

Interviewer: This is ***. It's January 24th, and I'm meeting with ***.

[...]

Interviewer: [...]. We are interested in student's sense of themselves as a writer, ***, and with that in mind we might as well start there. How would you describe yourself as a writer?

Interviewee: I think I'm a pretty strong writer. The, I don't know I think maybe more personal essays I'm much better at.

[...]

Interviewee: I'm better at personal essays probably than analysis of things like readings or novels. Text analysis and symbolism isn't really my strong point, but I think I'm also, like I took a class on narrative journalism, and I think the narrative style is much more fitting. Like I do it better. Science writing, which I actually have had a lot of practice with, with some of the research that I've been doing is okay. It's not maybe the strongest things, but I think I'm getting better.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: With more work.

Interviewer: Why do you say the narrative writing, you see that as a strength?

Interviewee: Mm-hmm. I think maybe observation, detailed description. Also I guess that goes with like a sciencey personality, but I tend to notice details. I feel strongly that I can write pretty well about them.

Interviewer: Just to sort of extend that thinking a little bit. What roles does writing play in your life either as a student or in sort of your life at large?

Interviewee: In general it's more as a student. I do writing for classes. That's usually what I would have to do if I had, for an assignment I'd say that's what I'd write, but I think I used to write more like poems and poetry. I used to write little stories, short stories, but I've kind of, I don't do a lot of that anymore.

Interviewer: Do you know why? Has it been a function of time or?

Interviewee: Yeah I'm a little bit busy, and I'm better at, I do a lot of photography, so I'm better at that and invest more time in it. I enjoy it more as well so.

Interviewer: Different kind of creative outlet maybe?

Interviewee: Yeah definitely.

Interviewer: Great. This is a couple of questions thinking about your growth as a writer, so thinking back to your first year last year. How would you describe yourself as a writer if you look back at your first term, first year?

Interviewee: Maybe more timid. Maybe a little bit less easy to describe things. I would hold back a little bit I think. Because I wasn't sure if a teacher didn't, if I didn't know what a teacher wanted. I think maybe like now I'm less concerned with what a teacher wants, and more concerned with what I think needs to be said.

Interviewer: That's an interesting kind of description of your growth as a writer. What do you think has contributed to that, or what led you to sort of feel that greater comfort, greater confidence?

Interviewee: Definitely the discussions that have been going on in classes. I like the emphasis that they put on, you know, how do you feel about this, how do you think, and how does it connect to all the other things. Like the readings that we've been doing for, or we had done in the classes, and how our topics are maybe relevant to those writings.

Interviewer: That's interesting. When you talk about the discussion are you thinking about writing classes you've had, or—

Interviewee: Yeah. Well writing classes and the RC classes, so like I'm residential college, so all my writing classes have been through the residential college. They emphasize a lot of discussion. I think like the, like hearing other students as well.

Interviewer: In terms of their ideas as well as what they're writing about?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: Yeah, like their ideas and their thoughts on like different subjects. I don't know.

Interviewer: Okay. Would you be able to describe what your goals are for yourself as a writer right now? Are there certain aspects of your writing work that you're focusing on, or that you kind of feel that you keep coming back to?

Interviewee: Well I think I'm going into a career in science, so I'm really gonna have to emphasize science writing as something that I have to get good at, or I should get at. Getting, gathering information as a writer is gonna be very important, and also synthesizing it in a meaningful way.

Interviewer: That's interesting. What kind of science field are you interested in?

Interviewee: Epidemiology.

Interviewer: Oh very interesting. That's great. Thinking about your writing experiences at U of M [University of Michigan], and you started here, there wasn't a transfer school?

Interviewee: Yeah. I started here.

Interviewer: Thinking about your experiences in your courses here. What would you say it means to write well?

Interviewee: I think it's really, to write well you have to focus on clarity. You have to come up with an idea and make sure that that's well thought out, well explained, and you get everything you need to get across, in perhaps not the most, like in a concise kind of manner. You've gotta be, and then, but you can't be too brief. You have to be able to get in depth, so there's a good balance that you gotta strike to be a good writer.

Interviewer: Any other aspects at all?

Interviewee: I mean it has to be interesting. Someone's gotta want to read it. [Chuckling]

Interviewer: That's a fair point. Last year do you know, remember which first year writing requirement you took?

Interviewee: I took the [Residential College course].

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: That one was narrative journalism, or the [Title of course] [Instructor] 00:07:27.

Interviewer: That satisfied the first year writing requirement, so you didn't have to take—

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: [English course] or [English 100 level course]?

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Okay. Tell me a little bit about your experiences in the course. You mentioned it already, right?

