

Interviewer: Okay. This is *** with *** in the Brandon Center. Today is April 5th, and we'll get started.

—what we're doing there.

Okay, so how would you describe yourself as a writer?

Interviewee: I always enjoyed writing. I feel like it's kind of a creative outlet for me. I always enjoyed creative writing, I guess, ever since I was young. I did a lot of creative writing in high school. I guess I've had more difficulty with the technical writing, developing those abilities throughout college, but I know that I've had a lot of work developing those, and I've become a better writer for technical stuff too.

Interviewer: Wonderful. How would you describe the role of writing kind of in your life in general?

Interviewee: I think it's really important. I'd like to actually become an author one day, just not necessarily as a full time profession, but that's always been a goal of mine to publish a book. I think that that's really important, and just any career that I go into—I'm looking to go into business—so I know that it's an important aspect of, you know—and looking at getting a job as like a project manager or a business analyst, so it's definitely important in that.

Interviewer: Okay. What kind of book do you want to write? Do you have any idea?

Interviewee: I'm like kind of a sci-fi nerd, so I'd like to write something along those lines.

Interviewer: Very good. That's fantastic, great. If you could think back to when you began here at U of M [University of Michigan], how would you describe yourself as a writer at that point in time?

Interviewee: I was pretty confident. You know, going through high school, I was always kind of at the top of my class. I didn't get like a ton of feedback from my teachers about how to improve or anything, so I felt pretty confident coming here at that time. My first writing course was kind of a creative thing too, so I felt comfortable with that, but then when I started to get into some of the scientific stuff, that's when I started to really have to work more.

Interviewer: Okay, great. Thinking back from when you started here, to what extent would you say you've grown as a writer?

Interviewee: I feel like, as far as the more creative prose, just kind of in any type of English or literature class, I don't think I've changed a lot from my writing style, but definitely my technical writing abilities, I didn't really know much about that at all, especially in my science classes. Just learning the format of the research process, and

kind of writing more succinctly and just really straight forward, that's been kind of a struggle for me—

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: - but I think that it's been really helpful having that extra work.

Interviewer: Okay. You've talked about kind of the struggle, and some of the new genres, and different ways that you've been writing. As you've encountered them—well, I guess, how confident do you feel with them now?

Interviewee: Not great, but definitely I've made improvements. I've gotten a lot of feedback from GSIs [Graduate Student Instructor] and professors about things that I can improve on, so I continue to work on that. Yeah, not super confident, but I am still working on it.

Interviewer: Okay. You kind of mentioned that you had seen within yourself some growth. What would you attribute that growth to? You were talking about GSIs.

Interviewee: I think just the opportunity, and kind of the—you know, that being a large part of the grade in the class, kind of forcing me to focus more on that, and put more time and effort when that wouldn't be something that I'd just do on my own time, and having to go through the process of a lot of revision, and just learning more about scientific material too.

Interviewer: Okay. Has that process of revision been something that has been required of you in class?

Interviewee: Yeah. Actually, yeah, all the writing classes have had me do that 04:16. We have to turn in more than one copy of the paper.

Interviewer: Okay, wonderful. What are your goals for yourself as a writer?

Interviewee: Well, I'd like to develop my technical writing more, especially in—as a business analyst, or in that kind of profession. That's something that's really important, and just kind of being more professional in my writing style, because I was always so used to writing creatively. I know that sometimes I could be kind of verbose, or you know, writing a lot of prose, so I'd like to continue to work more on the technical stuff. I'm not planning on going to graduate school, but somehow through my career, being able to work on that.

Interviewer: Okay, wonderful. Okay, so if we now kind of broaden our scope. Thinking across your writing experiences at U of M, what do you think it means to write well?

Interviewee: I guess having a sense of being able to get your point across. Well, you know, writing less. I think that's been a large problem for me. I have a lot I want to say,

and sometimes the page requirements are actually less than I would usually write. There's been a lot of focus in my classes on—especially just in the scientific literature—being able to succinctly describe your ideas or findings, everything.

I think it's partially being able to get everything you want to say across quickly and efficiently as possible, but also having a good command of language, and understanding of whatever you're writing about. It's just kind of like, well, good grammar, and having an obvious interest in what you're writing.

Interviewer: Okay, great. What first year writing requirement course did you take?

Interviewee: I took [Comparative Literature course]—

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: - which was—the topic of that class was HAL 06:27 in literature—

Interviewer: Huh, interesting.

Interviewee: - so it was more of a creative class.

Interviewer: Okay. What were your experiences like in HAL in literature?

Interviewee: It was really interesting, cuz most of my classes in high school were very just broad about writing, so it was fun to kind of have a specific topic that we focused on. Also most of our assignments in there were creative pieces, so I got to write a lot of poetry, which is something that I enjoy doing too. I feel like it was a good experience for me, but it didn't necessarily—choosing that class didn't prepare for me for my scientific classes—

Interviewer: Sure.

