

Interviewer: All right, there we go. This is ***. It is Monday, April 27th. I keep losing track of days. I am here with ***. [...].

[...]

Interviewer: I'm just gonna ask you some questions about writing in general, some broad questions about writing. Then we'll talk about your writing experiences here at [the University of Michigan] and some of the classes you've taken. I'll ask you some questions about the archive that you've uploaded writing to for the past couple of years.

Interviewee: Okay, sounds good.

Interviewer: Then we'll be done.

Interviewee: Okay, great.

Interviewer: Pretty easy stuff. My first question is probably question, start kind of big. How would you describe yourself as a writer?

Interviewee: I think that's a—yeah, I don't know. I guess in terms of the way that I write it's very—sometimes it can be excessive. I think throughout college I've learned how to be a little bit more succinct and to the point which is really good. In general I tend to try to make everything sound nice, which sometimes adds extra words to it. Yeah, other than that, yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. How would you have described yourself as a writer when you started here at Michigan?

Interviewee: I think I was a lot more—I don't know how to describe it. I guess I use a lot of flowery language I guess. I used a lot more words, tried to make things sound a lot more than fancy than it needed to be. I think that that was how I started off here at Michigan and think that's developed more into a really cohesive writing style that's more like succinct to the point. A lot of that has to do with the fact that I'm a science major. If I'm trying to make a point, I want to make it more—and I want to make it clearly—I want to be as clear as possible. That means that I'm writing a lot shorter sentences, using a lot less flowery language, just so that everything is clear and to the point. I guess a lot of the times maybe when I first got to Michigan my point wasn't always as clear. I didn't always have an argument that I was making, and I think that's obviously developed over time.

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

Interviewee: It's hard because I mean I don't really plan to do too much writing in my future. I'm pre-med and I'm applying to med school this upcoming summer again. The amount of writing I'll be doing is gonna be very slim. I can't really say there's many plans. I guess if I do any kind of writing it'll be scientific writing, and meaning that my writing will continue to get more succinct. I hope to develop more as a scientific writer, being able to if I need to write grants or write papers. I want to be able to make a point and have a lay person understand what I'm trying to say. Those are things that I hope to develop and I hope that I have been developing in the years before.

Interviewer: Makes a lot of sense. As you think about your writing experiences across UofM [University of Michigan], all of the classes you've taken here, maybe some of the extracurricular activities you've done, what would you say that it means to write well? This is another big broad question. What this question is kind of really getting at is what does good writing look like to you?

Interviewee: I think the most important part of good writing is having a central point to what you're saying. I think stuff like, for example last year when I was trying to write my personal statement, I didn't necessarily have a point in what I was trying to say—

Interviewer: For med school?

Interviewee: For med school, yeah. I didn't necessarily have a point in what I was trying to say. Now that I'm rewriting a new personal statement for med school this upcoming cycle, I have developed more like a theme and stuff like that. I think the most important part of a good writing piece is having a central argument or something that you're trying to say. Once you have that I think everything else falls into place.

Interviewer: Which ULWR, the upper level writing courses, have you taken?

Interviewee: I took AAPTIS [course], [title of course], my freshman year. I took Great Books first semester and I took [different AAPTIS course] which is upper level writing course second semester and I've also taken—forgot what the— [Chemistry course] which is biochemistry lab. That's also upper level—

Interviewer: Another ULWR?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. What were your experiences like in those courses?

Interviewee: I took [title of course] freshman year. That was fine. It was a lot of writing. It was definitely intensive. We'd had at least one writing piece a week, and then a huge writing piece at the end of the semester. It was very content-

oriented because it was all about Arab culture. It was a very interesting course. My experience of that was very similar to what I was saying about the most important part of the piece being the thesis. I know that when I started writing my eight-page paper, I just had a lot of different ideas and I was just writing everything down and had a lot of information. Then my roommate sat down and read it and she's like, "So what's your argument here?" I was like, "I don't have one." Once I had one it was so much easier to write the whole thing.

I think with the science upper level reading course, it's a little bit easier cuz they give you your—they tell you please write about this genetically modified organism that you find interesting. At that point you have what you're writing about, like "This genetically modified organism is interesting for these reasons." Then you write a three-page paper on that. It's very different experiences. Lab report, same thing, everything is already kind of set out for you. That makes it a little bit easier. I guess one of the things I like about science is you do have to think about what you're writing obviously, but there's a lot more structure to it than a creative writing piece.

Interviewer: Makes a lot of sense to me. Do you still use what you learned in those ULWR courses now?

