

[...]

Interviewer: Okay, seems to be recording. This is ***. Today is March 28th, and this is the writing development study with ***. How do you say your last name?

Interviewee: ***

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: Yeah, that's all right [cross talk 01:11].

Interviewer: Wonderful [laughter]. Okay, we'll just hop right in.

Interviewee: Cool.

Interviewer: Can you tell me how you describe yourself as a writer?

Interviewee: I don't know. I tend to be a—write too much maybe sometimes, I guess. I don't know. I try to be very effective in my writing but sometimes use too many words I guess, so yeah.

Interviewer: How do you mean, “effective”?

Interviewee: Like get my point across as quickly as possible.

Interviewer: How do you describe the role of writing in your life?

Interviewee: Well, this year hasn't been that great cuz I've been taking a lot more science classes and all these English classes. Last semester, I took my upper—my lower and upper-level writing requirements, so I did a lot more of that, but nowadays, I would say science writing is mostly the type of writing I do.

Interviewer: A lot more science writing.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay, good. How would you describe yourself as a writer when you first began coming to the University of Michigan?

Interviewee: I mean, I feel like I'm a pretty strong writer in general. Coming in here, I think, it was kind of more of a shock since I ended up not getting my best—the best grade ever on my paper here. Coming in, I'd say I was a weaker writer than I am now but probably very similar.

Interviewer: So you've developed some strength?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: What would you kind of contribute this development or this growth of yourself as a writer from when you first came in to where you are now? How did that kind of development happen?

Interviewee: I think a lot of it—so I came in not—like I said, not doing very well on my first paper, but after that, I spent a lot of time with my GSI [Graduate Student Instructor] from my Great Books class is what I took. I guess the way that she helped me was more developing my ideas and being able to cut out the sort of excess I had to fill the paper and have more actual ideas [fading voice 03:25].

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

Interviewee: I guess at this point since I'm leaning more towards the health field/science field, I guess develop more as a scientific writer, which I did a little bit in high school like writing up a paper but more of that I think, developing more scientific writing, which I find a lot more difficult to do.

Interviewer: What do you see the difference between the scientific writing and typical English classes writing?

Interviewee: I feel like English writing gives you a lot more room for flowery language, whereas scientific writing is more to the point, the bare bones of everything you need to know. For me, I think that's gonna to be harder just cuz I put a lot more floweriness into my language, so...

Interviewer: Okay, floweriness. Very nice, very nice [laughter]. Thinking across your writing experience at the University of Michigan, what do you think it means to write well?

Interviewee: I think it's to convey your thoughts as clearly and concisely as possible, so sometimes if you don't have thoughts, that could mean that your writing is bad. That's pretty much what I've noticed in—when my writing is received well versus when it's not, sort of when I don't really know what I'm talking about versus when I know more.

Interviewer: Is that knowledge based on research or is it kind of you formulating that idea?

Interviewee: I think—I think it's just me formulating that idea based on my own experiences with getting grades back and writing my own stuff, so...

Interviewer: Which first-year writing requirement course did you take?

Interviewee: I took Great Books [course].

Interviewer: What was your experience like with this course?

Interviewee: I mean, I thought it was a lot of reading. In terms of writing, like I said, I thought it was helpful cuz kind of had a very active GSI who really wanted to help get a lot of office hours, spent a lot of time with us, so give us a lot of a chance to really think out our ideas before we put them down on paper. That was helpful, I thought. I think it helped in my development in terms of actual maybe writing, not really so much—it was more just like development of ideas that helps [fading voice 05:55].

Interviewer: Are you still kind of making use of what you learned in Great Books in your writing now?

Interviewee: I wouldn't say that just—I mean, just cuz I'm not writing that much right now. Most of my classes are test-taking classes. Yeah, not this semester. Maybe in the future, but yeah, like I said, I don't do much writing now than lab reports.

Interviewer: Did you take [Writing course]?

Interviewee: No.

