

*Interviewer:* This is \*\*\*. Today is April 28th, and I am here with \*\*\*. \*\*\*, thanks again for coming and meeting with me. I really appreciate it.

*Interviewee:* Oh, yeah, no problem.

*Interviewer:* I think you've done one of these interviews before a couple of years ago.

*Interviewee:* Yeah.

*Interviewer:* It's going to be really similar. I'm gonna ask you some similar questions. We'll start by talking a little bit about what you think about writing, in general, and then we'll talk about your writing experiences here at [University of Michigan], and your writing experiences in the minor, in particular. Then we'll look at your portfolio, and then that'll be it.

*Interviewee:* Awesome.

*Interviewer:* It definitely won't take more than an hour.

*Interviewee:* Yeah.

*Interviewer:* To start off, I have a really broad, general kind of question, which is: How would you describe yourself as a writer?

*Interviewee:* I think very spastic, in the sense that I don't write continuously. I'll write sometimes, and then I'll come back to it a month later. I'm not a very continuous writer; I'm more of a writer that enjoys it, but only at certain periods of time. In that sense I'm not as comprehensive or as—I'm very passionate about it, but my style and how I approach it is really different.

I think lately as a writer I've been more and more apt to experiment, and then feeling a little more free to do things differently. I think I'm starting to see writing more in the way of what I always thought writers see writing as; something that's really frustrating, yet exciting at the same time.

I've noticed that change come about the last year or so. I'm writing more, in general, than I used to, so I'm becoming a little less spastic. At the same time I'm more likely to experiment and challenge myself more, too. I think the stuff that always seemed so frustrating at the beginning suddenly now is starting to seem more exciting, and now I'm more likely to actually sit down and write for longer periods of time than before. I think, even still, I'm still more spastic compared to most people.

*Interviewer:* Mm-hmm. That makes a lot of sense to me. How do you think, and I think you've started touching on this a little bit, but how do you think you would have described yourself as a writer when you started here at [University of Michigan]?

*Interviewee:* Most of the writing I did when I started at [University of Michigan] was very much for school, and it was very much driven by the classes I took and the topics I encountered that way. Now, I think, coming out of [University of Michigan] I've developed writing more as a personal hobby as well, alongside the class stuff, and I think I've broadened my view of writing a bit more. I think before, writing for me was mostly, like, five-paragraph essays and a lotta papers, and now there's much more of a reflective component about it. It's less about writing about other people, which I still do, but finding myself within the writing, too, I think, I've realized more now than I did before.

*Interviewer:* What do you attribute that change to?

*Interviewee:* I think, honestly, it was being exposed to other types of writers, different types of writing. Especially, I think, in some of the Sweetland courses. Before, I think I always used to encounter writing as, like, a subset of a class, meaning, like, if I was reading a novel I'd write about [Movie] because I want to learn more about [Movie], but I would never had taken a class where we just studied writing as writing, as a craft. I didn't get that until I was actually in the random 03:44 writing class, and I think that helped change my thoughts a bit, just seeing what other people thought about writing, and thinking of it less of a medium and more as a subject.

*Interviewer:* As you're graduating now, what are your goals for yourself as a writer, looking forward?

*Interviewee:* I definitely want to write more, and I'm trying to develop more of a disciplined habit of doing it rather than being so spastic all the time. I definitely want to write more. I never thought of myself as a journalist or anything that—a professional writing career, I guess, but now that type of stuff seems a little more attractive to me than it did when I came into [University of Michigan].

I've always wanted to do freelance writing on the side. My major is business and I'm going into marketing, so I know I will encounter writing there. I think as far as how I see myself as a writer in the future, someone who enjoys writing on the side and maybe I'll write an article for a magazine or write a book someday, but not something that's mainstream.

*Interviewer:* As you think about all of your writing experiences here at [University of Michigan]—you came here as a freshman? Or did you transfer in?

*Interviewee:* No, I came here as a freshman.

*Interviewer:* What do you think it means to write well? What does good writing look like?

