

Interviewer: All right. I'm gonna go ahead and set that right there and announce myself. It is Tuesday. Wednesday. Wednesday—

Interviewee: Wednesday.

Interviewer: April 29th. Wow. This week. It is Wednesday, April 29th. This *** and I'm here with ***. Yeah?

Interviewee: Yes.

[...]

Interviewer: I am starting off these interviews by asking everybody to tell me how would you describe yourself as a writer?

Interviewee: I guess expressive and conversational in tone probably would be the best. My favorite writings have been the narrative writings that I've done. I can do the analytical, talk about papers, et cetera, but I do come up more conversational in those sometimes, which I think is both reflective of me and not always my professors' favorites. Yeah, I think mostly just narrative focused with a conversational tone elsewhere.

Interviewer: Yeah. Can I get you to give me an example of that when you say a conversational tone?

Interviewee: I'm trying to think if I have a specific in mind. Just some of the more formal language that makes the writing sound stiff. I don't know if I have specific examples of it. A lot of the analytical essays I have to go back, and revise, and make sure I'm not coming off as if I'm talking to someone about a piece of writing, and more composing those thoughts into actual texts.

Interviewer: Okay. Yeah. That makes sense. How would you describe the writer that you were when you first got here?

Interviewee: Under developed.

Interviewer: [Chuckles] Say more about that.

Interviewee: I mean I did a lot of—not a lot, but I did enough writing for junior high and high school where it was one of the things like I was good at it and I could make my way through a piece. It was one of those things where it was never a focus. If I had to do a writing I could do it well, but I didn't think too much outside of it and it was a lot of the basics were developed.

I never viewed myself as a writer. After going through all of these classes and programs here I think I'm more I can identify what I'm doing. Even if it's the same things I was doing in high school I can still identify the fact that I'm doing those things and talk about a piece more in depth, so I understand the process and the focus more of what I'm doing. I also identify myself more as a writer than I used to.

Interviewer: Okay. Yeah. What's your major?

Interviewee: My major is English. I was pre-med for a while. I'm technically graduating with a bachelor of science.

Interviewer: Oh interesting. A bachelor of science and English?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: I love it. I love it. I'm about to go teach at a place where all of the English majors get a bachelor of science as well.

Interviewee: Oh wow.

Interviewer: Yeah. It's a rare thing—

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: - but not unheard of. That's great. What is next for you then?

Interviewee: That's a good question. No, like I said I was pre-med kind of up until last semester.

Interviewer: Oh wow. Okay.

Interviewee: I did pretty much all the pre-med stuff that I need to do. For a while I was sticking with it, but maybe exploring other things. It was official last semester. Right now I'm just keeping my options open and looking. The plan was already to take a get here anyways if I had gone into med school. Yeah, right now it's just keeping things open, looking for either writing programs or just writing based jobs. Yeah, kind of up in the air right now.

Interviewer: Yeah. Which is totally okay. I know it doesn't feel okay—

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: - but as someone who was in your shoes and came through it in the long run, you'll be fine. *[Chuckling]* As you look ahead to the future, what are your goals for yourself as a writer moving forward?

Interviewee: I think to develop—not develop necessarily, but to just write more pieces that are for me. Cuz the narrative pieces obviously offer that more easily than the argumentative or whatever other kind of papers I’ve done here. I haven’t had that many opportunities to just get an idea in my head and write with it.

I think that would be more—it would just be enjoyable and fun. I’d like to at least experiment with that and see how that feels to do that kind of writing that’s not for anyone except myself. As far as I guess career wise, I’m not entirely sure.

Interviewer: Okay. No problem. Yeah, there’s no right or wrong answer here. You mentioned that when you came you didn’t identify as a writer.

Interviewee: No.

Interviewer: I’m wondering why you ended up joining the minor as someone who doesn’t identify—who didn’t at the time identify as a writer?

Interviewee: Yeah. I was thinking of doing med school since I was 14.

Interviewer: Oh wow.

Interviewee: Yeah, so I came in and I took the [English course], which is the general requirement. I did really well in that course. I really liked the instructor and I liked the narrative essay that we had to do in that class, so I took another course with her, the [English course]. Which it wasn’t a narrative, but it was still an enjoyable course. I did well on the papers and I started to enjoy a lot of the English course. I’ll have all the science courses, and then there would be the one oddball English course, and that kept me sane.

Interviewer: That’s saying something.

Interviewee: Part of the writing minor was I—I forget how I looked into it, but I heard about it and part of it was taking [English course] and [English course]. I already had some of the requirements and I was interested in taking more English courses. It was just felt like a natural fit at the time. That was when I was not an English major either, so it was meant to compliment that and keep me—I wanted to take English courses with science stuff that also gave me a reason to be taking them and not just taking extra credits to make my life more difficult.

Interviewer: Right. Right. Because as a pre-med student the last thing you need is more random—

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: - stuff that you have to do.

Interviewee: Yeah exactly.

Interviewer: Yeah. Okay. Okay. That makes a little sense. As you think across this experience that you had U of M [University of Michigan] with both the humanities and the sciences, what does it mean to you to write well?