Interviewer: No, okay. Then what is your concentration?

Interviewee: I think I'm double majoring in biomolecular science and economics, but based on whether I can get into a class next semester, that can change.

Interviewer: You had mentioned earlier kind of lab reports and things. Have you had much opportunity to do writing in your field, in the concentration? And then what kinds?

Interviewee: I've done—okay, so for Econ this semester, I've done some article responses, so those are small pieces of writing that refer back to what we've learned, so I wouldn't call them really writing not much, just getting the concepts across that we learned more. Then for—I'm in Orgo right now, so I've done lab reports for that, so...

Interviewer: What's Orca?

Interviewee: Orgo.

Interviewer: Orgo. What's that?

Interviewee: Organic chemistry.

Interviewer: Ah-ha. Okay, okay. Got it [laughter]. I'm in English. I don't—

Interviewee: Yeah. That's fine.

Interviewer: - know these things [laughter].

Interviewee: That's fine.

Interviewer: Obviously, changing genres from kind of typical English papers to these more scientific papers, have you noticed any sort of effect that this separate genre, this scientific writing, has had on you as a writer as a whole in your whole experience?

Interviewee: I think maybe to an extent. I can't say this now because I haven't done any of the other type of—I haven't gone back to English writing for a while. I think if I was to go back to it, which I probably will next semester, I would see more of a concise bare minimum approach, more effect—like trying to get my writing across more effectively than I did in the past because that's how I look at my lab reports now, just getting the information out there without any extra words [fading voice 08:21], so...

Interviewer: All right, so just kind of really concise?

Interviewee: Yeah, which is kinda what I want I feel like because I've noticed, especially here at UM, that that's what they want. They want more—they want to see your ideas more than they want to see good use of the source.

Interviewer: Where are you kind of picking up that—that kind of privileging of concision, right? Is that from your professors, from your classmates, or—?

Interviewee: I think it's from maybe a mixture. I guess last year, I started the year off more with more, like I said, flowery language and stuff like that, and it wasn't received very well. As I cut that down more and more, it was received better, so...

Interviewer: How confident do you feel in terms of writing in your concentration at this point?

Interviewee: I mean, I'm just starting off on my concentration, so I can't really say how confident I am in it, especially since—but I've done science writing in high school, so I mean, I feel pretty confident considering I think I have more experience than most people coming into my concentration at this age. Yeah, I feel pretty confident with that.

Interviewer: Do you have any examples of when you've done really well writing in this concentration here or really poorly? Have you—have there been kind of specific examples that you can talk about?

Interviewee: I mean, yeah. I don't think so, yeah. This is my first semester doing—

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: - any kind of writing in organic chemistry, so I can't really say. That's not really my concentration, so I can't—yeah, because most of the classes that are science

classes tend to not focus on the writing aspect [crosstalk 10:11]. I mean, I did well on my first lab report, but that's about as much as I can [fading voice 10:15], yeah.

Interviewer: When you get that feedback, are they mostly giving you feedback about the science—the steps that you've taken or are they giving you feedback about the way the lab report is constructed?

Interviewee: It's mostly feedback on the information I put into a lab report rather than the writing, yeah.

Interviewer: What experiences kind of in and out of the classroom have had an effect on you writing?

Interviewee: Can you—yeah, I don't really know.

Interviewer: Well, for example, if we're talking about peer reviewing, do you have—are you—if you've—well, let's leave peer reviewing out [laughter]. If you're—do you read things outside that have maybe affected the way you write? Do you talk to other people about writing [cross talk 11:11] any other thing [inaudible 11:13]?

Interviewee: I think when I was younger I had a lot—I read a lot of classical literatures, which I think is why my writing has always been more, like I said flowery. I wish I had a better word, but...

Interviewer: [Laughter].

