that we chose as our mentor for the paper. They would read our drafts and help us make sure that we were moving along at a good rate, and he was kind of like the check-in person. I think the workshop in the [English course] classes is helpful. I know in my basketball classes a semester in the [LSA Residential College], that we've done workshopping; but I haven't found that workshopping in college is as helpful just because, especially now, it's really hard to depend on people to workshop your papers and do it in a good and well-reviewed manner. Usually, I do workshopping with other peers in my classes that I know; but I definitely think that workshopping is a good idea, and I have yet to use those in the writing center. Yeah, I definitely think that workshopping is really important and really helpful because, especially for this past paper that I just wrote for one of my comm [Communication] classes. I had one of my friends workshop it, and I would have missed something in the prompt that would have been really important for the paper. I definitely think that workshopping is helpful.

Interviewer: Okay. In [English course], did you develop any language to talk about yourself as a writer or how to learn to write?

Interviewee: Not that I can remember. It was a while ago.

Interviewer: Okay. Did you take [writing course]?

Interviewee: Mm-mmm.

Interviewer: No, just [English course], okay. What other experience have you had, and these can be in the classroom like you've been talking about, or outside of the classroom, too, that have had an effect on your writing, do you think?

Interviewee: I would definitely say my comm [Communication] classes, for sure. I know I keep emphasizing that. I don't know, I guess I think that I've kind of always had a knack

for writing, and it kind of comes naturally, which is why I chose to go in the direction of comm [Communication]. I definitely think that just doing writing a lot and reading a lot and immersing myself in it, has helped with making it come easier and developing—yeah, just developing my writing skills.

Interviewer: Has your writing process changed as a result of doing all that reading and writing?

Interviewee: I would say, not. I don't know, I guess freshman year, going back to the outline thing, I think freshman year, I definitely spent too much time outlining my papers in the formal way of doing the introduction, and then bullet pointing exactly what I wanted to say; whereas now, I just kind of conceptualize it in my mind of what I want to do. Yeah, I'll jot down quick notes of things that come to mind, like the introduction, because they're the quick things I want to say; but it's not like I type out a formal written outline anymore. I guess it kind of changed in that respect.

Interviewer: Did the formal written outline come from the rhetoric class in high school?
Interviewee: I know that we did have to write a formal outline; but even then, I didn't really like doing that, just because I find that when I do outline things in a formal manner that I end up writing part of the paper into the outline. Then I feel like when I write the paper, it's kind of contrived and the fact that I've already written it and then I'm trying to fit it into the paper, instead of having it flow from what actually comes to mind when I'm doing the research.

Interviewer: If I say the term, reflective writing, what does that mean to you?

Interviewee: It means journaling to me, I would say. We had to do a lot of reflective writing for my photography class this year. I would say that when I think reflection, I think of the challenges that I faced when writing it, what I can improve upon, as far as how the research or writing what about; but I think, mainly, the challenges and how I can improve in the future.

Interviewer: You use that in photography. Have you ever had to do that in any other place?

Interviewee: I don't think that I've had to do any reflection writing, other than in that class at [the University of Michigan]. I think that's the only class.

Interviewer: Have you ever done it on your own, outside of a class?

Interviewee: Sometimes, if I want to sit down and just reflect on things, I'll write; but usually, not really too much.

Interviewer: Okay. This question is about your experiences working with other writers in your courses or in other contexts, too. You've mentioned a couple already, so maybe you

could just elaborate. Your mom, working with your mom, and then you mentioned in [English course], too, you did.

Interviewee: Right. Usually, I send my papers to my mom, and she is actually a dental hygienist, but she's also a teacher, she taught kindergarten. I would say ever since I was little, I kind of always have admired and wanted to mimic her, I think, just because I always thought that her writing was so eloquent and well written and organized. I always just wanted to mimic that. She's read my papers all the way through high school and through college. I really depend on her to workshop my papers. I'll send her several drafts, and she gets really annoyed, but she knows it's all for a good cause. Yeah, I would say that working with her is probably the easiest; sometimes, I get nervous giving my work to others, especially if I know it's not my best work because I'm doing so many other homework assignments. I think that getting a different perspective on things, and someone who doesn't know anything about the subject especially, kind of helps with, is my point clear, is my thesis clear, is everything organized in a cohesive and coherent manner, do you actually get the point of what I'm trying to say without a whole bunch of fluff, is the research really good, and am I using the research enough to cite evidence.

Interviewer: Have you ever done any group writing projects, where you had to work other people to write?