Interviewee: That's tough because all of the writing I've done has been into my interpretation of it, and my instructor's interpretations of it, and then I guess general audiences' interpretations, but to write well I guess... I guess there are two, I guess, two aspects of it. Sometimes you can, not to sound mean, but you can tell a good paper from a bad paper just by the style and choice of language.

I think, one, once you hit a certain threshold you meet that criteria for being a good paper. After that I think it's a lot more subjective. My opinion of writing a good paper is just writing one that you're satisfied with, that you can look back on and say, "I'm proud of what I've written here," or for the most part not look back and say, "I wrote this piece because I had to write it. I don't really care for it. I don't like what I wrote." Which has happened in some cases. I think that was difficult to do because there's a dichotomy between getting the grade and doing the paper you wanna do. I think after the threshold it's about writing a paper you enjoy.

Interviewer: Yeah. Okay. What upper level writing courses did you take?

Interviewee: I took an anthro archeology [Anthropological Archaeology] course.

Interviewer: Interesting.

Interviewee: Yeah, that was before I declared English. I was looking for, I think, one outside your major. I took a bio chem lab, which kind of was upper level writing. At [course numbers], and there might be one other one somewhere in there. I can't remember.

Interviewer: [English course] is [title of English course]?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: What's [English course]? I feel like I oughta know. I've been in [cross talk 00:12:15] for six years, but...

Interviewee: Depending on who you take it with. They are kind of the same. They're very similar in that it varies from professor to professor I think, but they're both focused on writing longer essays. The [English course] especially had a heavy emphasis on peer review, the one that I took.

Interviewer: Okay. Okay. Yeah. That's really interesting cuz you've had upper level in a bunch of different fields.

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: What effect do you think those experiences had on your writing?

Interviewee: I think it taught me different ways of approaching writing and different ways of—it certainly was difficult to do some of the scientific writing after having so many English courses. Even in the non-upper level ones.

We had Ordell 00:13:14 labs where we had to do formal lab write-ups. I would take those with my [friend] and she was always like, "You write too much. This is not scientific language. Take out five of those words." I was like, "Word count counts."

Interviewer: I was just writing a similar comment on somebody's paper.

Interviewee: [Chuckles] It was certainly difficult in the science courses to break that habit, but at the same time I've learned a lot about what it meant to write scientifically and to write succinctly. That's something I still need to work on, but it's definitely it helped with some of the English essays where word count especially would always be something I would have to cut back on in the final draft.

Yeah, it's actually it's really cool to approach it from all kinds of angles because you get a different feel for just—I mean they're all essays, but they're very different when you're actually writing them. It was nice to actually see it exposed like that.

Interviewer: Yeah. Very interesting. Do you feel like—so we just talked about the writing. Do you feel like those experiences in those different classes had an effect on your sense of yourself as a writer?

Interviewee: In the science courses?

Interviewer: Across those multiple different types of courses.

Interviewee: Yeah. I think especially with regards to not using as colloquial speech and scientific writing. I think it made me realize—you know like I was talking about the casual tone earlier.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: It made me realize what type of writing I prefer and what I naturally am inclined toward. Yeah, so I think there are definitely essays that I enjoyed

writing more than others in a lot of those classes. Also at the same time it made me when I did have a really good scientific one it was really nice when I—one of my favorite ones. It was the last essay that I did in my bio chem. lab.

Just it all came together, and it was research involved with writing, so that was—I mean that's not who I am, I guess, as a writer. Who I always, what I always wanna write about, but it was at the same time it gave me the sense for when I really put everything together what it feels like.

Interviewer: Sure. That's cool. Do you still use any of the techniques or strategies that you've learned in those classes in any of the classes that you took after?

Interviewee: I don't think consciously necessarily cuz a lot of the times when I was taking those courses all of the decisions I made while I was writing were conscious ones to avoid some of the other styles I was used to.

I think in some sense with the scientific ones you have to have the abstract, the introduction, evidence, and the conclusion. It's a very formulated system. Each one is distinct in what you're supposed to do. I think part of that, a lot of that I learned in just English classes as well, like having your thesis and everything.

I think it has helped a little bit having those other courses to give me an idea for if I want to take—especially cuz there have been some English courses where I want to really get into it. With the final writing project I was trying to explain something that would probably be a very foreign content to a lot of people. It involved numbers and self-evaluation. That's when I felt myself taking that sort of scientific approach to really delving into this.

Interviewer: When you say that final writing project. Do you mean—

Interviewee: For the—

Interviewer: - for the capstone? Okay.

Interviewee: - capstone course. Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah. We'll talk about that in a minute.

Interviewee: Okay.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: Yeah, so there are definitely times where when I do want to get into that kind of detail it has definitely helped having that. Cuz I know the approach scientists take when they're doing a service.

Interviewer: Yeah. Absolutely. Okay, that makes a lot of sense. I'm going off protocol a little bit for this, but I'm curious. How would you describe the differences between writing in English, writing in the hard, the STEM fields, and writing in anthro [Anthropology]?

Interviewee: The anthro course was kind of similar to the science ones in that we were supposed to—it was a research assignment. We were supposed to have an abstract and all of that. I'd say it's a scale with the chemistry courses or biological courses being very left end, and English courses being the very right, and the anthro felt closer to the science courses. It had a bit more of the English discourse within it.