Interviewee: - but at that point I didn't really know what I wanted to do either.

Interviewer: Right. Okay, interesting. I guess, what effect did these experiences that you had in the first year writing requirement have on you as a writer?

Interviewee: Well, the GSI that I had was great, and he encouraged my creative writing, and poetry, and stuff. It was great to be able to talk to him. He would give me feedback on that kind of thing, because that's what I'm interested in doing in the future, but like I said, I mean it wasn't really that helpful later on, because I haven't taken any other classes in that department, or in the English department or anything, so yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. Is there any aspect of that—I guess, since like you said, you've kind of gone off in a different direction—that you are still using from that class in your coursework?

Interviewee: I guess just the interpretation writing, having read different material, and having to respond to that in writing is important. Being able to understand whatever you're reading really well, and come up with a solid argument for something, so that in a different way, using that in my other classes. It's also just, I guess, been helpful outside for my own writing that I do, you know, on my own time.

Interviewer: Sure. How has it affected the writing that you do on your own time?

Interviewee: I think it was just another way to get me interested in a specific topic, and be able to focus on that, and then kind of put all my energy into one work at a time instead of kind of just going all over the place.

Interviewer: Okay, all right, wonderful. Did you happen to take [Writing course]?

Interviewee: No.

Interviewer: No, okay. Then you say your concentration is business, but is there a—

Interviewee: Well, that's just what I'm interested in going into.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: I'm actually majoring in geology.

Interviewer: Oh, you are?

Interviewee: Yep.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: Completely unrelated, but that's where the science comes in.

Interviewer: Okay, interesting.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Have you had much opportunity to do writing in geology?

Interviewee: Well, I had my upper level writing class, and then I also had another class last semester that was—it wasn't technically an upper level writing class, but the whole grade was based on a paper. There were no exams or anything, so the same kind of thing.

Interviewer: Okay, so what kinds of writing were you doing in that?

Interviewee: Just kind of taking a specific topic that you're interested in, or sometimes he had some choices, and formulating like an entire scientific paper without doing your own research, but going to 09:46 the process of several revisions of that, and doing the methods, and the discussion, and conclusion, and all of that kind of thing.

Interviewer: Okay. It's largely been research based?

Interviewee: Yeah. Or taking like other research from other papers, and kind of developing your own ideas about it.

Interviewer: Sure.

Interviewee: That kind of thing.

Interviewer: Okay, wonderful. Then, again, if you look at yourself as a writer as a whole, what type of effect have those experiences had on you?

Interviewee: Well, initially it was kind of shocking for me, cuz I was used to getting all A's on my writing, and then getting back those first few papers when it's a lot lower than what I expected, and literally having to realize that I can't just write this really fast and turn it in. It's gonna take a lot more effort for me to get through that, but just kind of taking a step back, and looking at how I have to kind of reformulate everything that I'm used to into a different style.

Interviewer: Okay, all right. You were saying that your—I'm losing my [laughter]—my words have left me there—sorry—that you had to do multiple drafts, and what not, in your concentration. What were the things that you were focusing in, or on, during those kind of drafting times?

Interviewee: I think trying to become more concise in what I was trying to say was a major thing, and just describing more of the scientific part. I kind of tend to go more towards the other side, so I guess focusing in really just on the details, and describing everything really clearly, has been the harder part for me.

Interviewer: Okay. All right, wonderful. Then how confident do you feel as far as writing goes in geology, in your concentration?

Interviewee: I'd say moderate. I know that, you know, additional coursework would help, but I'm graduating this semester.

Interviewer: Congratulations.

Interviewee: Thanks. Since I'm not really planning on going into research in that field or anything, it's not something that I was really concerned about. I think it has been helpful to kind of get into that other style, because in business too, it's gonna be different from comparative literature.

Interviewer: Sure. Can you give me any kind of specific examples of some of these projects that you've been working on in geology?

Interviewee: I took a class on marine resources, and that was my upper level writing class. My paper was comparing the Exxon Valdez oil spill and the Deepwater BP oil spill. I was comparing the cleanup efforts and everything, and what would be best in the future, looking at what's happened in the past, to deal with a situation like that.

Interviewer: Okay. What type of sources were you using?

Interviewee: All primary literature for that.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: Lots of reports about bacteria, or degradation and effects on wildlife and humans, and all that kind of thing.

Interviewer: Okay, wonderful. Then what type of experiences, both in and out of the classroom, do you think have had an effect on your writing?

Interviewee: I guess I'm starting to take more time on my writing. I've always kind of—you know, I just want to write the one draft, turn it in. I don't want to look at it again. I guess becoming more critical of myself too, being able to say, well, I can go back to that. I can do better if I put more time into it, even if I don't feel like it. It has been helpful for me to know that I really should spend more time on my work.

