

Interviewer: Today is Friday, March 29th. I'm \*\*\*, and I will be interviewing—

Interviewee: \*\*\*.

Interviewer: Okay. Thank you. \*\*\*, how do you describe yourself as a writer?

Interviewee: I would say that I had a very good writing program in high school. I'd say I'm a fairly strong writer. You know, probably a better analytical writer than—it's weird, because I'm moving into the scientific realm of things because I'm going to be a bio major. That's a very different type of academic writing than English.

Interviewer: Yeah. Absolutely.

Interviewee: I really think that I'm a stronger English writer right now just because scientific writing is so straightforward.

Interviewer: You think you're better as an English, like more narrative—

Interviewee: Yes, because that's what I've learned my entire life. That's how I've learned to write, but now I'm just—

Interviewer: You came in fairly confident with your writing skills?

Interviewee: Yes, yes.

Interviewer: Tell me a little bit more about that. How would you say, how have you progressed as a writer since entering the university? Do you think you've changed from high school to now?

Interviewee: I might actually be a little worse. [Laughter] Yes, but only because of the types of classes I've chosen to take. I took my first year writing seminar in the Residential College. That didn't help me that much.

Interviewer: Is that the same as [English course]? Or—

Interviewee: Yeah, it's just like—

Interviewer: - is it essentially the same, but just based in the Residential College?

Interviewee: Right. Yeah. I mean, they have more specific topics and maybe smaller classes.

Interviewer: What was the focus of your class?

Interviewee: It was gender studies in southeast Asia. Yeah, it was not what I was expecting when I went into it, but it definitely turned out to be interesting. The papers

that I had to write weren't super challenging, I guess. There was one where we had to analyze this piece of music, the style of music from Indonesia, which didn't really require a lot of my writing skills. She was basically like, "Just write down what you hear," and so I did. It was fairly easy.

Interviewer: You say it didn't involve a lot of your writing skills. What writing skills were you hoping it would draw on or call for?

Interviewee: Well, I guess with the other papers that we were doing, we were analyzing books, so it required me to do a lot of critical thinking about the books and use quotes and analyze those, which was what I was more used to. I felt like the music paper was just writing exactly what I heard, and that was fine. There was no tailoring it to sound like super good. I don't know. It didn't—

Interviewer: You feel like in high school you were kind of trained to use an academic tone? Or—

Interviewee: Yeah. There was definitely a structure that you were supposed to follow in high school, like start with a broad topic sentence and then narrow down to your thesis, and then three body paragraphs, and then a really good conclusion.

Interviewer: You said earlier, and I think it's interesting, you said earlier that you feel like you've actually gotten worse as a writer. Can you talk more about that?

Interviewee: Yes. I feel like because I don't really take English classes anymore, and I do take—I guess I take, no, not really humanities, like social science classes still. A lot of my course load is science, so much science, where you don't really have to write papers. All you have to do is learn the material and take exams. When I do take a class where I do have papers, it's kind of a challenge for me just because I have kind of forgotten how to write essays. It's good practice for me to take a class every semester where I do have to write some essays just to keep up my knowledge.

I guess, this semester, I'm taking a poly sci [Political Science] class, but even still, those haven't really been real essays because they're super short essays. They're called micro themes, is what we do. We just have to write one page papers on refuting an argument mainly. I guess I'm still good at using material from things that we read and analyzing that and making an argument out of it. I'm still good at that, but if I were to have to write a 20-page essay, I don't know how well I could do that.

Interviewer: What would be the specific struggle there for you, do you think?

Interviewee: Probably just—I think I've gotten really good at being concise. I mean, I guess I am okay at filling in space when I need to just to make things longer. [Laughter] I end up getting redundant if I do that, so I think I've learned to be very concise. I feel like 20 pages would be not—it would be pointless.

Interviewer: Sure. Okay, yeah. What are your goals as you go forward? You said you were a sophomore. What would you like to do as a writer as you continue at Michigan?

Interviewee: I guess it would be good to relearn how to write good essays. I know I have to take an upper-level writing class, and there are lots of options that I could do with that. I could go more sciency 00:05:34 and learn how to write really good scientific papers, which I think would be more useful for the career path that I'm headed towards.

Interviewer: What sort of skills would you hope to get from a class like that, specifically, that you don't have now?

Interviewee: I guess just being able to—like with scientific papers, you need to be concise, but you also need to be really clear in your methods and what you did because you're usually writing to a scientific audience. They need to understand why you did something. You need to—I think you need to limit the amount of questions that they can ask you about your experimental procedures, so you need to convey why you made the decisions that you did. I think I would need to work on that, just really thinking through how I thought through the experiment and then putting that on paper.