There's just so much of say what you mean, get it out, move on with the science courses. Where if you have to make a point or summarize research you do it and you move on. I think it's just—it is very different. It's hard to exactly quantify it. It just comes down to how much you say about what you wanna say.

With the sciences it's just it's very—you really have to be succinct. Whereas with the Englishes if you're doing an analytical paper you can be succinct, but you can also expand on it where you want to especially if you're analyzing. The sciences, there was analysis, but a lot of it was summary. Even when you did have analysis it was very straightforward and—planned is not the right word. I think it's a little degrading towards it, but it's more dry, I guess.

Interviewer: Yeah. Okay.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah. No, that makes sense.

Interviewee: The anthro, like I said, fell between—cuz that one involved a bit of—I had to do outside research with more of my own analysis in it. The last paper I wrote for that course was comparing the Rome coliseum with one of the Greek theaters.

Interviewer: Oh interesting.

Interviewee: Yeah, so I had to a lot of research on what they were used for, how they were constructed, but outside of that it was a lot more of my interpretations of that. The way I summarized it with more sciencey, but the fact that I was doing more interpretation was Englishy.

Interviewer: Yeah, that makes perfect sense. That makes perfect sense. Yeah. Did you take any other writing courses in the science concentration? Cuz I'm guessing that most of your English classes had some kind of writing involved.

Interviewee: Yeah. In the sciences. The biggest one was definitely the [Chemistry course] cuz we had to do two big research and then lab summaries. I don't actually—I mean I think outside of the labs, which they were the formal lab write-ups ever now and then. Which followed a very strict procedure of this is the methods I used, these are the materials, this is the step by step. There weren't too many researchy science courses I took. Yeah, the chem one and then the labs for the most part.

Interviewer: Yeah. Now that you're about to graduate how confident do you feel as a science writer?

Interviewee: I feel confident that I can do scientific writing. I'd say 90 percent. Like I said that last 10 percent would just be the tone and the narrowing the word choice down. At the same time I like that. I like having a different take on it, which I think would be better for an English person reading a scientific paper. I think it would annoy the heck out of a scientist.

Interviewer: Okay. How confident do you feel writing as an English major?

Interviewee: I mean I don't feel not confident. Yeah, I don't really—I don't think there are too many issues writing as an English major. I'm trying to think if there are any. I haven't done a lot of creative writing or fictional writing, but I've had—there were exercises we had to do where we had to come up with stuff. It was more for fun. It wasn't our major papers or anything. I had a lot of fun with those. I don't know how well I was doing, like well in terms of instructor's opinion, I was doing on those.

Yeah, I feel, I mean, pretty confident overall. That's the one field I don't have much experience with, but I would still have a lot of fun with, I think, doing it, and would like to explore that more.

Interviewer: Okay. Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. How often would you say that you've used a skill or a strategy that you got in one class in a different context or in a different class?

Interviewee: All the time. It's I think part of it's who I am. If I learned something grammatically it's hard not to notice it, which makes me as I'm typing—even on Twitter, or Facebook, social media, any kind of thing like that, if I start typing the wrong thing and I notice it, I notice it and I have to fix it even if it sounds totally random or just not even English.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: One example the [English course] course I took we learned about the present subjunctive where you should say be instead of is. Like, "If he be here today," which just sounds ridiculous, but it's one of those things where once I've

learned it's hard not to notice it. Yeah, so I think it becomes pervasive in a lot of aspects of my life where I just have to follow what I've learned if I know it's the correct way of doing it.

Interviewer: Yeah. That makes a lot of sense. Let's take a second to reflect on the capstone course—

Interviewee: Okay.

Interviewer: - for the minor. Would you say that that's had an affect on your writing?

Interviewee: Yeah. I think honestly the final project that I did for that course was one of the most fun thing, and stressful, things I've done. Part of that's on me, the stressfulness. What I've really loved about the minor in general was the focus on new media.

Because throughout the course, I mean we had the writers' evolution essay, and we had a couple of reflective things that we were supposed to do, but where most English courses that I've taken is the typical you either write a narrative, or your write an analysis, you—not really a summary, but there's the typical English kind of writings that you do.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: I think in the minor it was more—there was less writing overall in the capstone course, but there was a lot of reflection on different aspects of writing. When we did some of the—like I said that project, that whole having an online portfolio was just totally, totally outside of anything I've done for any class.

As someone who spends a lot of time on the computer it was really fun to experiment with—I used Wix [website creator], which basically felt like creating my own website, which is really cool and it was a whole new territory. That was, I don't know, my favorite aspect of the writing minor was focusing on new media which I do think is very important.

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah. Excellent. Excellent. Okay. Would you say that the course had an impact on your writing process at all?

Interviewee: I don't know if the capstone specifically had an effect on my writing process. I think by the time I reached the capstone I developed my writing process pretty well. I think the biggest impact it would have had would be in the future when I approach bigger projects, like the final project. Which is a lot more involved and extensive than just the typical paper.

Most of that is just with the timeline approach and understand how much work has to be put into very long form writing. Yeah, so I think as far as affecting the specific process for normal writing, maybe not so much cuz I think it was already there. It definitely, it conquertized a lot of what I had already had and it expanded on the longer form that I hadn't really done yet.

