

Interviewer: Today is April 5, 2013. I'm \*\*\* and today I'm interviewing—

Interviewee: \*\*\*.

Interviewer: \*\*\*, how would you describe yourself as a writer?

Interviewee: I would say that I'm a decent writer. However, I don't so much enjoy writing so it's kind of just a write it to get it over with.

Interviewer: You say you're decent at it. What would say, specifically, you're decent at?

Interviewee: I think I'm good at research paper writing because it's easy for me to just write and get right to the point rather than adding all the fluff around it.

Interviewer: It sounds like you'd say the fluff part of writing is what you struggle with or you don't like. Can you talk more about that?

Interviewee: I just think I just struggle with coming up—well, not so much coming up with ideas. I come up with a lot of ideas in my head. I think I just struggle with writing it all down. I'm also impatient so I don't like to take the time to write it all down.

Interviewer: How would you say you use writing? What's the role of writing in your life?

Interviewee: Well, for school I use it just to get it done, but I journal a lot just for my own personal thoughts. It's a kind of don't pick up your pen. Just keep on going. Write whatever you want.

Interviewer: Good. Can you talk more about the difference between that process and the way you write for school?

Interviewee: I think that is a lot easier because you just write down your stream of thoughts, whatever comes up. You don't have to so much worry about grammar or going back and using large vocabulary, which I am not good at or trying to make a point.

Interviewer: You say you feel better though about academic writing thing rather than kind of like the narrative creative writing? Is that right?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: You don't like the big words, the editing for grammar. What is it about the academic papers, I guess, that you like.

Interviewee: I think for me they're mostly science papers 'cause that's what my major is so we don't necessarily need to use the big vocabulary words that make you sound artsy.

Interviewer: What's your goal in writing a science paper?

Interviewee: To try to convey and teach others what like the paper is about.

Interviewer: How would you describe yourself as a writer when you began here at the University of Michigan? Tell me specific strengths or weaknesses.

Interviewee: I think when I first began here, it was hard for me to write because I just didn't have any confidence in my writing because my high school writing class, or my writer class specifically, was a lot more challenging than the one here.

Interviewer: Can you say more about that?

Interviewee: Yeah, I think she was just looking for like more of the vocabulary, more of the descriptive stuff, which I wasn't good at. Even in like her research papers there's a lot of keep on going and going and write a ton of pages. I was used to like not—well, I got like B minuses on them, which isn't like awful. But in high school when you're used to getting all As, it lowers your confidence. I wasn't confident first coming in so I just didn't want to write.

Interviewer: Did you take your [English course] right away in the fall term or did you put it off?

Interviewee: Yes, I took it right away. I think—how was I at the very beginning? I was still just good at the straight-to-the-point writing, which was what my professor here liked. As we went on, we always had like peer editing, and he would look at our papers before we handed them in so it was helpful.

Interviewer: That was useful for you?

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: What sort of writing did you do in that class that made you feel successful I guess?

Interviewee: In that class, we did all research paper writing.

Interviewer: Which is the type of writing you use.

Interviewee: Which is the type of writing I like.

Interviewer: Then you started developing confidence—

Interviewee: Right.

Interviewer: - would you say? Okay. Are there any specific skills that you think you took from that [English course] class that were useful for you, that you still draw on now in your writing?

Interviewee: Yeah, I think a lot of like sentence structure stuff, just like better placing of where to put the verb or just more of the, yeah, structure of writing more than anything else.

Interviewer: It was a sentence-level type stuff mostly? Okay. How did your professor or your GSI [Graduate Student Instructor] help you to I guess work on that? Can you remember anything specific that he or she did?

Interviewee: Yeah, they just made notes on our papers.

Interviewer: Just like in-text comments—

Interviewee: Right.

Interviewer: - the wording here is confusing or stuff like that? Okay. Would you say that you've grown as a writer? You say you're a sophomore now?

Interviewee: Mm-hmm. I would say since my freshman semester, I have not grown as a writer because I haven't really—well, that's the only writing class I have to take my whole time here. I think that since being here my writing vocabulary has gone down. My like scientific vocab has gone up, but ...