Interviewer: That's kind of how you envisioned using writing, I guess, as you go forward, is kind of in that academic, scientific—

Interviewee: Yes, but also at the same time, I don't know how much I want to be a researcher. Because I'm still a sophomore, so I'm figuring it out and because I do like non-scientific writing more. I might like to learn how to write maybe opinion articles or do some sort of journalism just because I like kind of being able to be creative with my writing, which isn't necessarily a—

Interviewer: What creative things are you drawn to in terms of writing?

Interviewee: Not really like poetry or anything, but more just taking an idea or a thought that I have and trying to express that maybe in writing, trying to get people thinking about a thought that I've had. I don't know if that makes sense. [Laughter]

Interviewer: Yeah, that makes sense. Yeah. Yeah, you wanna—you're interested, it sounds like, in expressing emotions and thoughts and feelings rather than just maybe findings from a study, having a balance of those skills.

Interviewee: Because the thing that I like about science, I guess, is that it has facts, but I would more like to apply that—I guess I'm more social sciency, even though I'm going to be a bio major. I would like to apply the science to real-life situations, so I think I'd want to try to make that connection. Maybe I could take scientific findings and apply those through writing to a real-world situation. I don't know what kind of job that is. [Laughter]

Interviewer: You don't have to have that answer now. [Laughter]

Interviewee: That sounds most appealing to me, I guess, as a writer.

Interviewer: Okay, good. Thinking across your writing experiences at Michigan, what do you think it means to write well? What is good writing to you?

Interviewee: That's a good question. I think, I guess, being super clear is a good thing to start off with.

Interviewer: Can you talk more about what you mean by clear?

Interviewee: Yes. I guess, if I were to think about the normal way that I learned how to write an essay in high school, I think that I still basically follow that pattern into college. You want to introduce your audience to the topic that you're talking about, but you can't just throw it at them. You wanna put it in a broader context of why it's important. I think a good strong thesis is important just so your audience knows what you're talking about and what argument you're going to make. I guess I'm talking about argumentative things right now.

Then, you need a lot of support, so I think credible sources are good when you're writing and being able to analyze those really well. You can't just throw something in there and expect someone to be able to interpret why you threw it in there on your own. You need to be able to explain why you put it in there concisely but also—I don't know—well. [Laughter] I don't know what word I'm looking for. Just make it clear to them why you put it in there, but analyze it in a very clear way. You can't just ramble on. [Laughter]

Interviewer: Okay. It sounds like for you, clearness, or clarity, is tied a lot to how well you're communicating your argument.

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: Is that right?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay, then my next question is—and you already talked briefly about this—but your first year writing requirement course you took in the Residential College. Can you point to any specific skills or experiences that you had in that class that still affect you as a writer?

Interviewee: Yeah, I think my professor was really good at making me clean out my essays, kind of. Like I said, I'm really good at filling in space in my essays just to make them the appropriate length that my teachers want them to be, but usually, I guess, in the beginning of my freshman year, I was just putting things in that weren't really necessary. There were other space-fillers I could use that were more pertinent to what I was talking about, so she helped me to realize how to cut things down and how to—she also helped

me to organize my papers in a good way because I guess my process for writing a paper is to just wing it at first, just get kind of a skeleton or an outline going. Then, I'll fill in stuff as I go and make it more coherent. I guess for one of my specific papers, I definitely could've put things in a better order. She taught me that order was important in your paragraphs and the formation of your argument. I thought that was kind of interesting.

Interviewer: You said that she helped you figure out what stuff was irrelevant or maybe not as useful to your argument.

Interviewee: Right.

Interviewer: What sort of questions do you ask to figure that out when you're looking at your writing now?

Interviewee: Well, I always have to—while I'm writing, I get really focused on nit-picky details because I'm a super perfectionist. I guess sometimes I lose sight of the bigger picture of why I'm writing the essay. Now I kind of take a step back, and I think about what my argument is and how this specific thing that I'm writing relates to that argument and relates to the bigger context of what I'm writing about. I think that she helped me do that.

Interviewer: Did you take [Writing course]?

Interviewee: No.

Interviewer: Okay, and what is your concentration? Do you have one?

Interviewee: I haven't declared yet.

Interviewer: Do you have a sense of what you might do?

Interviewee: I'm thinking of double majoring in ecology and evolutionary biology and a program in the environment.