Interviewer: Okay. Okay. Yeah. Yeah. Would you say that it had an impact on your sense of yourself as a writer?

Interviewee: In the sense that I want to do more like the project?

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: I would say in that sense, yeah, I was not sleeping very much trying to get it all done, but at the same time I loved every second of it because it was just such a fun, and crazy, and different experience. Having this idea in my head and you know nothing ever comes out perfectly like you plan it to.

Interviewer: Right. Right..

Interviewee: For the most part it looked how I wanted it to look. I would come up with an idea and I made a lot of it happen. I think that was really cool. That's not really something where when you aren't incorporating the type media or using the website like that with just writing a paper, I mean, I can have an idea down for what I wanna do and evolve it as I go. There was a very visual and, I don't know, personal association with the project in that as a writer I would love to do more stuff like that.

Interviewer: Yeah. Can you tell me a little bit about what you did for the project? [...].

[...]

Interviewee: Yeah. Like I said I had a lot of fun with stuff like this.

Interviewer: Fascinating. Look at this.

Interviewee: Yeah. This was one of the things where he just asked us in class one day to think of a metaphor for your portfolio. I couldn't think of anything right away and then I thought of a molecule where different parts come together to make something and I just came up with this.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: Then, yeah, so I went with a mediciney approach to the backgrounds. The final project was actually quite a bit different.

Interviewer: [Chuckles] Oh. Look at that. It's like a video game.

Interviewee: Yeah. Well, it's about a video game.

Interviewer: Oh, it is? Okay.

Interviewee: Yeah. It's about an online game [...] that I play a lot. A lot of people play. There's also a lot of people who don't know anything about it. I was trying to associate it specifically with esports because esports are this growing phenomenon in the gaming community.

Interviewer: Right. I've seen You Tube videos of people in arenas watching people play—

Interviewee: Yeah. Exactly.

Interviewer: - video games.

Interviewee: There's actually, it was a couple of weeks too late. There was a tournament this weekend that was broadcast on ESPN2. It was the first one that was ever broadcast—

Interviewer: Fascinating.

Interviewee: - on cable television.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: There was a big deal because there were the people who really celebrating and then there were the people who were like, "What am I watching?" Like, "Why is this on my sports channel?" [Chuckling]

Interviewer: Was this on Twitter that you were seeing this go down?

Interviewee: Yeah. Oh yeah. It was just like—it would have fit in this perfectly. For the project I tried to focus on [online game] because that's the one that I know I'm most familiar with. I've been playing for ten years now, which is just crazy to think about. I wanted to associate—I was talking about with esports a lot of people talk about this is the direction things are taking with video games and esports. It makes sense financially to do this. Colleges are giving scholarships away now for esports players.

Interviewer: Really?

Interviewee: Yeah. I wanted to focus on the social aspect of it and [online game] is one, it's an especially social game. I tried to focus on how that online community was more than just people behind a computer. It was actual people who interact, and get along, and talk.

I had the idea for the rest of my portfolio was ideas coming together, smaller things to make a bigger thing. That's not a good word to use. What I did is I took—they had a mosaic that they did a while back. That's the main background for my project and throughout the backgrounds of the different slides zoomed in to see—

Interviewer: Oh interesting.

Interviewee: - the different what it is, and you can go from page to page. This is the font that they use in [online game]. Most of these pages are different sections of this being zoomed in on. Yeah.

Interviewer: Then they move. Your pages move across.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Interesting.

Interviewee: Which was a lot of work to do.

Interviewer: I bet.

Interviewee: Sorry. I'm not sure it will scroll.

Interviewer: Oh. Yeah, I don't think it has an actual scroll button. Yeah.

Interviewee: Okay. Yeah, so it was just really fun. I started out with a totally different idea in mind. Then at one point I was like, "Well wouldn't it be cool if I had the [online game] font?" Then I had the idea for the pages on the side. I was like, "Well, if I'm gonna do the font up here. Why not do it over there as well?"

It involved a lot of work. I was talking to people who are more familiar with Photoshop that helped me along with getting the details of this down, and getting the text, and everything. It was just really cool to see to put it together and to envision how I wanted each page to layout. The layout I wanted to be. Then how I wanted to describe these.

This is an example of the page where I had to really try to pretend I was someone who doesn't play the game and try to explain it to them. I can't remember page it is. It's one of these pages where I go—this is the narrative approach where I tried to take a narrative and put it in the project. Then I have testimonials from other

people who play the game. I think, there's a page here that goes into a lot more detail. Maybe it's 16. Yeah. Okay. This is one of those things where—

Interviewer: Whoa.

Interviewee: - scientific approach. If you're playing the game, and your doing something right or wrong, people will actually put things on a website, and analyze them, and rank you compared to other players. You can try to see where you are overall. Then you look at the breakdown of what you use during a fight.

Interviewer: That's a great idea.

Interviewee: Yeah. This is a lot of the time where I would take that scientific approach where I would try to say as much as I can about numbers and facts. Without going to far above people's heads, but also without dumbing it down too much. It was just overall it was really cool to see this all come together. For the most part a lot of these things I didn't expect to have when I went into it and I didn't expect them to work. I'm really happy that I got the page, the font to work on the page numbers, and the backgrounds to work, and all that stuff. It was just—

Interviewer: Yeah. That's really cool. Well, and it's fascinating even to see that the formality really does shift, right?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: This is not as formal as the last page that we looked at with all of the numbers, but it's significantly more formal than over here on your introduction where we have—

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: - like super conversational. [Online game] is still the focus if that makes sense.