Interviewee: Yeah. I really, really enjoyed it. It was like a whole discussion focus. It kind of, initially the writing started out like teaching you like style, writing style points, and then you kind of started to examine like a bunch of narrative novels and journals and articles that have been written for like newspapers. Cuz I mean it was a journalism class, so you learned some like ethics and things in there as well. Then she sent us out and gave

us an assignment for like to focus on the community or whatever. You have a pick a location and make people feel as if they're there, so that really emphasized the like the detail oriented narrative style of writing.

Interviewer: What did you write about?

Interviewee: [local Ann Arbor book store].

Interviewer: That's great. [Chuckling]

Interviewee: It was, that was an experience. It was really cool. You kind of, they taught you how to conduct interviews and things as part of the journalism class.

Interviewer: A bit different than like the sort of class like essay focus—

Interviewee: Read a book, write an essay, great essay. Yeah.

Interviewer: Right. Were there other writing assignments that you recall and can talk about that experience?

Interviewee: Yeah. There was, we had a free topic. I had recently visited a lab with the UROP [Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program] 00:09:01 class that I've been taking about, and it was an animal research lab. I kind of used my experience there to describe, or like draw people into an understanding of maybe where animal research is going, how and why it's being used, and, you know, via pros and cons, without being too judgmental perhaps. I think that's maybe kind of important. I liked the way that the class emphasized maybe, as well as personal narrative, non-judgment in writing. You know you have to leave it up to the reader to understand, to find their own understanding.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: Of what you're talking about I guess.

Interviewer: [Inaudible 00:09:40] It is a bit different than I guess we were just discussing sort of traditional essay based first year writing requirement, and so I'm interested how those sort of different experiences influenced you or helped shape your writing as it is today do you think?

Interviewee: I mean I guess I didn't have to do the like in text analysis so much, so that's maybe why I'm not so good at it. I think I feel a lot more confident as a writer because of the experience that I've had. You know having to go out and find something to write about. Like the extra effort really helped make it more of like it's on me. It's my responsibility. To be a good writer I have to make the, take the initiative and do something with it.

Interviewer: Maybe a different kind of ownership—

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: —of the work? Yeah that makes sense. The question asks are you still making use of what you learned in the first year writing requirement?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: That's an interesting with the class you took. I'd be curious to hear how that might play out.

Interviewee: Well I'm still using it because at the moment I'm in a different RC [Residential College] writing class, the upper level writing requirement.

Interviewer: Which course is that?

Interviewee: It's [Social Science course] [...] with [Instructor] 00:11:01.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: I think maybe the idea of activism is kind of playing in in the same way the responsibility on the writer to make a thoughtful kind of an analysis of the situation without really making a moral call to action, or deciding purposely to make that call to action based on what you're seeing, what you're observing. I think the journalistic base for that it kind of leads to better writing later on.

Interviewer: That's interesting that you draw on that kind of observational idea when you're thinking about both classes. That's interesting. What is your concentration? I know you said you're working toward—

Interviewee: Microbiology. As like but I mean I've already done the residential college kind of program, so like all the languages and social justice class type things.

Interviewer: Okay. Within the science side in your concentration have you had an opportunity to do writing in any of those classes yet?

Interviewee: Yes. We have to, we had to write an abstract for a research project, and pull together a full research poster, and give a presentation about that. I did have to—

Interviewer: What course was it?

Interviewee: That one was, it was the UROP program.

Interviewer: Okay. Okay.

Interviewee: Then I'm taking [Molecular, Cellular & Development Biology course], which is like also research based. That one you just have to write abstracts and put together project synopsis.

Interviewer: Okay. How'd it go? Writing in the field?

Interviewee: Got an A. [Chuckles] That's, I mean it was more difficult and there was less instruction on what and how to do it, but I think my mentor really helped out. If I hadn't had such a supportive mentor I would have had a lot of trouble.

Interviewer: Is the mentor a faculty member, an instructor, or?

Interviewee: She works for [Laboratory] 00:13:02. I think she's a research assistant.

Interviewer: Someone working in the field?

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: When you said the writing was more difficult, do you, if you had to talk about what aspects were difficult?

Interviewee: There was, nobody really gave you a place to start. They didn't say, "This is an example of what we want you to write, and here's how to do it." There wasn't the same kind of support there I noticed, but my [mentor]00:13:31, she kind of like, we went and spent an afternoon talking about how to do it. I've heard other people didn't get the same kind of help that I did.

Interviewer: Sure. Was she someone that like you could say, "Would you look at this abstract"? Was it that sort of support?

Interviewee: Yeah. I mean she taught me how to, how she writes them basically initially. Then also you can send emails back and forth saying, "Okay this is what I've done. What's good about it? What's bad?" I think I was really lucky with that.