*Interviewee:* I think good writing—I think it has all these structural elements they teach you about all the time. It's well organized, there's a clear concise idea. I think also there's some sort of component where people can relate to it, whether it's you being able to accurately persuade someone about what your ideas are, or whether you're writing about yourself, but there's still some common themes or ideas that people could read your piece and still feel like, "It was worth reading this." I think that universality component is so important. I think I've realized that more and more in my time in Michigan compared to before.

*Interviewer:* Which ULWR, the Upper Level Writing Requirement courses, have you taken here at [University of Michigan]?

*Interviewee:* I took a lit course, which was [Title of course], so that was upper-level writing.

*Interviewer:* [Movie] [chuckles].

*Interviewee:* Yeah, [Movie], I actually did write that paper. [Movie] and I think it was [Novel. Yeah, dense stuff. Then I took [Title of course], and the section I took was more focused on creative non-fiction. That was interesting. Then I'm taking an upper level and then the writing minor, capstone.

*Interviewer:* What were your experiences like in those courses? I'm thinking about the [Title of course] and [Title of course] in particular. We'll talk about the capstone course in a minute.

*Interviewee:* Very different, both courses from each other. I think [Title of course] was much more about the [literature], much less about the writing. It was very similar to the types of writing I used to do before I came to [University of Michigan], so it was kind of reflective on that. I think now, actually, I feel like it was harder for me to write those type of essays after I've written creative stuff for a couple years in [University of Michigan].

*Interviewer:* Interesting. Yeah.

*Interviewee:* I started noticing more and more subtleties and using this word over that word, and I think taking that class taught me, "Okay, I think I'm gonna close this chapter of my writing in this realm for a while."

The [Title of course] course I enjoyed a lot. That opened me more to creative nonfiction, and looking at how people write about real things, but in a more creative way. I think I had encountered that before with narrative essays, the type of stuff they make you write in high school, but never form and structures, and just being exposed to people like David Foster Wallace and all these different authors.

*Interviewer:* What effect did you think those experiences had on you as a writer?

*Interviewee:* I think the first course told me more what types of writing I liked in the sense that I didn't enjoy writing those really deep, deep analytical essays as much as I did before. I think the second course told me the idea of being more creative. I think it opened me up to challenge myself more. I think in that course, specifically the beginning, I'd written a very typical narrative essay, but later on I experimented with form and kind of challenged myself a bit.

*Interviewer:* Do you still make any use of what you learned in those courses in your writing now?

*Interviewee:* Yeah, definitely. I think the [literature course] definitely helped me revisit the idea of structuring an argument between all the time and places. The second, the creative nonfiction course, definitely I think it opened me up to the idea of journaling, and even writing journal entries differently.

*Interviewer:* Other than the minor and the gateway course, have you taken any more writing classes here at [University of Michigan]?

*Interviewee:* Not specifically writing, but a lot of the other courses I took had writing components in them, but they weren't focused on writing. I'm taking a lit class right now, and it's on South Asian literature, and I've written a couple of papers for that. More like those analytical papers, but it's not the focus of the class.

*Interviewer:* What about your first year? Did you take a first year writing course?

*Interviewee:* Oh yeah, I did. Yeah, [English course].

*Interviewer:* [English course], okay. What was your experience—

*Interviewee:* Oh, and I also took—yeah, I took [English 200 level course], too. I can't believe I forgot that.

*Interviewer:* That's okay, that happens. What were your experiences like in [English course] and [English 200 level course]?

*Interviewee:* Good. I think [English course] was my first entrance into College writing. I think I wasn't sure coming out of high school what that distinction would be like, so that was a good gateway course for that. [English course] and [English 200 level course] seemed to be, at least the sections I took—I coincidentally had the same professor for both, funnily enough.

*Interviewer:* Oh, interesting.

*Interviewee:* I think that might have changed my writing experience a bit, too, because she had already seen my writing before, but it was mostly argumentative and a little bit of creative nonfiction, but nowhere near the level that I encountered in [English 200 level course]. It was strange. It was structuring arguments about things that you typically probably wouldn't structure arguments about. She made the class so that you could write about topics that you were interested in.