Interviewer: Can you be more specific? What do you mean by writing vocabulary?

Interviewee: How do I explain that? I think just the words that the average person would have to look up if they went past it. I don't remember any of those anymore or all the ones I used to know.

Interviewer: You mean you think many words—

Interviewee: Right.

Interviewer: - that English teachers sometimes like to see?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: What about your ability to—okay, sorry, different question. Get to that in a second. You would say from your freshman year you haven't really grown as a writer.

Interviewee: Hm-mm.

Interviewer: Let's think a little bit more about your [English course] class. You said that that class helped you with like sentence-structure issues and you wrote a lot of research papers. Do you feel like you got any skills in terms of like researching or other skills related to those types of papers?

Interviewee: I got a lot better at online researching and knowing what sources were better to use.

Interviewer: How do you recognize a good source?

Interviewee: Good sources are peer reviewed.

Interviewer: All right, good [laughter]. How did you come to realize that?

Interviewee: We had a day in the library when they taught how to use all the online library resources.

Interviewer: Do you feel pretty confident about your ability to integrate sources into your writing?

Interviewee: Yeah, I do. Well, I feel confident about opening them up and searching for words, not actually reading them.

Interviewer: Interesting. Is that something you feel like you learned then in [English course] how to do? Where did you learn that skill, I guess?

Interviewee: I don't know if I necessarily learned it anywhere or if I just started doing it.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm but you found it useful in [English course] to be able to do that?

Interviewee: Right. 'Cause then you could just look for the things that specifically pertain to your paper.

Interviewer: The skill of skimming. That's good. All right, so thinking across your writing experiences, and it sounds like maybe those were kind of limited for you at U of M.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: What do you think it means to write well if you had to describe good writing and writing well?

Interviewee: I think writing well is to keep your audience focused the whole time so don't make it boring or drag it on. 'Cause if your professor actually wants to read it, it's a good paper and also just to be clear about what you're talking about and not write in circles and all over the place.

Interviewer: Good. We already kinda talked about this, but which first-year writing requirement course did you take?

Interviewee: I took, well, I actually didn't take [English course]. I took an equivalent to it in the RC.

Interviewer: Oh, tell me about that.

Interviewee: It was structured a lot like the [English course] course, but it had a specific focus, and it was called—shoot.

Interviewer: If you can't remember the title, that's fine. Do you remember the theme?

Interviewee: Yeah, it was something—it was about like how your brain relates to creativity.

Interviewer: Oh, interesting. Let's see. Can you tell me a little bit about the specific—you said that there were mostly research assignments. Do you remember much about the specific assignments, how they were different from each other?

Interviewee: We read a few different like short stories. We only had three papers. One of 'em, we read, "The Tower of Babel," something like that. We had to pick a topic that related to that and then like research other things about it too. Then we had one where we could choose our own topic. We had one about Picasso and a dancer and how they, like their creativity like related.

Interviewer: Were any of those essays more useful for you, do you think, than the others?

Interviewee: I think the one where I had to choose my own topic 'cause then I had to actually think about what would be a good thing to like research on.

Interviewer: How'd you come to your research topic?

Interviewee: I actually don't even remember my research topic.

Interviewer: I'm asking you to remember way, way, way back.

Interviewee: I think I just searched online for like a few different topics and used whichever one I found the most useful information on. That was also one of the ones that like we weren't given any like—we had to find all our citations ourself. Like we didn't have any of the papers we read already in class or anything else to go off of.

Interviewer: What was that like, trying to integrate all those different sources into a paper?

Interviewee: I think it was difficult. I don't remember why. I just remember hating to write it [laughter].

Interviewer: Did you feel successful after you had written it?

Interviewee: I did. I did.

Interviewer: Do you remember what you thought worked about the paper?

Interviewee: I think I felt successful the most because I wrote as many pages as we needed to write because I'm not good at writing. Well, it wasn't even long. It was five pages, but for my admissions essay for Michigan took me from August to January to write [laughter]. I think that was the most successful part for me.

Interviewer: Making the page length. Did you take [Writing course]?

Interviewee: No.

Interviewer: No, and then your concentration, your major is biology?