Interviewer: Okay. Since you haven't—sorry. Just skipped ahead now in my questions. I'm sorry. You've talked a little bit about, you haven't declared your bio major yet, have you? Okay, but you have taken classes in biology, and you've written for those, I assume, to some degree. Can you say anything more specific, 'cause you've touched on it already, about how you use writing in biology classes? What specific skills they call on you to use as a writer?

Interviewee: Yeah, so I'm taking a bio lab class right now that's required for bio majors. One of the big things that you do—two of the big things that you do in that class, are read a really dense scientific article and summarize it. That's really difficult because it's a super technical article about things you're not really familiar with, and you have to summarize that into three pages. These scientific articles have like size eight font and a

bunch of graphs that you have to analyze. [Laughter] That's really hard, but I think it's really useful because it makes you think critically about what that study was. It teaches you how to read scientific articles, which is good.

More on the writing side, there's another task that they have you do which is write a scientific paper. I've had experience with that at the U of M biological station. I don't know if you know where that is. It's up north. [Laughter] You take classes, and you have to write a paper about this experiment that you design and perform. We, basically, do that same thing a little bit less intensely in this bio class. What they like you to do on scientific papers is make it as clear as possible what the experiment was about, how you set up the experiment, an intro to and background information for why you even performed the experiment, why is it important in real life. I don't know if I answered your question.

Interviewer: Yeah, I just asked you how are you using writing now, and so you gave me the two, the summary use of dense scientific articles and then what sounds like a lab report to me, the second assignment?

Interviewee: Yeah. Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Okay, good.

Interviewer: Yeah, and then I am working in a lab right now through [inaudible 00:15:43]. I don't know—yeah. I also have to write a scientific paper. I have kind of written a scientific paper on this experiment that we were doing, and I realized that through scientific papers, I have an opportunity to also utilize some of my creative writing skills, which is, I guess, maybe my, because I think I'm a pretty good academic writer, as opposed to scientific writer. I think that that actually really benefits me when I'm writing scientific papers.

Interviewer: How come?

Interviewer: Yeah, it just like—I think that I can be really clear and concise. I know I always use those words. It just, I think that I can get my point across in a very sophisticated-sounding but also concise way, which is important because you wanna keep your scientific papers kind of shortish 00:16:46. Especially in the introduction because the rest of the parts of a scientific paper are pretty, just like spitting out numbers, and this is what we did. They're pretty—I don't know. They don't leave room for creativity, but in the intro, I like being able to connect what the experiment was to the bigger picture, which is where my academic writing comes in, and I can use prose and big words. [Laughter]

Interviewer: Yeah. That makes sense. Yeah. How confident, generally, do you feel about writing scientific papers? You mentioned you can bring in your academic skills to writing for biology. Generally, do you feel confident about yourself as a writer in biology?

Interviewee: Yeah. I think, because I've had a little bit of experience with it, I think I'm more comfortable now. I know how they work and how people want them to be written. They're actually, probably, the easiest papers that you're going to write just because there's not much you can—they don't want you to talk about too much. They only want you to say exactly what that section calls for. Like results, you just basically talk about the numbers that you got. You don't even interpret them at all. That's saved for discussion. I don't know. That's—

Interviewer: You feel good about that middle section. It sounds like you draw on your prose skills for that first section when you're introducing it—

Interviewee: Definitely for the intro, and sometimes for the discussion, too.

Interviewer: Okay, good. Let's see. Now I wanna ask you a little bit about experiences outside the classroom that affect your writing. Do you have any experience writing outside the classroom? How do you use writing in your regular life or in your extracurricular life?

Interviewee: I guess I don't have much of an extracurricular life. [Laughter] Basically, my extracurricular life is my job, and that's where I still use my scientific writing skills. [Laughter]

Interviewer: Okay. [Laughter]

Interviewee: I don't really write in my free time, even though sometimes I want to. I might write ideas for a poem or something, but I never get around to it, so. [Laughter]

Interviewer: You're interested in poetry, and sometimes you jot ideas for poems. Did you, in the past, write poetry? Now it's like the time or—

Interviewee: Not in my free time, but in high school when we had to have poetry assignments or personal narratives. I think that they would be fun, but I don't just really write for fun usually.

Interviewer: Do you use social media or anything like that?

Interviewee: Yeah, I have a Facebook and—

Interviewer: Do you do writing on that? Updating on that or anything?

Interviewee: Not too much, no. [Laughter]

Interviewer: Okay. [Laughter] Have to check. You would say, generally, that your experiences outside of school as a writer are fairly limited. Would you say that they've had any affect on your writing in school?

Interviewee: I don't really think so, no.

Interviewer: Okay. Let's see. What have your experiences of working with other writers in your courses been like?