Interviewee: Yeah, exactly. That's what—

Interviewer: Right?

Interviewee: - I was trying to balance that throughout, and what page is it appropriate to use that different tone, and where's the line. Some of the feedback I got when I was talking about this with the people I play the game. They were saying that numbers page might be too in depth, but at same I wanted to keep it, but that's one of the things I was hoping for feedback on is did I go too in depth or is this a good line to drop?

Interviewer: Right. You got feedback from people you play with?

Interviewee: Yeah. There were a couple of people looking this over before I was turning it in and just saying, “Okay, you know,”—cuz a lot of this stuff it’s if you heard two people talking about the game it would sound like a different language.

Interviewer: Sure.

Interviewee: A lot of times.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: Just so many acronyms and different in jokes, and all that stuff. It’s hard to talk about this without—even if you try to put yourself in an outside perspective, it’s hard to remember what you didn’t know before you knew it.

Interviewer: Yep.

Interviewee: Yeah, I was trying to get—they were helping me a lot with that kind of stuff and saying like, “Just dumb this down a little bit more,” or “More detail here,” or “I think if you had a page about this in between these two that would help.”

Interviewer: That makes a lot of sense. Yeah. That’s really cool.

Interviewee: Thank you.

Interviewer: When you think about the site as a whole. Right? Cuz there are a lot of different elements on this.

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: We have the molecule here under portfolio assignments.

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: We have the writer’s evolution, which has the DNA strand. Which is great. Right? That’s very—

Interviewee: Yeah. Even if you—

Interviewer: - strategic.

Interviewee: Yeah. Back on this one this is the click through to the next page.

Interviewer: Oh. Okay.

Interviewee: You click on the different parts, and then you can scroll, and it just will take you back. It's more than just the brief description over here. It actually works to take you to that page.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Thinking about this, what's the story that you want this to tell?

Interviewee: Mostly I wanted it to reflect the fact, like the fact that I'm getting a bachelor of science in English, I didn't want that part of me to just, "Well, I'm not doing that. Just throw it away." I wanted it to—cuz it shaped me I think and it has affected how I view things. Even if it's not necessarily reflected in my writing I think it has affected me. I wanted that to show.

I think a lot of the sciencey part of the sciences is the microscopic scale and how things come together. What I wanted this to show was different pieces of my writing coming together to show who I am as a writer. Like the different parts of this molecule they all come together to tell—individually they are still themselves. That's still my [English course] essay, that's still my [Chemistry course] essay, but together all five of those have a bigger picture.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: I wanted to emphasize that through the portfolio.

Interviewer: I think it's awesome. Is that an actual molecule by the way?

Interviewee: It's caffeine.

Interviewer: [Laughs] That's amazing. I love it. I love it. Which means there's gonna be somebody who's gonna look at this and totally get the joke. The rest of us will be like, "Oh. It's a molecule."

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: [Laughs] That's awesome. That is awesome. When you designed it from left to right, is there a reason that you chose to go from the portfolio assignments toward the larger final project as opposed to starting off with [online game] and moving—

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: - in the direction—

Interviewee: I mean the home page is the introduction to this whole idea of pre-med student doing English things. This page emphasized that throughout. I've intentionally used different writings. There is the [English course], which is a straight up narrative. There's the [Chemistry course] piece, which is the most involved scientific—all of these I'm—

Interviewer: Wow.

Interviewee: - I made these images in a program and had to manipulate the different sites on this—

Interviewer: You made those images?

Interviewee: There's a program where you can import different proteins.

Interviewer: Oh interesting.

Interviewee: It's not highlighted like that by default.

Interviewer: Okay, you do that?

Interviewee: Yeah. You select different parts and you can emphasize it differently. Like some of them are way more basic, but yeah.

Interviewer: That's crazy cool.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: You're making me wanna be a science major. Wow.

Interviewee: Yeah. I wanted to have the narrative, the [Chemistry course] piece. This is an argumentative piece that I felt good about. This was just—like I said this is one of the more for fun pieces that I [*cross talk 00:39:56*]—

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: I didn't too many of those, but this is one of those that I have actually done. It was one of the [online game] websites that occasionally asks for blog posts where they would you give you a topic and then just say send us your views on this. No one's grading it. The only people giving you feedback are the other gamers. It was fun. Then I included this piece cuz it was the first piece I ever got that suggested I should be an English major.

Interviewer: Right. Did you see any relationship between these one, two, three, five things that you put up there?

Interviewee: Mostly they are just different parts of who I am as a writer I think. There are some overlap, like the [English course] pieces is an argumentative piece, which was very focused on making a point, which a lot of the writing does. The [Chemistry course] piece was similarly I had to make a point through all of that scientific jargon. Yeah, so there's overlap, but I think the—like I said, the main thing is that together they make the bigger picture.