Interviewee: It's movement science.

Interviewer: Movement science. Talk to me about any sorts of writing that you do for movement science.

Interviewee: I've only had to write in one class, and it was for statistics, and we had to write—we had to choose a research topic and summarize like prior knowledge about it. We had one page and we had to fit 15 sources in one page.

Interviewer: That sounds challenging.

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Can you talk to me about how that was?

Interviewee: It was challenging. I feel like it was hard to fit it all together because I feel like every sentence had to be another source and not like—there wasn't much room for your own explanation or anything in it.

Interviewer: Was that easier for you since it was mostly based on other people's sources because I feel like you've said you don't like to expand it.

Interviewee: I think it would have been easier for me if we had a page and a half because it was really just like trying to cram so many things in there.

Interviewer: That sounds like your one official writing assignment that you've had.

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Do you ever do informal writing in your concentration like short responses to something that you submit or writing in class that you do?

Interviewee: Yeah, we do those. Mostly, they just look to see that you have the right answer, not like how wrote it out.

Interviewer: Can you talk to me about what an assignment like that might look like, I guess?

Interviewee: It might ask a question about like, well for physiology right now, we have had six of them. It'll ask a question about like a specific topic. Well, like every assignment will ask about like four or five and we have 200 words to answer it. You can answer it however you want. It can also be in like a list format if you decided that.

Interviewer: Do you feel confident about writing in your concentration?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: Why?

Interviewee: I think because a lot of people in my concentration are like people who are more gifted in science than writing also write a lot like I do. It's just more natural, I think, the way they want us to write.

Interviewer: Do you have any specific examples you can point to where you're like, "Yeah, I got this," like, "my writing is as good as everyone else here." [Laughter]. How do you know, I guess. If you really don't write that much ...

Interviewee: I think for our summary for my statistics class, we all wrote like very similarly.

Interviewer: Did you guys have to exchange or did you—

Interviewee: No, I just have friends in that class who I—

Interviewer: So you saw their writing—

Interviewee: Right.

Interviewer: - and you were able to compare it.

Interviewee: Just seeing the professor's writing too. Sorry to interrupt.

Interviewer: Oh, no, that's useful. Did your professor give you a model of writing?

Interviewee: He did. His was a lot longer than ours, but yeah.

Interviewer: You felt like yours stood up favorably to his?

Interviewee: Mm-hmm, yes.

Interviewer: How would you describe, I guess what made them similar? What did you notice about your writing, his writing?

Interviewee: His also had a lot of just like sources and not his own explanation.

Interviewer: Is that what it means to write well in your concentration?

Interviewee: I think to write well in my concentration means to just give people a lot of information and also convince 'em that what you're doing is something that needs to be researched.

Interviewer: How do you do that?

Interviewee: Well, you pick a topic that you already know yourself is like something that needs to be researched, and then you find sources that—I don't know—that if someone read them they'd be like, "Okay, I can see why this needs to be done." Like I did mine on coronary heart disease so it was finding sources that really show that it was an issue and like we needed to prevent it, find ways to prevent it.

Interviewer: I'm gonna kinda switch gears a little bit. What experiences in and out of the classroom have had an effect on your writing? You said that you journal. That might be something that you could talk about here.

Interviewee: I don't know if journaling has so much had an effect on my writing or just my own personal thoughts. Well, I journal for religious purposes, not for like—I think it's helped me to be able to explain in writing like how I'm actually feeling, which I guess has been useful in telling people vocally how I'm feeling.

Interviewer: Would you see that skill, being able to kind of express yourself and your opinions, do you think your major would ever call on you to use that in your writing?

Interviewee: Not so much. I think if I ever had to try to convince the board of, I forget what they're called, about like really wanting to do a research that is not necessarily one of their top priorities, I think it would be helpful then to really like try to get my point across, but other than that ...

Interviewer: Do you use your journal—it sounds like you just use it personally, right?



Interviewee: Right.

Interviewer: Is it something that you share?

Interviewee: I share it with some people.

Interviewer: You're kind of writing for an audience, I guess, is what I was wondering about. Kind of.