Interviewee: It's always kind of really dependent on the situation because when we do peer review, sometimes, most of the time, I don't find that useful just because usually when you're doing peer review, your professor wants you to bring a draft in. I guess the way that I look at drafts is like the farther I get along on my draft, the less work I have to do later. Usually my drafts are fairly good when we peer review. Then, the person that I'm working with usually doesn't have much done, so I end up helping them more, which is always the case. [Laughter] That's what I've found to be—

Interviewer: Was that your situation in [English course] or the course that you took instead of [English course]? Or do you do workshop in other classes, as well?

Interviewee: We do it in some of my other classes, too. Yeah, I guess in [English course] it was kind of that situation, too. What was the question again?

Interviewer: Just about what have your experiences been like. Have you done it? How has it affected your writing? Or not affected your writing, I guess.

Interviewee: Yeah, mainly—

Interviewer: It sounds like you give feedback to other writers. Is that right? In peer review?

Interviewee: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: Can you talk about that? What that's like?

Interviewee: I think that it's—I think peer review is interesting because everyone looks at the assignment in a different way, so it's cool to see someone else's viewpoint on something and how they write about things. It's kind of hard to ignore someone else's writing style completely and not change something in a way that would make it sound better to you because their way is usually perfectly fine. It just is not how you write. I think that it's hard for—that's an important part to overlook while you're peer reviewing. That's another instance where I need to look at the bigger picture of what, exactly, the assignment was and what we're writing about and how everything that they write connects back to that bigger picture. That's what I look at while I'm reading their papers.

Interviewer: It's kind of this question of looking at the assignment again and getting maybe a new understanding of what the requirements are?

Interviewee: Yeah, because they could definitely use different sources of support for their argument, and I have to see if it's a valid use of that quote or something.

Interviewer: Then the next question is, your writing in biology, obviously, and probably in other classes, do you have any experience with group or collaborative writing where you work with a couple of other people to write a paper?

Interviewee: Yeah. When I went to the bio station, because I did the experiment that I worked on with my group members, we all had to collaborate and write that paper all together. I think we all picked a different part, and we put it all together in the end.

Interviewer: Did you have to revise it together?

Interviewee: Yeah. [Laughter]

Interviewer: What was that like?

Interviewee: Yeah, we wrote all the parts separately, we put them together, and then we went through it together. I don't think that we changed too much of each other's writing styles, but we just kind of made the sections flow better so that—I don't know—it made more sense. It wasn't that hard just because it was a scientific paper. I think that if it were an academic paper, I think it would be more difficult.

Interviewer: Why?

Interviewee: [Laughter] Just because scientific papers, the parts are very specified about what they want from you. It's more like a section that you can write, and then you'll be good to go. With an essay, I think you would have to work harder to make it flow together, and you would have to make sure that all the parts were important. I don't know. That's all.

Interviewer: That's good. If you were gonna give advice about writing to someone else, what are some things that they should think about as they begin writing a paper?

Interviewee: I think definitely depends on what type of paper you're writing. Just think about the bigger picture of why you're even writing this paper because there's obviously some point to you forming an opinion about it or making an argument about the topic.

Interviewer: When you say bigger picture—

Interviewee: I guess, just what's the point of why you're writing, what kind of context are you putting your writing in.

Interviewer: What sort of context meaning kind of considering the audience? Or—

Interviewee: Yeah, considering the audience and how, exactly, you're going to approach the subject that you're talking about. I don't know. This is very abstract. [Laughter] Usually you have a topic for your paper, and you have specific requirements that you

need to fulfill for that paper. I guess you just have to think about how best to fulfill those requirements and make it clear to your audience what you're arguing or what you're talking about.

Interviewer: Okay. Then, do you have any experiences with new media writing, like writing for blogs or websites, using sound or video in the composing process—

Interviewee: No.

Interviewer: PowerPoint presentations?

Interviewee: Yes. [Laughter] I mean, I have to make PowerPoint presentations for class, but that's different just because you have to—you still have to know what you're talking about, but you have to make the slides not overwhelming. You can't always be looking at your PowerPoint and reading off of it. You need to know what you're talking about, but you need to put the most important information, in bullet points usually, up on the screen so that your audience can follow along but also listen to what you're saying. Yeah, just you have to highlight the important points.

Interviewer: What's your process for creating a PowerPoint presentation?

Interviewee: Well, usually I have a rubric to follow, so I don't usually have to think that much about it. Probably, I think I usually put in a lot of detail in the beginning and a lot of bullet points and a lot of information, but then I pare it down. I go through it, and I kind of practice a little bit about what I'm gonna say, and then I pare down the information that doesn't need to be on there that I can just say and tell my audience.