So, for example, I think when you think of argumentative essays, I think of position essays and you write about a controversial topic, or you're analyzing a passage in a book and you're trying to argue your thesis. Her essays were, like, whatever career field you're interested in, write an argumentative essay about why—I think it was why that career is defined that way over other ways, or something like that. It was using really typical English elements but writing about stuff that you actually cared about, I think.

That was different. I think that was my first encounter with writing about things I like to write about, but using the same English techniques that I learned before.

*Interviewer:* Yeah, that makes a lot of sense to me. You mentioned you're in business school doing marketing, right?

*Interviewee:* Yeah.

*Interviewer:* Did you take any writing courses in your concentration?

*Interviewee:* [Chuckles] I did. There's a comp [composition] class that they—it's called B comp that they require for graduation, but the writing you do there is how to write really efficient reports and e-mails. Nowhere near the type of writing—

*Interviewer:* A little more like technical writing kind of stuff.

*Interviewee:* Exactly.

*Interviewer:* Do you feel like that course affected the writing that you do in your concentration at all?

*Interviewee:* Yeah, definitely. Looking back, we've had to write reports for group projects. I just actually submitted a report last week on Saturday. It was a 30-page report on a PowerPoint doc that we did. It's definitely impacted my writing within my major, meaning that I know how to be more concise, I know how to be very communicative and direct, versus I think it's the opposite in my LSA 12:20 writing courses. It's been interesting to see that flip. They flip this way, that way, depending on whatever it is.

*Interviewer:* Mm-hmm. Contrast.

*Interviewee:* Yup.

*Interviewer:* Do you feel pretty confident? I know you mentioned going into marketing. Do you feel pretty confident about your ability to write in the ways that you'll need to to be good at marketing?

*Interviewee:* Definitely. I think one advantage I have is I know how to write very directly in the business context with all the experience in the business world, but I think I also have gotten to experience more of the creative touch from my LSA classes, so I feel like I've got the best of both worlds in that sense.

*Interviewer:* How often do you feel like you've used the skills or the strategies that you've learned in these writing classes that we've been talking about in other courses?

*Interviewee:* Just in general? I think taking those writing courses definitely made me a better communicator, whether it is public speaking or interviews or writing anything, really. I've also noticed even in the business school in group projects I tend to be the person who organizes the reports and stuff at the end, because I like doing it and I guess because of all the writing classes I've taken, but I also feel like I have an easier time doing it compared to other group members. I'm always like, "Oh yeah, I'll do it." In terms of affecting my other coursework, I think it's just given me more confidence.

*Interviewer:* That's great. What impact do you feel like the minor capstone class, the [Writing course], had overall on your writing?

*Interviewee:* I think the gateway course is really good about making me reflective. I think the capstone course was really good giving me an opportunity to kind of put together all the writing talents I had acquired all four years into something that was actually tangible.

*Interviewer:* Has this course had an impact on your writing process?

*Interviewee:* Yeah. I think it's definitely shown me I could have more stamina in writing for long periods of time. My capstone project was a short story that ended

up being 20 pages, single spaced. Maybe not short. I've never written something for that long. Being able to even sit down for hours at once and write that was pretty incredible for me.

I learned a lot about myself during that process, like what types of things irk me, what types of things help me. I think, in general, different classes and different assignments that you get, you never get a piece that, first, can be so long, usually, and then second, you get months to do. This was a good opportunity to see myself work in that context.

*Interviewer:* That makes a lot of sense to me. How has that had an impact on your sense of yourself as a writer, do you feel like?

*Interviewee:* It's made me a little more confident in my writing ability. Definitely I think the coolest thing with the capstone course is that you're taking it with other minors, so it's the community aspect that's cool, too. It's nice to be able to help other writers as well as have them help you and say, "Oh, no, that was actually really great," or, "You should fix this." It gives you a little more confidence as a writer. I think, I, at least, and I know a lot of writers probably think the same way, I've always doubted my writing ability or how good it is. Sometimes I need other people to say, "This is fine" and then we can move on 15:59.

*Interviewer:* What made you choose this short story as your project?