Interviewee: No, not really. I wouldn't say. At least not this semester. This semester I've just been like micro bio and two economics courses and neither of those require me to do too much writing. I can't say that I've done a ton of that. Right now while I'm writing my personal statement I do consider obviously I want a theme to my writing. I want an idea that I'm trying to get across. I don't know exact—I've obviously learned something by doing all those writing pieces, but I can't say I directly learned it. It was more of an indirect learning just from consistent writing.

Interviewer: Makes a lot of sense. What other writing courses—I know you mentioned the Great Books course?

Interviewee: Yeah, I took Great Books and then I took [AAPTIS course]—

Interviewer: Then a chem.

Interviewee: Yeah, the chem course. Then I've also taken—I was abroad last year in [country]. I took [title of course] which is like a literature course on just Kafka. I wrote a few things for that.

Interviewer: Wow.

Interviewee: It was fun. Yeah, that was a good time.

Interviewer: Cool. You sort of touched on this a little bit already. Have those courses affected the writing that you've done since then in your concentration?

Interviewee: A little bit I would say, but not too much just cuz like I said, we don't really do too much writing as part of a bimolecular science major. Any of the classes that I do writing for usually like lab courses—

Interviewer: Do you produce lab reports and that kind of thing?

Interviewee: Yeah, mostly that. Yeah. I haven't really done much of that since [Chemistry course], the first semester of my junior year. Yeah, this year it's mostly been like a year of exams mostly. I don't really have—okay, yeah, I did take [Economics course] last semester and that was more of a course where you needed a central thesis. You're trying to be very, very succinct because that was a three-page paper and you couldn't go over on that. It's like a three-page paper where it's like 50 percent of your grade or something like that, and you're just like trying to get all the information you've learned in one semester in three pages. That really forced me to learn how to be very to the point which was really nice and that was something that I have learned.

Interviewer: That sounds challenging.

Interviewee: Yeah. It was definitely not fun, but it was a good way to learn how to have a very clear point and then get that point across as succinctly as possible which was really great. Also something that I learned from the other courses that I took, just being clear in what I'm saying and saying everything in as short a way as possible.

Interviewer: The next question is did you take writing courses in your concentration, and you took the chem lab, but it sounds like that's it?

Interviewee: Yes, yes. That's about it. All other classes are [crosstalk 09:28].

Interviewer: I keep asking you the same question in multiple ways there. How often have you used those skills or strategies? I'm hearing you say things about like an econ class learning how to really pare down a lot of content into a short amount of space, that kinda thing.

Interviewee: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: How often have you used strategies like that, like you were just talking about, in other courses? Maybe not in writing courses but other kinds of courses?

Interviewee: I guess studying for any kind of exam you're trying to figure out what exactly is the most important parts of—and like outlined it and whatever.

Sitting down. Usually my best way of studying is self-study, so I'll sit down and read a textbook and that's how I study best and being able to sit down and write down the most important parts of what I'm reading, and learn from that rather than write down every single sentence that's in a textbook, which is kinda what I used to do is—yeah, that's kinda how I've developed that skill more. Just like understanding what's important and understanding what's not important. That's just something you learn from writing and you also are able to apply to other classes when you're trying to study.

Interviewer: Over the past two years what experiences both in and out of the classrooms—not just stuff in courses, but outside of classes as well—has had an effect on your writing?

Interviewee: I guess also I'm in an honors fraternity on campus. I've had leadership positions and that for the last two years, and which means sending out a lot of e-mails, but also bothering people. Like learning how to be very clear, very like showing them what's important, making sure that you're not spending writing whole paragraphs out so that they'll actually read what you're saying. I've definitely used it in that way, making sure that the people that I'm writing these e-mails to understand what's important.

Interviewer: It's an important skill.

Interviewee: Yeah, definitely [*mumbling*].

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

Interviewee: Just reminds me of the personal statement I'm currently writing, reflecting upon what's going on around me, what's going on with me specifically. That's kinda what I think of when I think of reflective writing, being able to think about what's the world around you, put that to paper which I think is probably one of the hardest things I've ever had to do in my life.

Interviewer: It's really difficult.

Interviewee: Yeah. Just being able to coherently write out what you might observe around you. Yeah. I don't know. I'm writing a little one right now and it's really hard to put pen to paper.

Interviewer: It's a hard thing write.

Interviewee: Yeah, for sure.

Interviewer: When I wrote mine for grad school it was really difficult.

Interviewee: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: You said you wrote one last year as well, and now you're writing that personal statement.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: How has that writing it over a year ago now and—I guess it was over a year ago, right?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Now writing this version out, sounds like you've pretty much started over.

Interviewee: Yeah. No, I'm writing a completely different one.

Interviewer: How has that process changed for you over the past year? Does that question make sense?