Interviewer: Okay, both, in and out.

Interviewee: Right, yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. Then how has your writing process changed with kind of those experiences in mind?

Interviewee: Yeah, kind of just the same. You know, at birth 13:51, all throughout high school, and everything too, I just write the one draft, turn it in, and expect to get the A. Now, you know, it's more of a process over time. I try to get my ideas down, kind of in an outline, which is something that I usually didn't do before, and then do a few different drafts until I feel comfortable with it.

Interviewer: Okay. How many drafts do you usually do until you feel—?

Interviewee: It's never like one full draft of the entire paper. I'll kind of like get the whole basic outline there, and then I'll probably go back a couple of times to build on certain areas that are weak, or just kind of take out paragraphs here and there, rewrite.

Interviewer: All right. Okay, wonderful. If I use the term, reflective writing, what does that mean to you?

Interviewee: Well, considering I like to do creative writing a lot, that's just kind of—I base that on my own experiences. If something's bothering me, I'll go write some poetry, or create my own short story, or something. I guess just writing about my own experiences, thoughts, feelings, whatever.

Interviewer: Yeah. Okay. Have you used reflective writing at all in any of your courses?

Interviewee: Well, we've done critique. I can't remember which class this was, but I'm pretty sure that we did a critique of our own writing, like looking from an outsider's point of view, so in that way. I guess I kind of put it in another perspective too, pretending I didn't write it, and seeing, well, you know, these are actually more areas that I realized I can improve.

Interviewer: Okay. How was that experience for you? Was it helpful?

Interviewee: I guess kind of just trying to step back from it, and make it like not something that's my own, just putting it in a different perspective, I guess, could kind of help during the revision process.

Interviewer: In what ways do you think that might have been helpful?

Interviewee: Well, also I think it had to do with some of it 16:12 spacing, like the time spacing between it, because turning in the paper, and then waiting a couple weeks until you go back to it, I think that kind of had something to do with it too. Just kind of a fresh perspective, but also just looking at it in a different light, I guess, pretending that you didn't put all that work into—I don't know. It's kind of hard to explain.

Interviewer: No, you're doing great.

Interviewee: Okay.

Interviewer: Yeah, okay, very good. Then what have your experiences of working with other writers in your courses, or in other contacts, kind of been?

Interviewee: We do a lot of peer revisions too. I'm always the type of person who doesn't want to be really harsh towards the other person, because I don't want them to be mean to me. I guess it's been helpful to me too to see—especially in the same types of writing for the scientific stuff—how other people approach the topic, and the style that they use, because I can kind of use that toward my advantage to work on my skills too.

Then just having other students feed back to me, instead of a professor who has a Ph.D. and knows, you know, way more anyway, and has a lot more experience with it—kind of having somebody my own age, at my own level, can be more helpful in the comments and revisions.

Interviewer: Okay. Why do you think that that's more helpful?

Interviewee: Just because, you know, obviously they're not gonna know a ton about my topic already, and they're not gonna focus more on just broad flaws with my writing, I think, just more like smaller things that I can work on and fix over time.

Interviewer: Okay, wonderful. Have you done much group or collaborative writing projects?

Interviewee: I may have done one in my first year writing class, but nothing like very extensive, or for a long term maybe, just like a short writing assignment.

Interviewer: Okay, great. If you were gonna give someone advice about writing, what are some of the things they should think about as they begin writing a paper?

Interviewee: I think confidence is a major thing, just knowing, you know, if you know the material really well. There's not really ever a wrong answer to writing. It's about how you construct your argument, so just knowing going in, and having an outline of what you want to say, and being able to organize and present your information well is the main thing to start out with.

Interviewer: Okay. You're suggesting then that kind of doing the background research is the best place to start?

Interviewee: Depending on what type of writing it is, and the topic, yeah. Having at least a broad idea of what you want to say, and then being able to have at least a short outline to be able to organize your information and your ideas as well, I think that's the most important way to start.

Interviewer: Okay, wonderful. Have you had any experiences with new media writing—so just writing for blogs, or websites, video, PowerPoints, anything that way?

Interviewee: I've done quite a few PowerPoint presentations, actually, based off of the papers that I've written, but that's [fading voice 19:43].

Interviewer: What has your experience been with that?

Interviewee: It's more enjoyable for me at least, cuz it's a lot more—just taking like the main points out of there instead of being stressed out, and getting all of the information that I need, and being able to present it in a way that's more interesting, I guess, to the

audience. I know I wouldn't just sit down and read a lot of scientific articles, cuz sometimes they can be pretty dry, so just presenting it in a way that more people might be open to hearing about it.

Interviewer: Okay. Can you give me an example of a time—like a paper that you turned into a PowerPoint, and then presented?