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah. I have so many questions that I wanna ask. I am like, “Okay, which one do I go for first?” You've been talking a little bit about the feedback that you've gotten from your [online game] community.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: I'm noticing here that the feedback from the [English course] paper changed the entire course of your college career.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: I wonder if you could say a little bit about your experience on getting feedback from instructors, or from peers, or—

Interviewee: Okay. The writer's evolution talks a lot about that.

Interviewer: Does it? Okay.

Interviewee: Some of them more sarcastically. *[Laughter]*

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: Yeah. No, I think it has been—there have been good times and bad times with that.

Interviewer: That would seem reasonable. Yeah.

Interviewee: Yeah. Sometimes they have legitimately helped, especially with the basics. Like, “This isn't, you need your thesis and papers to be stronger than this,” or like, “Your transitions aren't working well.” That kind of general feedback has really helped and the basics that you can keep, the fundamentals, I guess, throughout all the papers that still apply. I think that kind of feedback has definitely helped.

There has been other feedback where it felt more like the instructor had an opinion. That wasn't what I wanted to write about. I would still meet the requirements, the rubric requirements, but sometimes it felt like the professor had a different idea for tone or what have you that affected the grade. There was a tug

of war between, “Well, do I wanna write for me or do I wanna write for the grade?”

I think fundamentally there has been a lot of feedback where I’ve taken it forward and said, “Okay. I’m using too many, too long of a quote with not enough analysis. Next time shorter quote, more analysis,” that kind of feedback. Then there have been times where just—I mean and that’s just the nature of writing in English. There is no one right answer for anything. I think the feedback, it’s been a mix. Overall I mean I’ve definitely grown from the experience of writing.

Interviewer: Yeah. Does your writer’s evolution, would you say that it creates a coherent whole with the other things that you’ve got on here?

Interviewee: In a sense it’s more of a reflection on what’s not here.

Interviewer: Oh interesting.

Interviewee: I’m trying to think if any—I do mention the [English course] essay I think in my writer’s evolution. Outside of that the writer’s evolution talks about those times where I have had feedback on something that I either disagree with or just, I don’t know, the papers that I wasn’t with myself too. It’s not all about the feedback. It’s hard to say. It can stand by itself, for sure, but I think it does give you the other side of everything, in that I talk about what pieces I either haven’t liked or professors and instructors haven’t liked.

Interviewer: Yeah. Okay. Yeah. [Pause 00:44:55 - 00:45:00] I’m trying to figure out what I might have—cuz we just have talked and we covered most of it. I’m trying to make sure we haven’t anything.

Interviewee: Okay.

Interviewer: [Pause 00:45:06 - 00:45:13] Do you think making this had an affect on you as a writer?

Interviewee: I think so. I think, one, it got me to reflect on what—I mean I already had a sense of what I did like and what I didn’t like, but I never really reflected on it. The [English course] and the [Chemistry course] I knew those were some of my favorite essays I’ve written while I was here. It’s just one of the things you just know. I got to examine why I enjoyed those. I got to put them on display. Yeah, I don’t know. It’s been nice to see it in this fashion and to put it all together.

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah. What did you learn from the reflective work?

Interviewee: Some of it was learning about what I’m better at. Some of it was learning what it takes to make me feel good about a piece, I think. It wasn’t

necessarily writing in my comfort zone. It was especially with the chem piece writing on a topic with which I am not very familiar and which requires lots of research.

Even though I was a science person it was still very complicated and difficult. In the end it felt like a smaller scale version of the project in that there were a lot of different elements and it really challenged me. I think I learned that I think some of my more, in the pieces I like more, are the ones that really—not only do I have to challenge myself, but I can really get into them.

Because even ones that have been challenging necessarily haven't been enjoyable because they're not necessarily challenging in a good way, but these were challenging where I could overcome it with enough work and effort, and they were still within the bounds of stuff that I generally enjoy doing. I think that was the take away.

Interviewer: Yeah. Okay. Great. Let's say I'm—as a writing teacher—

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: - I come at this, right? I approach it asking the question, “What could this tell me about the way a student learns to write”?

Interviewee: This specific portfolio?

Interviewer: This specific portfolio.

Interviewee: About any students?

Interviewer: The whole website.

Interviewee: About any student in general?

Interviewer: About any student. How do you think, or do you think, we could generalize about student writing development based on what you've got here?

Interviewee: I think based on what I've got here you could generalize that there are fundamental aspects of writing that you can teach and that will improve a writing and help somebody become a writer. I think it would also teach you that there is a high degree of subjectivity in a lot of the fields where sometimes a student just has to write for him or herself and learn what he or she wants the priority to be. Do you want the priority to be a grade? Do you want it to be self-satisfaction? Do you want it to be for someone else? I think that would be the biggest aspect of it, I think.

I don't know if that necessarily—that definitely comes across from the writer's evolution essay. I don't know about the portfolio as a whole. I think the portfolio as a whole trying to get back to that more just shows that there are a lot of different elements of writing and that no one is the right one, but that they could all coexist.

Interviewer: Yeah. No, I mean I actually—I'm a little primed to be thinking about this cuz I think about what students do in their extracurricular lives, but I do think that's something that shows up here from the portfolio as a whole. Because this is very clearly the one thing that's not academic.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Right? It's also here, the [online game] thing is also here in your final project. I do think we see the range, right?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: I can see even here just your commitment to particular pieces.