Interviewee: Kind of.

Interviewer: Would you say that your writing process has changed as a result of writing in your journal?

Interviewee: It's hard to say because I like didn't start doing it until last summer so I haven't really written much since then.

Interviewer: Fair enough. If I use the term reflective writing, what does that mean to you?

Interviewee: Let's see. Talk about reflective listening a lot. I don't know about reflective writing.

Interviewer: You can start there. What's reflective listening?

Interviewee: Reflective listening is when somebody tells you something and you, not necessarily repeat exactly word for word what they said, but like repeat what they say to see if you're like actually following them correctly.

Interviewer: Oh, so you reflect—

Interviewee: Back to them.

Interviewer: - their own words back to them.

Interviewee: Reflective writing. Are you reflecting your own thoughts in your writing?

Interviewer: Maybe.

Interviewee: Maybe [laughter].

Interviewer: Have you ever had to use reflective writing in your own writing processes? Did you ever have to do any reflective writing in your first-year writing course, for example?

Interviewee: I'm gonna say no 'cause I don't know what the term actually means [laughter].

Interviewer: You mentioned in your first-year writing course that you had experience working with other writers in workshop, right? Can you talk about those experiences?

Interviewee: We didn't work with other writers. We worked with our classmates.

Interviewer: Oh, sorry, I mean your classmates.

Interviewee: Okay.

Interviewer: They were also writers.

Interviewee: Oh, okay, in workshop.

Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: I think it was helpful because I got to see their point of view and like what they learned in their high schools about writing, and it was also helpful because I had to actually think about what I've learned about writing and like editing their papers or giving them advice.

Interviewer: Can you talk about the structure of workshop? Like what did you do to prepare for it? What did it look like that day in class?

Interviewee: We would all come in with a rough copy of our paper. It was usually about a week before our papers were due. Then he'd split us up into groups of four, and we'd all take turns passing around the papers. We'd all edit them in different colors.

Interviewer: What were you looking for when you did that sort of editing?

Interviewee: We were looking for grammar, I think, like paragraph structure and if like what they're writing made sense and flowed well.

Interviewer: Good, and you said it was useful for you to get those comments too? How did you use the comments after you got them?

Interviewee: I mean I always considered using what they said. Sometimes I didn't think it made sense or was better so I would discard it, but I always read through all of them. Then sometimes I asked the people questions if I didn't understand like why they wrote what they did.

Interviewer: After you kind of did the paper pass around, you'd have time for discussion?

Interviewee: Not usually. I would talk to them after school or when we were leaving.

Interviewer: After class discussions and [cross talk 27:18]. You've done workshopping and peer review. Have you ever had to write a paper in a group, collaboratively, before?

Interviewee: No.

Interviewer: If you were going to give someone advice about writing, what are some of the things that they should think about as they begin writing a paper?

Interviewee: Is this a college student or ...

Interviewer: Yes, a college student.

Interviewee: I would say really focus on and think about what you want to write before you actually start writing because that does help the paper to flow better and make more sense if you already, prior to writing, know what you're gonna write.

Interviewer: How do you do that?

Interviewee: You make a list.

Interviewer: A list of ...

Interviewee: A list of topics and what like each paragraph should be about.

Interviewer: It's a list of topics you're gonna cover in a particular paper?

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Kind of like the outlining process?

Interviewee: Right.

Interviewer: Right? Is that something you did for your first-year writing program, for class?

Interviewee: I did do that, yes.

Interviewer: Yes? You found it useful?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: How did you identify the topics you were gonna talk about?

Interviewee: Well, I think I would just find good sources first that could actually be talked about and go off of those.

Interviewer: Are there any other things you would tell somebody just starting out?

Interviewee: I would tell them to listen to the font and font size or else they might get points taken off [laughter]. I don't know what else I would tell them. I know that doesn't really relate to ...

Interviewer: No, that's important to be aware of, kind of the secrets.

Interviewee: I think I would just tell them to also talk to their professor 'cause their professor knows what they're looking for rather than just trying to figure it out on your own. Maybe email them like what you think you want to write about.

Interviewer: Did you ever do that?