Interviewer: No that seems like an enormously helpful resource. Yeah. Keeping in mind those different experiences, how confident would you say you feel about writing in your discipline, writing in the sciences right?

Interviewee: Not very, very confident. Like I definitely need more practice, definitely need more time, I think, and more reasons to do it. Like there's not so much that the undergrad aren't publishing research. It's the adults who are really doing it, but it's kind of, it's really been an experience helping out.

Interviewer: Okay. If you're thinking about writing experiences in and out of the classroom, and yours are so varied, so from this kind of science writing with your mentor

to the journalism class in your first term. How do you sort of see them collectively influencing your writing? What do you take away from them in kind of broader sense?

Interviewee: In a broader sense? [Chuckles] It's kind of, they've maybe helped me to think better, or more precisely I think is a better word. They've got, I can analyze things better, and I think that maybe I'll need, it's a better for me as a scientist to observe things. I keep going back to that, but that's really what I'm taking away from most of it.

Interviewer: Okay. You see that effect in your writing and, for instance like in detail, or is there an—

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: —example that I might think of?

Interviewee: Well one of the writing pieces that I submitted for the survey, I actually did, it was the science piece that I did for the journalism class.

Interviewer: Oh okay.

Interviewee: That one was I spent a lot of time discussing the experience that I had had like from a first person point of view. [...]

Interviewer: Oh that's so neat.

Interviewee: It was just really interesting. [...], but it was interesting to learn how to observe that. Then be able to like portray it in writing later on.

Interviewer: Fascinating. That, it was a piece for a class? What was the class?

Interviewee: It was the narrative journalism.

Interviewer: Oh okay. Okay. Was that something that you selected?

Interviewee: Yeah it was the free topic.

Interviewer: Oh that. Oh that's the tie in to the animal?

Interviewee: Yeah that was the one.

Interviewer: Oh. Interesting. That must have been fascinating.

Interviewee: It was really cool. Cuz I mean I didn't go in to the, I didn't go in to the, it was through the UROP class, but I didn't go in expecting to like end up writing about it. I'm glad that I like observed enough. I had already been taking the class, so I was thinking about observing and looking for something to write about, and I found it.

Interviewer: Oh that's great. Interesting. Yeah, no so this idea of sort of a detail, kind of observational skills—

Interviewee: Using that detail to relate it to a larger topic I think.

Interviewer: Yeah. Fascinating. Switching gears just a bit. If I use the term reflective writing—

Interviewee: Okay.

Interviewer: —what does that mean to you?

Interviewee: I think that's more analysis. Like thinking about how whatever you're reading or experiencing relates to something else larger. I guess.

Interviewer: Have you ever had to do any sort of reflective writing then about your own writing process? Has that ever been a part of the class? Like look back.

Interviewee: No that's never come up for me.

Interviewer: Okay. Whether assigned or voluntary that's not, okay.

Interviewee: No.

Interviewer: In any of your course have you had to work with other writers, peer review—

Interviewee: Yeah. We had—

Interviewer: —small writing groups?

Interviewee: We had to do a peer review for the narrative journalism class.

Interviewer: Okay. Can you talk a little bit about what your experiences were like in that situation?

Interviewee: They weren't very helpful. A lot of the observations that came out like were very surface, very shallow from the students. I didn't like the, I didn't have a good experience. Then I read a lot of papers that I didn't like, which I mean—

Interviewer: You mean the other students' papers—

Interviewee: —other students. [Chuckling]

Interviewer: [Cross talk 00:18:44]. Okay.

Interviewee: I don't know. That doesn't sound very good.

Interviewer: No that's okay. That's okay.

Interviewee: It wasn't really very helpful for me. I didn't find like I thought talking with the teacher was much more helpful. She was more clear about what was good, what needed work, and maybe how to do it better. Sometimes the students offered suggestions and then didn't really back it up with like how could I change my writing.

Interviewer: That's a nice, that's a really specific way to think about it too. Was it just on the one—

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: —project that you—

Interviewee: No several, we did like—

Interviewer: There were a couple?

Interviewee: We did like three major ones, and we did peer reviews for each of them. I mean some were definitely better than others, but I had, I didn't get a lot of help or change for my essays from those. It was more feedback from the teacher herself.

Interviewer: That's interesting. At any point were they sort of group or collaborative projects, or was it your own writing—

Interviewee: It was your writing—

Interviewer: —just—

Interviewee: —being reviewed by other people.

Interviewer: —other people, yeah. In other courses have you done any kind of group projects or collaborative writing at all?

Interviewee: Not really.

Interviewer: Okay. You talked a little bit about that relationship with the mentor—

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: —but that was still sort of your work product ultimately?

Interviewee: Well I mean it was her ideas. It was all mostly her thoughts, but I had to put it into writing.