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: You've made that very clear—

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: - in the reflection. I think that, yeah. Yeah, I mean I think I'm primed to agree with you because of my research interests, but I totally see what you're talking about.

Interviewee: Thanks.

Interviewer: Now anyone who transcribes this will know who I am too. Anyway. I think I announced myself at the beginning. Let's go way back to—

Interviewee: Oh gosh.

Interviewer: - the gateway.

Interviewee: Okay.

Interviewer: All right? Which has been a long time ago probably.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Two or three years?

Interviewee: Yeah. I took that fall of my junior year and I stayed an extra year, so I'm going into my fifth year now.

Interviewer: Got it. You're a fifth year senior, okay. As you reflect back on your gateway course, how did the experience in the capstone compare to the gateway experience?

Interviewee: One, the gateway course was like group therapy and the capstone course was stressful. No. *[Chuckling]* The gateway course it definitely—it was the first introduction to knew me and reflective, especially reflective writing I think it focused on a lot more. Cuz part of that was you had to—I think you had to—you might have had to reflect on a piece, I think, but you definitely had to re-purpose and then re-mediate pieces in that.

Which was a very unique experience in that it was done a lot more gradually and more group—there was a lot of group discussion in that about how to approach stuff like that. That one primed me for looking back on—in the same way I'm doing in these little summaries here, like this is my favorite piece of writing. Why is that? That wasn't something I had done too much before that.

Always have a sense of what ones you like, but you never really analyze why. The gateway course primed you for that. It also with the remediation it was just really cool to take something you've done and imagine it in an entirely new medium or for a different audience. It's exposed me to this idea of, one, reflection and, two, overlapping disciplines in a way.

The capstone course, it brought that a lot more together, especially with the writer's evolution where you're specifically examining old pieces of writing. Not just examining the individual writings themselves, but looking back on them, and looking for a bigger take way from what you feel about piece A, piece B, and piece C. Is there a bigger story behind why you did or did not like these?

Then obviously with the portfolio and the project that brought it together a lot more, so I think that the capstone it was a lot more self-directed in a way too. Where you had to keep on top of stuff. My professor/instructor was very good about understanding when students were stressing a little too much and pumping the brakes for us. It was largely keeping up on your own and making sure you're working to your own deadlines. I think that's important.

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah.

Interviewee: Going into the real world. Cuz a lot of times in classes we're used to hard deadlines and I think that was one of the more difficult parts of the course was not having more than, "All right this is due at the end of the semester," kind of deadlines. You really have to keep on top of stuff. Within writing it brought

stuff together. Outside of writing it just prepped you more for if you are gonna pursue writing, what's it gonna be like when you're your own decider of deadlines?

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah. Some basic life skills in there.

Interviewee: Yeah. Exactly. Preparing us for the great void.

Interviewer: Yeah. I love it. What have your experiences been like working with other writers during your time in the minor?

Interviewee: It's actually been really nice—this gonna make me sound like a bad person. In the introductory courses, like I said, you can tell bad writing from good writing. So often I would get feedback and I'd be like, "No." Like, "Just straight up no that's not good feedback." The professor would usually, or instructor, would usually have the opposite feedback. Which a lot of courses I expect that of, especially the 200 level and some of the 300, more people just have to take those.

I think it was maybe [English course] was my first real experience of everyone else—for the most part people in the class and more so in [English course], the people in the class really knew what they were talking about. The feedback I got was stuff that I actually—it wasn't necessarily, "Do I get the feedback from them and then double check it with the professor?" It was, "I can trust what they're saying cuz I know they know what they're talking about."

It was nice to be surrounded by people who I was more comfortable in discussing my works with them and it didn't feel like an exercise. It actually felt helpful and like I could get useful feedback. I think having us all together like that made the feedback feel more confident.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. Sure, that makes a lot of sense. You did a gateway portfolio and you said that that was your intro to this—

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: - notion of remediation and whatnot.

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: How would you describe the difference between that and this?

Interviewee: That one I did [inaudible 00:56:37] and was a lot more limited as well. The focus I think in the gateway didn't feel as much on the gateway portfolio. It felt like you were developing skills and then using those skills to put something together.

Whereas the capstone felt like the portfolio was really the ultimate centerpiece of the course. I think that portfolio was, the gateway one that is, was a nice way to put my stuff online. It was a very basic form of this, I think. I had the basic requirements. It was fun to experiment with drop down menus. This felt so much more complete and so much more developed than the gateway one.

Interviewer: Yeah. I hope so, yeah. The minor is relatively new.

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: Are there any suggestions that you'd have for the people running the program, instructors or the administrators of the program.

Interviewee: I'd say maybe more jumping in at least a couple of times. Especially someone like me who—I mean there was an idea in the gateway course I remember where they, or at least advertised in the minor like, “You're supposed to keep a portfolio of all your work as you go along and utilize it.” There's the writing minor Ctools [learning management system] page.

I thought we were supposed to—I didn't do this all the time, but I thought we were supposed to upload pieces as we went along. That was supposed to be something we came back to. In a way we did in the capstone course, but it felt more like in the time between my gateway and my capstone the pieces I did in between in reality felt a lot less emphasized than I expected.