Interviewee: We had to do that. It wasn't, yeah.

Interviewer: What was that like?

Interviewee: He would just have us—we just had to get our topics approved by him before we wrote about them.

Interviewer: Did you ever go meet with him to talk about your topic as your paper was developing?

Interviewee: We, for our last paper, he had 20-minute meeting times for a week, where we'd come in and talk to him.

Interviewer: Was that useful for you?

Interviewee: It was very useful 'cause I struggled to, I think, sometimes come up with ideas 'cause I worry about whether or not they'll be good ones so it was helpful to talk to him and he could tell me what I should focus on more.

Interviewer: He helped you figure out where to focus?

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: How did he do that? Did he say, "This is it. This is where you should be focusing"?

Interviewee: He didn't say I needed should things. There was a lot of "I think this might be helpful if you focused on this." He gave me a few options but it wasn't like a "do this exactly."

Interviewer: Did you like that—

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: - being given choices?

Interviewee: I did.

Interviewer: Have you had any experiences with new media writing? That means writing for a blog or for a website or using sound or video in some sort of composition or making a PowerPoint presentation?

Interviewee: I have made a PowerPoint presentation.

Interviewer: Have you done that for class at Michigan?

Interviewee: Yes, I did that for my first-year writing. Also, our final paper, we also had to present the topic to the class and what we knew about it.

Interviewer: You had to create it, present it to the class. Did creating that PowerPoint presentation have any effect on you as a writer do you think? Did it help you rethink about your paper in any way?

Interviewee: It did make me rethink about my paper, but it was already turned in. Just like I had to like gather more information when I made it, so just—well, for my paper I didn't read as much as I did for my PowerPoint.

Interviewer: That's interesting. Why? What about the PowerPoint made you realize you needed to do more reading?

Interviewee: Because when you look at a PowerPoint, you have to include a bunch of facts or more so I guess—and it also had to be 20 minutes long. I had to—yeah, they were boring.

Interviewer: Wow, that's a long presentation. How long was the paper?

Interviewee: Five to seven pages, so not that long.

Interviewer: That's part of the reason it sound like you might have had to dig up some more information. If you had had the paper to write over again, would you have changed anything about it after doing the PowerPoint presentation?

Interviewee: Yeah, I think I would have changed some of the facts I included in there. I probably would have explained them more because I knew more about it after I had to do more research. Because like I said, I don't normally read the whole paper. I just pull it out for my ...

Interviewer: Did your PowerPoint presentation—was it a matter of going back through the sources you already had—

Interviewee: Yes, yes.

Interviewer: - in a more systematic way?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: You've been putting pieces of your writing—you've been uploading them to the study archive on CTools [learning management system]?

Interviewee: Mm-hm.

Interviewer: How has that process been going for you?

Interviewee: It's been good. I have to get a reminder a lot

Interviewer: How many pieces have you uploaded?

Interviewee: I uploaded three so far, so one from every semester.

Interviewer: Good. I'd actually love to talk to you about each of the things that you uploaded. Do you remember the first thing that you uploaded? [...].

[...]

Interviewer: Talk to me about that narrative piece. Where did it come from and [cross talk 37:02].

Interviewee: That was my freshman year. I was also in a narrations class at the same time. This actually is from a different freshman writing class.

Interviewer: Interesting. You were taking two writing classes at the same time?

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Did you learn anything specifically from that narration class?

Interviewee: Well, it was kind of like not-effort A class. I did learn—well, I don't know if I specifically learned anything because he always edited our papers for us and we kind of just did what he edited.

Interviewer: What kind of assignments did he give you? It sounds like creative pieces, like were you writing short stories?

Interviewee: We were writing short stories. We could write about whatever we wanted to write about, at whatever length. We had to hand one in every other week.

Interviewer: That's actually quite a bit of writing.

Interviewee: Well, or you could just edit the one you already handed in [laughter]. Hand that in.

Interviewer: Was that a workshop setup?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: Did you exchange with other people?

Interviewee: Or not a workshop so we had a 20-minute meeting with our professor every Friday.

Interviewer: Oh, okay, to talk about your writing—

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: - so you're saying you would take his comments and apply to your revision the next week?