Interviewee: A bit. Yeah, for sure. I think it's not really the thing that I'm writing about kinda changed a lot. I've decided that I wasn't being reflective enough in my other one. I was more just listing my résumé in 600 words, like this is what I did and this is why I did it and this is why I decided I wanted to be a doctor kind of thing. That's not really what med schools are looking for. They're looking for you to reflect upon your experiences and to show what you've learned from it, and say something beyond what your application already tells you—what the application already tells you.

Interviewer: How did you find that out? Like to—

Interviewee: Yeah. First of all I kind of knew it. When I was writing it the first time I was just like crunched for time. I was applying kind of later in the cycle, and I was just like this is good enough. It's not gonna make or break my application, so I might as well not spend too much time on it. I also spent a lot of time with the career center after I finished applying trying to figure out like gap-year options, figure out whether I was going to reapply and stuff like that because I wasn't getting the best choices for schools that I wanted to interview at and stuff like that.

Yeah. I mean I did spend a lot of time with the career center. I sat down with someone there. He kind of told me the same thing that I was kinda like listing all of my achievements thus far and on a piece of paper when I really didn't need to do that, since I did have the rest of my application to do that. Yeah. We sat down and talked about it a bit. Then I just thought about it a little bit more.

Yeah, the topics are completely different. In the last one I pretty much just talked about my experience with science and going into research in high school and how I really liked that, and that took me towards medicine eventually. Then in this one I'm talking about something a lot more personal, something that you wouldn't get from an application.

Interviewer: How do you feel about the personal statement that you write? I know it's a hard thing to write.

Interviewee: Yeah, for sure.

Interviewer: How do you feel about that more reflective personal statement versus the previous version?

Interviewee: I like it a lot more. [...]. I have much more of a theme. It's not just "I wanna be a doctor" which is what my theme was last time around. It's more like I wanna be a doctor because I've seen the lack of care and the lack of resources that underserved populations have, and I wanna be a part of the solution.

I think this time around I feel really good about my personal statement. I actually just finished it yesterday, my first draft, looking forward to editing it and making sure it's really good.

Interviewer: That's awesome. That's fantastic. Sounds really interesting.

Interviewee: Yeah, no, I'm pumped about it. I really like it.

Interviewer: Sounds like it. When is it due?

Interviewee: The application comes out officially on June 1, and I want to have everything in by then, just so it's all rolling admissions.

Interviewer: Wow. That's awesome. Whoa.

Interviewee: Yeah. I wanna get it in as soon as possible.

Interviewer: You have a busy few weeks.

Interviewee: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: What have your recent experiences been of working with other writer in your courses or perhaps in out-of-class context? Have you done any kind of collaborative work or group projects or peer work shopping, that kind of thing?

Interviewee: I think I did a lot more of that earlier on in my undergraduate career because I was taking more general broad-based courses and I was taking more

courses that required that. I think the higher the level of the course the more independent work there seems to be. At least that's what I've noticed. I mean my upper level writing course through the biochem [Biochemistry] lab course was all on—we did have some group stuff for that for sure. What do you mean by my experience?

Interviewer: Just sort of what have you done with other writers, what kind of writing communities have you been a part of, that kind of thing.

Interviewee: Okay, okay.

Interviewer: Some people do group projects, some people actually write papers collaboratively. Some people do a lot of peer-work shopping, that kind of thing. We're just trying to get a sense of what's going on.

Interviewee: Yeah, fair enough. Not too much peer-work shopping I would say. I think earlier on in my undergraduate career I did a lot of lab work with other people. My freshman and sophomore year it was mostly just like lab courses where you have to write lab reports together and stuff like that. My semester abroad I also took an economics and transition course. That's like transition from—it was in [country] so it's from the Soviet Union from Communism back towards the market economy. We wrote a paper together for that on the Ukraine. Yeah, there's three members in that. We separated it into three sections and each of us wrote a part of it. It was pretty good. I wouldn't say there was a lot of collaboration. We each just decided on one part and we then edited it together.

Interviewer: Wow. Now that you're about to graduate what kind of advice would you give to college students about writing in college? What are some things they should think about before they sit down to write?

Interviewee: I mean definitely the idea of having a central argument is super important and something that you don't realize you don't have until sometimes you're like, oh, I thought that I was saying this, but you don't really—I don't know. That's how I usually feel. I'm like, oh, I thought I had an argument but then you think about it really and what is my argument? Like I don't know—

Interviewer: What makes you realize that you don't have one when it's up there?