Which wasn't necessarily a bad thing, but I just had different expectations. I think the way the capstone course functioned I think it reflected on those writings well enough, just fine. I don't think we need to emphasize it, but I was expecting different after the gateway course. I also, like I said, I would like more—at least, “Hey. Come to Sweetland once this semester and talk about your writing,” or something.

Interviewer: Cuz you guys have advisors within the minor? Yeah?

Interviewee: Technically we do. I was introduced to mine once when I got accepted to the minor. I was always welcome to go, but it was never a requirement and I never actually had him as an instructor, so I rarely ended up talking to him. Which I mean it's not like it's a bad thing, but I think it would also—especially someone like me who ended up taking two and a half years, I think, before taking the capstone course.

I think it wouldn't have hurt to interact with the minors more often. I also, I know this is probably way too difficult, to keep the same instructor in the gateway as in the capstone. I did that and it was really nice, but I now a lot of people who described a totally different gateway course than I had taken.

Interviewer: You're the second person today actually that I've talked to who has talked about that being a really positive experience having the same instructor.

Interviewee: Having the same. Yeah. No, it definitely was. It felt very comfortable and I was continuing off, but I can't really imagine what it would have felt like to go from a different gateway instructor to a different capstone instructor.

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah. That's an interesting—

Interviewee: Which not easy to do. You can't really schedule instructors two years in advance.

Interviewer: Right. Well. Yeah, but it suggests that one of the questions we should be asking going forward in the future is actually this question, right?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Did you have two different instructors or did you have the same instructor?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Because that could be informative and I don't know programmatically how that would work, but it doesn't seem—yeah I don't know how you would do it.

Interviewee: Yeah. I mean I intentionally tried to get the same instructor. It wasn't like, "This time works best." It was like, "I want the same as the gateway."

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah. Then more generally what would you like professors to know about teaching writing to undergrads?

Interviewee: The Sweetland professors?

Interviewer: Any professor actually.

Interviewee: In just in the English?

Interviewer: Yeah, or English or chemistry.

Interviewee: On one level especially the lower, the 100s and 200s, peer review is not—I mean peer review is a good waste of class time for students. It sounds bad, but people rarely enjoy peer reviewing unless their peer reviewing with someone who's very competent in their feedback. A lot of the times—

I would rather a professor take a day off and say, “You are required to come in and talk about your paper,” then have a class period dedicated to getting feedback from someone who’s either going to tell me one slightly negative thing about my paper and then just compliment me on the rest. I know that sounds pretty critical, but I haven’t found very much of my peer reviews to be helpful. I don’t know if professors realize that or not, but I think going forward—office hours have helped far more than peer reviewing has.

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah. Okay. I mean, again, you’re the third person actually today who said something along those lines. I think that suggests—because all the best data we have tells us that it’s effective, right, but our students constantly tell us that they hate it.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: I think we need to really think about that. We need to think hard about that and what that—

Interviewee: Yeah, and I think—

Interviewer: - is.

Interviewee: - sometimes that comes down again to the subjectivity where a student might not necessarily be giving bad feedback, but they’re also not the one grading it. Like I said it changed a lot in [English course] and [English course], but I generally got decent feedback in those. With a lot of other courses that weren’t—especially [English course] and [English course] those are paper writing courses. In the class where you’re discussing—I had the Victorian novel where part of that was discussing Victorian novels.

Interviewer: How many did you get in in a semester?

Interviewee: We had in five.

Interviewer: Wow.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: That’s impressive.

Interviewee: It was a lot of reading and one of those was like 800 pages. Yeah, so we had to discuss those kind of papers with other students. That was significantly less helpful than the [English course] and that’s still a 300 level class. Yeah.

Interviewer: Interesting. Okay.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah. Okay. That's really helpful. All right, anything else that this has jogged that you'd like on the record for us or—

Interviewee: I can't think of anything right now. I mean it was really fun. I wouldn't mind an intermediary writing course. Just because I found those so unique compared to the other—and I know there are creative writing courses out there that I just didn't have the opportunity to take. I wouldn't mind if there was something in between because I just like writing courses a lot.

Interviewer: What do you mean when you say intermediary?

Interviewee: There's the gateway and there's the capstone.

Interviewer: You wouldn't mind requiring—

Interviewee: I wouldn't mind something, yeah, required in between. One, because it's unique, but, two, because a lot of time the people who I've had the class with I have other classes with or some of 'em I had the gateway with. It's nice to catch-up, and you're surrounded by people who you've seen before, and you familiarize yourself with.

Interviewer: Sure. Well, yeah, I mean we know I mean the Bloomsbury group and the Victorian writers.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: You learn a lot from being in community—

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: - with other writers.

Interviewee: Yeah, I mean that also might be partially painted by me being here longer. I know some people they took the capstone course—I mean the gateway—I keep mixing those up. The gateway course—

Interviewer: I know. I do too.

Interviewee: - and then the capstone course a year later, which would almost be like taking it three semesters in a row, which would make it over kill. If you start your sophomore year I don't think it would hurt to have a junior year and then the capstone.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Great. Well, it's helpful to have those perspectives on the record. Thanks so much for giving us your time—

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: - here. I wish you all the best as you go forward.

Interviewee: Thank you.

[End of Audio]