Interviewer: Okay. If you were going to give someone advice, like imagine a new student coming to Ann Arbor, what are some of the things they should think about as they're beginning to write a paper? College course paper.

Interviewee: I don't really, I think maybe it's a good idea to not necessarily rely on what you learned in high school to formulate like five paragraph essays don't really fly here. Like I started doing that initially and I got told this is not the way to do it. It's, I mean maybe you could call it reflective writing, but it was, you have to, it's more about, a lot of the courses I have taking anyway have emphasized more like thoughts and understanding. It's not so formal like at all. It doesn't necessarily matter if you got three body paragraphs, introduction, conclusion as so much as like your quality of writing has to be much higher.

Interviewer: Sure, so advice on how to break out of the mold?

Interviewee: Oh that's hard. [Chuckles] You just have write. Like sit down and write out everything you think, and then edit so much. I think you have to go back a lot. Then like three and four times, depending on how many drafts you get like, and help. Things change, and you like re-arrange paragraphs and things a lot.

Interviewer: Is that part of your sort of standard process at this point would you say?

Interviewee: Yeah. Definitely. Especially for big, big papers. Usually you don't write much more than like, four, four double-spaced pages at a time.

Interviewer: Pardon me. Yes.

Interviewee: When you have the big, you know write a ten-page paper it takes a lot more structural revision.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. That for you was a change when you—

Interviewee: Yeah that was a big change, but I liked it. It was good.

Interviewer: Good. I wanted to get some of your thoughts on new media or digital writing. In any of your courses have you done blog posts, Power Points, any kind of online writing at this point?

Interviewee: Not really. I mean I got a history class and we have to put up all our question, we have to put up, we have to write a question based on the reading, but that, we haven't done a lot of that yet.

Interviewer: Like post it or—

Interviewee: Mm-hmm, and post it—

Interviewer: Just on Ctools [learning management system] 00:22:27.

Interviewee: —on Ctools.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: On the forums page

Interviewer: No sort of like—

Interviewee: Interactive.

Interviewer: Okay. All right. We talked about this a moment ago. You have been, you uploaded some work to the Ctools site as part of this study. Did the process go okay for you? Were there any—

Interviewee: Yeah it was pretty easy. I mean—

Interviewer: —glitches?

Interviewee: —there were instructions.

Interviewer: Some of these questions we actually talked about earlier. Was it only the observational piece that you uploaded, or was there another also?

Interviewee: There was another one. I don't remember which one it was.

Interviewer: Okay. Thinking about the observational piece, and again this is about the sort of animal—

Interviewee: Testing.

Interviewer: —testing, surgery?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: I'm not quite sure, transplant. [Chuckles]

[...]

Interviewee: It was, you know it was where I took observations and put them directly into writing. It was definitely like a change. It was where I started to think maybe a little bit differently about writing style, as well as actually just getting the words on the paper for a

class. Like it really became part of my life a little bit more. It was, ended up doing a lot of like Internet research for as well, but it was an interesting mixture of like what kind of information can I get and what kind of information can I experience and kind of then make into information, or how can I take this experience and put them down on paper in a substantial format?

Interviewer: Mm-hmm, so it was both kind of the process and the product that you felt like were different?

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: In terms of what you had to do to create it and the tone and the style?

Interviewee: Yeah. It felt more like content generation than kind of taking something else and digesting it.

Interviewer: How interesting.

Interviewee: Which I kinda liked. It felt good.

Interviewer: Yeah that's great. That's great. Those were the questions that we had. As I've gotten your sort of thinking about your work as a writer, pieces that you've done in the last couple of years, is there anything else that stands out to you or any other comments you would make about sort of writing instruction or writing work as a college student? How we do it? How we could do it better?

Interviewee: I don't know. I mean I love the small classes in the RC [Residential College] where you've got like 12 people. I like the really comfortable environment where it's really the discussion that made a huge amount of difference. You can hear a lot of other people's opinions, and I liked it.

Interviewer: Again thinking about discussion influencing your own writing—

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: —in terms of ideas, or—

Interviewee: Definitely has hearing other people's opinions. Kind of if I don't agree with them then they offer like points for rebuttals, and if I do agree with them they make me wanna think more about something or look up some more like solid information about why people think this way versus the other way. What kind of information supports this idea, or that, so I think it's kinda again given me more of an initiative to take something outside of the classroom setting, and apply it to a classroom kind of activity.

Interviewer: That was an interesting sort of theme that I kept hearing sort of in each of your answers in sense of your own kind of ownership as a writer. It's nice to sort of see

that grow and develop. Good. Anything else? Anything I didn't think to ask or that you would wanna comment on?

Interviewee: Nope I think I'm good. [Chuckles]

Interviewer: Okay. Great. [...]

[End of Audio]