*Interviewee:* I had written creative nonfiction. I'd written complete nonfiction too, and I've always loved reading as a kid, and I'm still an avid reader. It's funny, because I've never thought of writing, the books I was reading. I never thought of the other side of the process, so going off of that I was like, "I wonder what it would be like to actually write the stories that I always enjoyed reading?" I had gotten a really small opportunity to do that in the gateway course, but not anything that I felt like I expressed myself in, so I decided to do a short story because I thought that would be a good way for me to exercise my fiction talents.

*Interviewer:* Awesome. What effect has that experience had on you as a writer? I know you talked a little bit about developing some stamina, and that kind of thing. Is there anything else you'd like to add to that about what effect this has had on you as a person, as a writer?

*Interviewee:* I think the stamina part is definitely true. I think in anything it's given me a little more confidence in me being able to tackle writing tasks that I hadn't tackled before or I hadn't had experience in.

*Interviewer:* Awesome. The next thing we're going to talk about is your capstone. I had to wake my computer up, so it'll take a second here. Sometimes it has to think for a while before it connects to the internet here on campus, I don't know why. I'm gonna have you pull that up.

[...]

[Pause 19:24-19:52]

*Interviewer:* The next couple of questions are going to be about this portfolio. What I'd like you to do first is maybe remind yourself of what you've done here, cuz sometimes you forget once you've sort of finished it. We're gonna think about the most memorable aspect of writing this portfolio. Feel free if you need to take a second, that's fine, and then just talk to me about what is really memorable to you about putting this portfolio together.

*Interviewee:* I think figuring out the theme of the portfolio, because the difference between this portfolio and *[inaudible, computer fan starts 20:29]* I think this one had to have some sort of coherent story behind it, so you know how your writing developed over the years. Figuring out this theme and really reflecting back was a lot of fun, I think in some ways.

*Interviewer:* Cool. What were your aims for the portfolio? You mentioned a theme, or a story. What were you trying to tell the reader of the portfolio?

*Interviewee:* I only meant this for the minor writing audience, so it was very much specific to the assignment, but again, charting my development. Showing them how my love for reading eventually translated into my love for writing. I had read *Little Women* voraciously as a kid, and one of the characters—

*Interviewer:* Jo March.

*Interviewee:* Jo March, yeah, is a huge reader, and I'd always identified with her as kid, and I think that's most little girls, but she was also a huge writer. I never thought about that side of it until I got older. I was thinking about that.

*Interviewer:* That's really interesting. How do you feel like your portfolio addresses that goal?

*Interviewee:* I broke it down. Since I love reading so much, I kind of organized it like a book. I broke it down by part, or stage, and each stage shows a different feeling I encountered with writing, or like a different evolution of the types of writing I did. In the beginning, it's very frustrating, but as you go further it becomes more reflective of *[fading voice 22:00]*.

*Interviewer:* Interesting. It looks like to me, as you're sort of narrating the movement through these various parts, that you designed this to have a particular—you wanted the reader to progress through the portfolio in a very particular way.



*Interviewee:* Yes.

*Interviewer:* Can you talk to me a little bit about how you designed it to do that? How did you design the portfolio to lead the reader through this process?

*Interviewee:* Much like any story, I began with a prologue. I gave this direction, like the home page 22:40. If you go to the prologue, it explains the theme of this portfolio, and there's also a navigation tab. So in this tab, it kind of tells you, okay, like any other book you go in order. You start with Part One to Part Two, Part Three. I also gave a direction in the sense that if you don't have time to read all the parts, you go to the back cover which, like any other back cover—usually back covers of books have a really short summary, right? In that sense I put my evolution essay, which was supposed to be a summary of my writing development.

*Interviewer:* Nice.

*Interviewee:* In a sense this portfolio almost is like a manifestation 23:22 of that.

*Interviewer:* That's really interesting. What made you decide to include this navigation diagram?

*Interviewee:* Again, kind of to what you were alluding to before, making sure people had enough direction to it. I wanted to make sure people didn't go straight to Part Three. I wanted to be clear on that.

*Interviewer:* That makes a lot of sense to me. Did you notice any relationships among the artifacts that you included here as you were creating the portfolio?