Interviewee: I think sometimes it's very helpful to have somebody else read it, for one thing. If you have a friend who is actually gonna be honest with you and be like, "So what are you actually saying here?" That's always been super helpful for me. Then just reading it over and asking yourself the question. Like what is my argument here will tell you that you're—will give you a better sense of whether you actually have a thesis or a main idea or a theme or whatever. I think there's a ton of really great resources on campus that are worth using and I wish I'd use more of like as an undergrad, more people should use.

Interviewer: What kind of resources do you wish you'd use more?

Interviewee: I think definitely the first time around I wish I had had—I had been abroad so I didn't really have the opportunity to talk to the career center as much and get more help from them when I was applying. Also, the Sweetland writing center, just talking to professors. I think I definitely did a lot of that. I know in Great Books I had plenty of opportunities to talk to my GSI [Graduate Student Instructor] and get a lot of help, but I feel even in classes that aren't writing courses, people don't use the resources they have. They don't show up to *[inaudible 19:45]* centers as much as they should and all that. That's a super helpful resource.

Interviewer: You mentioned having other people read your papers was helpful.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Who did you have read your papers? Like who was a helpful person for you to have look at your work?

Interviewee: Well, definitely my roommate from my freshman year was—I mean me and her roomed together until this year. She looked at my papers a good amount at least my freshman year. Then also I'd have one of my best friends who doesn't go here, I'd have her look at a lot of my stuff I know for med school. When I was applying this year I literally had her read every single thing that I wrote.

Interviewer: That's nice of her.

Interviewee: Yeah, yeah. We're there for each other. I mean we've known each other since we were three. Yeah. Either that or either my roommate or my best friend from third grade. [...].

[...]

Interviewer: Interesting. It's nice to have that kind of support.

Interviewee: For sure. Definitely. Definitely necessary.

Interviewer: Really interesting. Have you had any experiences here at Michigan with new media writing? I'm thinking about things like blogs or websites, making an electronic portfolio, making videos, that kind of thing?

Interviewee: I had to make a video for my French class in my sophomore year for [French course]. That was a pretty big deal. One of the people in my group was in the informatics at school, informatics at school, so she did most of it so I can't say

that I have too much experience with that. Then I was in an econ course that started off with blogging, but I ended up dropping out.

Interviewer: Okay. Have you ever made an electronic portfolio before?

Interviewee: No.

Interviewer: Okay, so I'll skip this. I know you've been uploading pieces of writing to the study archive on CTools [learning management system].

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: How has that process gone for you? Have you had any trouble with it?

Interviewee: No. It's been fine. Yeah, yeah. Maybe like the first time. Nowadays I remember what to do. It's been fine, yep.

Interviewer: That's great. That's wonderful. How did you choose the pieces that put on the archive? How did you decide every semester which piece to put up there?

Interviewee: It's usually the one that I feel most proud of. Yeah. The one that I feel like I worked the hardest on or did the best on or something like that according to my teachers or whatever. Yeah, most of the time it's just been that I would say.

Interviewer: Okay. Did you ever go back and look over your old writing as you were posting things?

Interviewee: I think last semester I posted—or like two semesters ago when I posted something from my semester in [country]. I looked at that again just because I did that in a very short period of time, but it was something I was proud of cuz it's like literature classes aren't really something I do anymore. It's one of those things where it was like really hard to do. Once it was done it's something I'm happy to look back at.

Interviewer: That's great. Did it make you think differently about your writing to look back at it in that way?

Interviewee: I don't know. I guess I didn't really think about it that much. It was more just like this is good.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's awesome. That's great. All right, last sort of big question is what do you think that instructors should know about teaching writing

to undergraduates? If you could give professors or instructors any advice, what would you say?

Interviewee: I don't know. I think I have the best experience in terms of a writing teacher my freshman year in my Great Books class from one of the GSIs. I think it was—she showed us that she was super passionate about teaching and super passionate about what we are learning which is really hard to be cuz there's—like Great Books there, like really—nobody should be passionate about that stuff. It's very, very boring. She was very into it and because she was into it more people were into showing up to her office hours and talking to her and she made herself super available. Like she'd be at Starbucks for a couple hours at least once a week. If you showed up she would do everything in her power like help you and guide you in the right direction.

I think that really pushed a lot of the people in the class to do better. I think just showing—being passionate about the material really pushes your students to do the same. At least it did for me. I think instructors have been a very big part of what I've become passionate about. If I have a good instructor in a class I'm more likely to do well in it. I'm more likely to really try. I think that's probably the most rewarding.

Interviewer: That's great. Last question. Do you have any other comments or something that you thought we might talk about that we didn't or anything like that?

Interviewee: Not really. Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. Well, those are all the questions I have then.

Interviewee: Great.

Interviewer: I really appreciate you coming and taking time to talk to me.

[...]

Interviewee: Thank you.

Interviewer: Bye.

[End of Audio]