Interviewee: Yeah. We do a lot of that in the comm [Communication] department. We did one last semester and actually, I don't remember what the topic was, which is awful. I don't mind working in a group on papers, as long as everyone is doing their part, which I guess—I don't know, working in group papers is definitely helpful and the fact that I know I'm probably going to have to collaborate with people, especially in journalism in the future, and bounce ideas off of people and get their thoughts and their perspectives. Sometimes I find it easier to work with other people, just because I usually have a lot of anxiety before I start a paper. Knowing that I can bounce ideas off of other people and, kind of, depend on them to help me thing through things is definitely helpful. If there's a page limit on the paper, it makes the page limit go a lot faster because everyone is doing their parts, and then all the pages just add up.

Interviewer: Okay. If you were going to give someone advice about writing, what would you tell them as they begin a paper?

Interviewee: I think the number one this is, don't freak out. I know a lot of people, especially my friends and myself, I usually get a paper assignment, I'm like, oh my gosh, how am I going to write this, especially for a 10 to 12 page paper. I'm not one of those people who can just sit down the night before and completely write the whole thing. I know there's people who do that, but I would just freak out. So I would say, just look at the prompts, especially if you're given it at the beginning of the semester; look at it and say, all right, this is what I need to look for throughout the class. Yeah, look at the prompt and then just say, all right, well, this is going to have to happen, and I'm just going to start doing the research. By immersing yourself in the research, I usually think that you side with some portion of it, and then you develop your thesis from there, and then just start

writing. I think that's the best thing to do, is just always to start writing and get your thoughts out on paper.

Interviewer: Great, thanks. You said your major is comm [Communication], right?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: You've talked a lot about the writing you do in that major; but can you say more about the different kinds of writing you do for that major?

Interviewee: Yeah. For a lot of the beginning comm [Communication] course, the introductory, the 100 levels, we did—that was when I was really first immersed into writing research papers, and having to get my own sources, scholarly evidence, as well as using arguments that they presented to us in class by the professor. That has kind of always been one of the main themes of comm [Communication] is doing those research papers. Then, in two of—and we actually to conduct our research and come up with our own thesis, and use SPSS [statistical software] and use statistics to cite our evidence and prove our thesis. Also more in the upper-level, I would say that we do use the formal, but we also use informal. I've had to write reviews of a TV show; also have done blogging on the internet and using social media to interact with other classmates about readings that we've done or things that we've done in class. Quite a vast array of things that we do in the comm [Communication] department, as far as writing.

Interviewer: Do you think all the writing is argumentative?

Interviewee: I would say, for the most part, yeah. I don't think—we don't usually do any free writing; and even in our blog posts, in order to get a really good grade, you have to kind of create your own argument about the readings that we've done and not just summarize.

Interviewer: What affect have these experiences had on you as a writer, do you think?

Interviewee: I would say that I've just learned that there's no one way to go about writing, and there's no one way to write. I think that, especially after workshopping with other people, that everyone writes differently and there's not one way and there's no one good way. I would say that writing is pretty powerful in general, as far as the way that you can use your words to get your point across.

Interviewer: How confident do you feel about writing in your major?

Interviewee: I usually feel pretty confident. Like I said, I usually get pretty anxious, just because that's who I am about getting it done. I guess, the most anxious part about it is actually starting, which is why I find it's easier to just not think about the structure of it, and just know that I just need to get my thoughts out and flesh it out, and then go back and reorganize.

Interviewer: Okay. The next question is about your experiences with new media writing, which you just mentioned the blog. Do you want to talk more about that?

Interviewee: We use—I forget what the site is called, but every other week, we had to write blog posts about the readings that were assigned that week. In order to receive full credit, you had to summarize the readings, do a comparison between at least two of the readings or past readings. Then if you wanted to receive additional credit or a three out of three, instead of a two out of three, you had to create your own argument with regard to the readings. I think that's the only new media stuff that I've used, as far as my writing goes, is the blogging using—I can't remember what the website is called.

Interviewer: Is it WordPress [content management system]?

Interviewee: Yeah, it's WordPress [content management system]. I don't know why I couldn't think of that.

Interviewer: What were your thoughts on doing it on a blog like that?

Interviewee: Well, it's interesting because the class was social media and politics; so we were talking about amateurism in writing and journalism, and how prevalent it's becoming and people can just post on the internet without any credibility. I think that posting online is awesome, especially because of anonymity, other than—I mean, especially for that class, we had to use our user name. I think it's really nice because, again, you can bounce ideas off other people, but also has its downfalls. Sometimes, I wish that we'd use more new media technology in writing classes, just because it makes it easier, especially if we're going to workshop. I think that writing classes should use Google docs or something, because then you can actually see what people are doing. I know we used Google docs for one of our group project assignments. I just think that makes it a lot easier in corresponding with people on getting your ideas out.

Interviewer: Did using that blog in that class have any effect on you as a writer, or did you think about writing in a different way because of it?