*Interviewee:* Yeah, I noticed that I liked writing about particular things. Either it was literature or social justice type of stuff, and later, I think, more in the reflective part. I think I noticed the similarities in my style then and how it's evolved, especially from the [inaudible 24:16] course to now for the last semester.

*Interviewer:* Do you think that creating this e-portfolio has had an effect on your writing?

*Interviewee:* I don't know if it's directly changed anything. I think if anything it's just helped me reconcile my thoughts about writing. I don't know if it's directly impacted how to write.

*Interviewer:* How do you mean "reconciled"?

*Interviewee:* In the sense that I kind of had to deal with how [inaudible 24:44]. I don't think I would have actually sat down and thought about that until I had to do this portfolio.

*Interviewer:* What did you learn from the reflective writing in the e-portfolio? With the evidence-based essay you wrote, and the contextual reflections that you wrote.

*Interviewee:* It was interesting. Usually you read stuff like the Paris Review and always read about other writers describing how their writing students or someone else would analyze it [inaudible 25:13] writing students. It's weird to give that to yourself. If anything, I kind of noticed that there was some sort of pattern or a line that I could trace. That was really cool.

*Interviewer:* That's awesome. What do you think the people who are interested in writing developments—so program administrators, people in Sweetland, people like me who are just interested in how students learn to write, what could they learn about writing development from your capstone portfolio?

*Interviewee:* I think that's it's a very long process, and I think the biggest thing about writing development is I think a lot of kids in school, myself included, hated writing in high school and in grade school because of how it's structured. How it's very much a five-paragraph essay, and often times you don't actually have to write about things that you really care about. I didn't get that opportunity until college. So understanding what type of triggers would encourage someone to actually like writing.

At the same time, I always felt like I had the love of writing to be a writer. You have to love every part of the process, and a lot of the process frustrated me, and there are still parts that do frustrate me at the same time, but I think I've learned while making this portfolio and just reflecting back that the stuff that I hated at one point also seems exciting at the same time.

Understanding that it's not black and white. You don't have to love the process. I love this quote that—I think it was Thomas Mann—I don't remember the author, but he says that writers are the people for which writing is the hardest, which is so true. So understanding that you don't have to be this spectacular [inaudible 27:00]. There are people who hate the process and find it really hard, and that's one of the challenges for me.

*Interviewer:* That's great. Very interesting. Now we're gonna talk a little bit about the process from the gateway course into the capstone class. How did your experience in the capstone course compare to your experience in the gateway course?

*Interviewee:* I think it was much more structured in the capstone. Not necessarily like that was a better thing compared to gateway. I think it was fine that gateway was unstructured. It seemed much less reflective and more about doing something. That I liked. I think it finally gave us an opportunity to explore a new project and still get credit for it.

*Interviewer:* What have your experiences been working with other writers throughout the minor?

*Interviewee:* Very cool. It's always interesting to see people have different quirks to their writing. *[Sniffs]* Sorry.

*Interviewer:* No, you're fine. The pollen is attacking us all. It's that time of year *[Chuckles]*.

*Interviewee:* *[Chuckles]* Exactly. So people have different quirks to their writing. It was just interesting to see how people's writing also fit into their majors. There were a couple of other B school [business school] students who were in the minor with me as well, but a lot of the students were comm [communications] or English majors. It was interesting to hear more about their lives in that sense, because how they approach writing is very different. I think for them, writing is all they're doing pretty much all the time, and for people like me it's almost like a side or a subset of what we do, and it's not all always directly related to what I do with most of my coursework. So just hearing about their experiences and how they're *[inaudible 28:51]* very different from other majors and *[fading voice 28:53]*.

*Interviewer:* What are the differences that you see between the gateway and the capstone e-portfolios? I know you touched on this a little bit earlier.

*Interviewee:* Yeah. The gateway e-portfolios seemed to be more portfolio-like, in the sense that it's just the work you've done in different areas of writing that you've been able to explore. This one seemed much more about development or telling a story. It was almost like the gateway portfolio was a photo album that showed all the different pictures and different artifacts that we've collected over the years, but this one was more like a home video.