Interviewee: Mm-hmm. In a class that I took last semester, I wrote about archaeological radiocarbon dating, and how it can be affected by marine reservoirs. The water, and the carbon in the water, can make the ages older or younger than they're supposed to be.

That was a difficult one for me too, just in the writing process, and getting all the information that I needed, but turning it into a PowerPoint, it was only like a ten minute presentation. I was able to add pictures, people ask questions about certain things along the way, and just kind of highlighting the main points that were important for the presentation.

Interviewer: Okay. Who were you presenting it to?

Interviewee: Just to my class—

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: - from my paleoceanography class.

Interviewer: Okay, wonderful. That process of taking your paper, and putting it into a different format, what effect, if any, that you can think of, has that had on you as a writer?

Interviewee: I think that I was a more confident presenting the material, cuz I had so much research on it, but also, I guess, just more confident overall about my writing, cuz I was able to take it, and make it into more of an interesting, like Popular Science, kind of thing, instead of just a dry research paper.

Interviewer: Sure. Okay, wonderful. All right, so now we're gonna look here.

Interviewee: Okay.

Interviewer: I know you've been uploading [inaudible 21:57] tools. How has that process been going for you?

Interviewee: Good.

Interviewer: Yeah?

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: I'll let you pull out the [inaudible 22:07].

Interviewee: Okay.

[Break in Conversation 22:09—23:13]

So, yep, there's the [cross talk 23:16].

Interviewer: Okay, wonderful. So the process has been going well. There haven't been any—?

Interviewee: No.

Interviewer: Okay, great. What pieces did you choose for the archive?

Interviewee: I put one essay from my first year writing class—

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: - and then I put—let's see—oh, okay. It was kind of the same style for an anthropology class that I was taking, so not hard science, but I took a colonial Latin American history class last semester, so that was—I uploaded an essay from that.

Interviewer: Okay. Why did you choose these particular pieces?

Interviewee: I guess that was the style that I felt more confident in. I feel like it's easier for me to see the specific improvements that I had made in that style. Since I didn't really have a background in scientific at all, I haven't made like huge improvements, so I guess it's easier for me to relate to that style more.

Interviewer: Okay. Maybe we could like open it up—

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: - and if you could kind of take me through what you've done for both pieces?

Interviewee: I'll 24:29 see how much I can remember in this one.

Interviewer: Yeah, I know.

Interviewee: In my HAL in literature class, we were reading Dante's Inferno, so this one, I think, was kind of writing about two different themes, or duality in the literature. This one I wrote about fear versus courage, about going into face the underworld when Dante's going through the levels of the inferno. This is a pretty short paper, but just kind

of going through the introduction of, and the background of the story, and describing how both aspects of fear and courage are present in the narrative. Then using specific citations or quotes from the text in describing—kind of using a couple paragraphs to describe each of the aspects, and I think just kind of a conclusion.

Interviewer: Do you remember much about the process of writing this?

Interviewee: At this point, this was—I think this might have been one of the first couple papers that I did here, so I think it was really similar to just kind of my high school. You know, I had read the text. I kind of just sat down and wrote the whole thing in one sitting. That's kind of how I was writing at that point, so yeah.

Interviewer: Okay, all right. What about the other?

Interviewee: Okay, so yeah. We had a take home essay, and based on our last name, we got assigned to a specific topic. We were writing it about a certain figure in colonial Latin American history, and writing about just basically how she contributed to society and stuff at that time.

This woman was Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, and she was actually a nun in the time, and there's a lot of—she was really intelligent for her time, and a lot of people really loved her. Basically, we just wrote about how she affected the society at that time. I don't remember the exact details. Oh, okay, it was based on a letter that she wrote to a priest at that time, so taking from that what we can know about her, and what her life was like, just based on that specific letter.

Interviewer: Okay, interesting. You were saying that you were a little bit more comfortable with the styles of both of these, but they seem maybe different. What do you see are the similarities and what are the differences?

Interviewee: I think the fact that they are both based on a piece of writing, or like a creative historical kind of thing, I guess, they were both kind of describing, and kind of an opinion thing, rather than a hard fact based paper.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: I think, yeah, that's the main similarity.

Interviewer: Okay. What about the differences you see as a writer between them?

Interviewee: I think being able to go into more detail in the more recent one, and referring more to the text, and getting specific details and information that makes my argument stronger in this one, rather than sitting down for an hour, and writing the entire paper, and not just kind of going—whatever's going through my head. Then this one, you know, taking more time, a couple drafts of being able to go back and refer to the text several times.

Interviewer: Okay, all right, wonderful. Any other comments about this or writing as a whole?

Interviewee: Not that I can think of.

Interviewer: Okay, great. Well, I think that's kind of the [fading voice 28:42], so let me—

[End of Audio]