Interviewee: Right.

Interviewer: How were those conferences different from your freshman writing course conferences?

Interviewee: The one previously, the writing course we talked about, he made us think a lot more, gave us options. He like drew us out on like things we could write about where this one, he wrote the edits down on our paper. Said, "This is what I saw." Kinda told you everything you had to do rather than like helping you to learn.

Interviewer: It's interesting to me 'cause you chose to upload something from the narrative course and not something from your freshman writing course. Why did you choose this piece?

Interviewee: Because I had this one saved on my email and all the other ones from my freshman course, my computer crashed so I didn't actually have them [laughter].

Interviewer: Oh, no. Do you remember anything about writing this particular piece?

Interviewee: I do. I think this is the one about a penguin.

Interviewer: It sounds like you didn't have a lot of options about what to upload, but is there anything in particular you like about this essay or that you think that you did well?

Interviewee: Actually, this isn't the one about a penguin. I think it was easy to write because it had a lot of similarities to my own life. I wrote it at the same time that I wrote like a testimony for my church.

Interviewer: That's interesting. You've also written testimonies for your church. 'Cause that's a really good example of outside-of-school writing.

Interviewee: I've written like six of them in the past year [laughter].

Interviewer: Oh, wow. A lot of that writing then. Tell me what you know about writing from those experiences. Maybe you can clarify for me. If you write a testimony, is that something you would aloud to an audience?

Interviewee: Yes, well, not always, but in my case, yeah, I did. I read it at my church a few times in different places. I think you really learn to look back on your own experiences, your own feelings and things that you've learned and write. To be able to—cause the first one took like weeks to write, and after that they got easier. It's a lot of being able to put your thoughts in a way that you could express it to others.

Interviewer: How long are the testimonies, like written out, or does it vary?

Interviewee: They usually take about five minutes to read.

Interviewer: Probably two to three pages.

Interviewee: Two to three pages.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Is there anything, when you think about—'cause that seems like a pretty big writing experience.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Is there anything you take from writing those that you applied, say, to your narrative piece here or that you apply to writing that you do in your major now?

Interviewee: I think it helped me in writing narrative pieces because the best—like our professor told us once the best narratives are the ones that like at least part of the story comes from someone's like real life experience. Writing that helped me to be able to like think about past events that I could use as like a starting point for my writing.



Interviewer: Did your writing experiences in church help you to—so it sounds like they helped you write your narrative piece.

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: Would you say anything from your narrative class helped you write your testimonies?

Interviewee: I don't think so. I worked with a lot of, like with a few of the pastors on writing like my first testimony. It was more I think that helped my narration.

Interviewer: Interesting. What was that process like? Sorry, and you don't have to share any of this if you don't want to—

Interviewee: It's okay.

Interviewer: - it's just interesting.

Interviewee: It was just they asked me a lot of questions about my life and experiences.

Interviewer: Had they seen a draft of your paper or was this before you started writing?

Interviewee: This was prior to it. Then they asked about like what I've learned like recently and how I could incorporate it all into like what I would share with the rest of the church.

Interviewer: It sounds like that was useful for you kind of—

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: - on the ideas development end of the writing process.

Interviewee: Right.

Interviewer: Then it was easier for you to create the writing after you'd gone through that.

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: Is that right? Okay. That's this piece and then what's the second piece you uploaded?

Interviewee: I think the second piece is one from my intro movement science class. Yeah, we had to choose a topic having to do with exercise. I chose how asthma affects exercise performance.

Interviewer: How long is the paper?

Interviewee: I think it's only a page or two 'cause they're all short. I don't think our professors actually really want to read them.

Interviewer: Why did you choose to upload this one?

Interviewee: 'Cause it was the only thing I wrote that semester.

Interviewer: Oh, wow. Do you think you do anything particularly well in the piece?

Interviewee: Let's see. I think I found information and was able to structurally put it together throughout my paper. I think I did that well.

Interviewer: Do you have any other comments about writing at Michigan or yourself as a writer that you'd like to share [inaudible 46:27]?

Interviewee: I don't think so.

[End of Audio]