*Interviewer:* What an interesting way—

*Interviewee:* *[Chuckles]* Yeah.

*Interviewer:* I like that. That's a really interesting comparison, because the home video would show more of a narrative, right?

*Interviewee:* Exactly.

*Interviewer:* That's really interesting. The gateway and the capstone course both emphasize reflective writing in various forms. How would you describe your experience with that kind of reflection? I know earlier you talked about how you felt like that reflection has been really important in your development as a writer, so I was wondering if you could talk a little bit more about your experience learning to write that kind of reflection, and how it's maybe specifically affected you, and that kind of thing.

*Interviewee:* Learning how to write the reflection in the gateway course?

*Interviewer:* In both courses.

*Interviewee:* In any course? Okay.

*Interviewer:* I know you did a good bit of reflection in both gateway and capstone, right?

*Interviewee:* Yeah. I think, first, both the reflective experiences were a little different with the gateway and capstone. I think gateway was the first time I did any reflective writing, but the capstone was "been there, done that." I think the reflection in the capstone was more refined than developed, was actually part of an essay, versus the gateway reflection was much more fluid and *[inaudible 30:47]* which I think was a very accurate reflection of what I had thought about writing, too. I didn't really know *[fading voice 30:53]*.

*Interviewer:* *[Laughs]* Yeah. So you learned.

*Interviewee:* Yes.

*Interviewer:* Are you still using reflection in your current writing, either assigned or voluntary writing?

*Interviewee:* I think reflection in the sense, yes, I like to think about my own experiences and then draw from that. I'm not using it in the same way of—I think the reflective pieces we did in the gateway and the capstone tended to be more just about writing, and then myself, how I practice things 31:23 and stuff, and it's not as personal. I think there's pieces of it 31:26.

*Interviewer:* For sure. Had this reflection given you ways to talk about your writing in terms, or concepts, maybe?

*Interviewee:* I don't know if it's given me new words or different ways to talk about it. It's definitely helping understand different ways of depicting it, I guess. I'd never really drawn the reader/writer connection or really thought about it to some extent.

*Interviewer:* How did the reflective writing help you do that?

*Interviewee:* I think it was the idea that I had to find some sort of pattern. Thinking about who I am as a person and how I even encountered writing, and then trying to draw a pattern from that.

*Interviewer:* The minor program is still pretty new, relatively speaking. Are there any suggestions you would have for the instructors or the administrators in Sweetland for the minor?

*Interviewee:* I definitely like the fact that the gateway course, and there is the capstone, kind of, not really. I definitely like the fact that it was a gamification grading system, and it wasn't an A, B, C, D letter grade. It almost gives you a sigh of relief, because the frustrating thing about writing, also, is that you know how you write works in certain ways, and that's what you always submit, because you're worried that you won't get the grade that you get, and you're afraid to experiment and challenge yourself, and that can be a huge block in your writing development. So the fact that those courses are open and you don't have to worry about a grade, so you're more encouraged to revise constantly [*inaudible 33:05*] that was great.

I think it was great to have the reflective pieces, but at the same time I almost would have even wanted more time just to write. I think the reflective component was good, but I think we spent too much time. I feel like you could ask me in five years what I think about writing and it would be slightly different. I think it's [*fading voice 33:33*] It's hard to pinpoint that this early [*fading voice 33:38*].

*Interviewer:* More generally, what do you think the professors should know about teaching writing at an undergraduate level?

*Interviewee:* I think that most people, they already know this, but again, most people come into college for the most part hating writing, so understanding that the stress and the frustration was there beforehand. But again, figuring out that the undergrads really [*fading voice 34:10-34:18*].

*Interviewer:* Do you have any other comments, or things that you thought we might talk about but we didn't get to, or anything like that?

*Interviewee:* No. I think you've covered a lot.

*Interviewer:* [*Chuckles*] A lot of detailed questions.

*Interviewee:* Yeah.

*Interviewer:* Okay, well great, that's all I have. Thank you so much for coming and chatting with me.

[...]

*[End of Audio]*