Interviewee: I think it definitely made me more nervous to put my writing, because I knew that everyone in my class was going to read it because we had to comment on at least one other person's writing. I would read other people's posts, and they'd be longer than mine. I'd be, like, oh yikes, they wrote more than I did. Sometimes, I'm nervous to do that because I know that some people are maybe better writers, I guess, than I am or that I think, just because of their tone, or the vocabulary that they use is sometimes maybe a little bit more eloquent than I would use in a blog post. Yeah, I think it depends, and it definitely made me nervous to post things online that I knew everyone could read.

Interviewer: You've been uploading pieces to the archive as UTools [Unique Tools for Windows System Administrators].

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: How's that been going?

Interviewee: It's good. Usually, we use Dropbox [online file hosting service] or the assignment fulfiller thing. I actually like that easier than handing in the physical draft of the paper, just because, I mean, printer problems can arise. I just had that last week, where they had to submit it online and then also had to bring a paper copy in. I think it's just easier and more effective to just use the Dropbox tool or uploading archive.

Interviewer: Can you talk about which pieces you've chose to put in for this study?
Interviewee: I think I put in—I think they were both comm [Communication] papers. My first one was the witnessing one, which I wrote for comm [Communication course]. I can't really remember exactly what the paper was about, I know it was only last semester. Then this semester, I think I chose one from my social media class. I really chose that one because doing that specific class, I had never had to use headings and subheadings, and he had us really split up the paper. I really thought that that kind of showed my growth as a writer in one of the new tools that I learned, that sometimes it's easier to actually head even a five to six research paper, other than a 10 to 12 research paper, and just put the headings on there to organize it. A lot of my writing, we usually don't do that, unless it's our formal end of the year writing one. I actually found that I really like that a lot.

Interviewer: Okay. Can you say any more about why you chose either essay?

Interviewee: I think that the first one, just because I really was interested in—I can't remember which one the witnessing one was about. It was either about the Frontier House [historical reality television series], or Laguna Beach [small city in California] and real-life television. I think that I chose two different ones, because one was kind of more of a research piece; and then the other one was kind of a research piece with my opinion included in it, which we don't usually get to write opinion within a research study very often. I think that's why I chose the two different ones.

Interviewer: Do you think they reveal different strengths of you as a writer, or is one better than the other?

Interviewee: I think that the second one that I incorporated was better with my opinion in the research one, because I've never had to write—well, one, because I got a good grade on it. I've never had to learn how to balance between my opinion, while giving a real life example, while also citing evidence from an author. Doing that paper really pushed me to do that in a professional manner.

Interviewer: The other one was more straight-up citing a source?
Interviewee: Right. I think that doing the second one was probably better, because it really pushes you more to learn how to do the research, while also citing real-life examples and giving my opinion about it.

Interviewer: Okay. Anything else you want to say about the uploading for this study?

Interviewee: No, other than I like it. It actually is nice, because when uploading the—or looking through my papers, it kind of allows me to reflect back on how much writing I've done. Sometimes, I actually—I think I went through and read through my papers, and was like, oh, this was actually pretty good, or oh, these are things that I need to improve upon or maybe I should have spent more time on this paper. I think uploading and doing this study has allowed me to reflect upon myself as a writer, and really see the progress that I've made throughout the year.

Interviewer: That's great. Let's talk about the future a little bit. What kinds of writing do you think are going to be most important for your career?

Interviewee: I would say, a lot about what I talked about at the beginning, as far as learning to write objectively and cite two sides of a story. I would say probably more of—I don't know. I guess, a lot of the research aspect, just because journalism requires a lot of research. I also think that, with the prevalence of new media technology, social media like Twitter and Facebook and things like that, I think going into my internship that they're going to have us do all of that, as far as doing the research aspect of it, as well as using the online media tools and the blogging and writing news articles. I think everything is really important for future career goals.

Interviewer: If you could tell your teachers one thing about writing or how to teach writing better, what would you tell them?

Interviewee: That's a hard one, I don't know. I don't know. I would say, especially for the introductory courses, that the grammar usage especially—yeah, the grammar usage review is really important, and kind of refreshing people on how to make a good thesis and not just a static one with three points. I think that's one of the main things is, some professors want a static thesis with the three points that's explicitly laid out, whereas other teachers really want the overall thesis that's really complex. I think that when teaching how to write, that it's important to tell students the difference between the two, and how to learn when to use one in a certain situation versus the other. I think that's definitely one of the things that I've had to learn how to do and learn how to adapt to, according to different professors.

Interviewer: Do you think that's the grammar and the usage question, or is that more like an ideas?

Interviewee: I think it's probably more of an ideas section of writing.

Interviewer: If you have different ways to organize it, then you can—

Interviewee: Yeah. I mean, yeah, I don't know.

Interviewer: Okay. That's the last question. Anything else you want to say, any other comments?

Interviewee: I don't think so.

Interviewer: Okay, great. Well, thank you.

Interviewee: No problem.

[End of Audio]