Interviewer: Does the process of creating a PowerPoint presentation at all inform the way that you write? Has it changed the way that you write in any way?

Interviewee: No, I don't think so. I think it might be the opposite, actually, just because at least if I'm making a PowerPoint on a paper that I've already written, just as a presentation to go along with it, I'll take the things from my paper that I've written and all the thought process that I went through, and I'll pick out the key points. Basically what I'll say is everything that I wrote in the paper, but the key points will be highlighted on the PowerPoint. It's just like a super condensed summary of what I wrote.

Interviewer: What you've already written.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. All right. You have been uploading pieces of writing to the study archive on CTools [learning management system] 00:28:32. How has that been going for you?

Interviewee: It's been fine. It's not really extra work 'cause I've already written the papers, so I just put them up there.

Interviewer: What have you been uploading? That kills me.

Interviewee: Yes. They're were some papers from my first year writing seminar. There was some analysis of some books that we read about Indonesia, I think. Those are pretty short, actually. The thing is, I haven't at all had to write a super long essay at this university yet, so I'm a little bit—

Interviewer: What's the longest piece of writing you've had to do so far?

Interviewee: I think probably like five pages. [Laughter] I know.

Interviewer: Wow. Do you—is that one of your—would you like to write a long paper before you graduate? [Laughter]

Interviewee: I think that—it's not that I would want to, but I feel like it's a college experience that I should have to experience. Just because I remember my sister—she went here, too—she would always—I'd call her sometimes, and she'd be like, "I'm in the middle of writing a 20-page essay right now, so I can't talk." [Laughter]

Interviewer: What was her major?

Interviewee: She was an anthropology major, so yeah. I think just—I like taking social science classes, and I don't have a problem with—I don't have a confidence problem with my writing. I'm not really afraid to take social science classes or anything, but my concentration path just requires that I take a bunch of science classes. I think that I would like to take more social science classes in the future and continue working on my writing.

Interviewer: Do you have a sense—and I don't know anything about the biology major—but biology won't ever require you to produce something really lengthy, it sounds like? Probably not? Okay.

Interviewee: Probably not.

Interviewer: Then, so you mentioned you uploaded a couple of pieces from—

Interviewee: Oh, yeah. We're still talking about that.

Interviewer: Oh, that's okay. [Laughter] You mentioned you uploaded a couple of pieces from your first writing requirement class. How would you choose those pieces?

Interviewee: Oh, well, I thought that because—oh, part of the first year writing seminar process, too, was rewriting. We could either, for some of the papers, we could choose to rewrite, and some of them, we, if we did it on our own, we got—I don't know—extra

credit or something. I think that those two that I uploaded, I rewrote and my teacher liked, so that was my process for putting them on there. [Laughter]

Interviewer: What did she like about them? Or what were you proud of them?

Interviewee: Well, they were—I think they were much—I don't remember. She had problems with them in the beginning, and then we had a meeting. She told me what she thought could be improved, and then I just followed those instructions. She liked them a lot better. I think it was probably just like the order of paragraphs and unnecessary quotes that I could take out. I don't remember exactly what those papers were on, but.  
[Laughter]

Interviewer: It was a while ago.

Interviewee: Yeah. I think another one that I uploaded, too, was from my anthro-bio class, so that was basically—that was another really easy assignment. [Laughter] It was just talking—I had to answer questions that kind of took into account the entire course and topics we had been learning throughout the entire course. It wasn't super specific, but it was more like—I don't know. I'd have to get super specific, actually. It was like I had to take facts that we learned from all the different units of the course and then answer a question, not really that we had answered in class, but just think about it myself and answer it.

Interviewer: Was it a question that you came up with or one that your professor did?

Interviewee: No, it was questions that she came up with.

Interviewer: Then kind of tying the themes of the class to that question?

Interviewee: Yeah, but it wasn't like an essay. They were very short, probably like a page-long answer to each question.

Interviewer: Oh, so was it—so what you uploaded, was it a series of papers, essentially? Or was it one cohesive paper?

Interviewee: I think it was a series of papers. I made a new paper for every question that I answered, but they weren't really long.

Interviewer: Okay, sure.

Interviewee: Yeah. I mean, I did have to use sources from class, but they weren't super detailed.

Interviewer: The total length of that piece with all of its little components, how long was that, do you think?

Interviewee: Probably like five pages.

Interviewer: Probably about five. Okay. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about writing at Michigan? Or about your writing, in general?

Interviewee: I don't think so.

Interviewer: Okay. Sounds good. Thank you very much.

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