Interviewee: Yeah, I've read a lot of Jane Austen, a lot of Jane Eyre, those kind of things. Yeah, just a lot of classics when I was younger that I think influenced how I write in general. Even though nowadays I've cut that down, it's still relatively the same. Plus, I add a lot of, I guess, bigger words to my writing cuz I feel like it makes it sound more intellectual. Those kind of things all stem back from I think when I was younger and reading a lot of those classics.

I still try to read classics over the summer, but during the year, I can't say I read that much that would influence my writing cuz [inaudible 12:05] at school.

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

Interviewee: I mean, I guess like reflective writing is kinda thinking about what—I've actually done a good amount of that this semester—last semester and the semester before that I took a seminar. It was an [Honors class] called [title of course], is where each week we would reflect on what we'd read—that read and that we'd been assigned to read what we talked about in the seminar, and sort of just what we thought about it, and the same thing.

I took a [Sociology] class last semester, which is a project community class. We would reflect on—we went to a site to teach kids debate, so we'd reflect on that as well as the readings we were doing on social inequalities, especially in the education system. Kind of just like thinking it out, what you've learned outside or inside the classroom, so...

Interviewer: Thinking about what you've learned inside and outside the classroom.

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Have you used much reflective writing in your own writing process as far as reflecting on how you write in or out of the classroom?

Interviewee: You mean writing about my writing?

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: No, not really.

Interviewer: Not really.

Interviewee: Yeah. We did a little bit of it in my Great Books class I think towards the end. We looked at our own development and what we learned, but I think that was the extent of it.

Interviewer: Do you remember what you noticed in that exercise?

Interviewee: Kinda the same things that I've been saying. Yeah, just kind of like cutting down to make my ideas more clear.

Interviewer: You were able to see that in the progression of one semester from starting kind of [fading voice 13:54].

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: What have your experiences been in terms of working with other writers in your courses or even outside?

Interviewee: I guess I'm—starting from my last year of high school, I spent a lot of time working on my college essays, so I got to work with other—both of my friends would read my essays and give me feedback on that. Then when I came to college, my roommate would help me out with my essays, so that was really helpful and kind of had—she had the same kinda feedback that my teachers were having. Kind of what I gleaned off of the class and off of talking to her and other students was this idea of being more concise [fading voice 14:43].

Interviewer: Have you done much work in your classes of working with your classmates or has it mostly been you seeking people outside?

Interviewee: In my Great Books class, we did some peer editing for our second two essays. I honestly didn't find it that helpful though because most people looked at the rough draft maybe not as seriously as they would the final, so the editing I was doing was probably not as helpful because they weren't planning on handing that in anyways.

Interviewer: Have you done any sort of group or collaborative writing where you're all working on a final project together?

Interviewee: I mean, this semester, I did some for my organic chemistry class for the lab portion of that, but yeah, yeah. I think that's pretty different. There wasn't much—I feel like that would be very hard to do for an actual essay because everyone has their own writing style, but this was scientific writing, so there wasn't many ways to phrase something, so I didn't have much to disagree with I guess.

Interviewer: If you were going to give someone some advice about writing, what are some of the things that they should think about as they begin writing a paper?

Interviewee: I mean, I think the first thing that they should think about is definitely what they're trying to argue for, so pretty much what your thesis is going to be. Because from there, it's like once you have the thesis, it's really easy to formulate your other ideas and separate them into concise points that you then can prove. I mean, you have—after that, you just have your claim and your evidence and your final conclusion. I mean, I think that structure you can follow once you have your thesis.

Interviewer: Kind of start with the thesis?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Is that generally how you compose as well?

Interviewee: Yeah, most of the time. I think—I wrote an essay two semesters ago for my upper-level writing requirement for AAPTIS [Arab, Armenian, Persian, Turkish, and Islamic Studies] 16:52 331 where I actually didn't do that. I just was kind of writing things all over the place because I just—it was a really big paper. It was an eight- to ten-page paper, and I had my roommate look at it. She would ask me what I was arguing, and I realized I wasn't arguing anything. Once I did that, it was a lot easier to write the paper.

Interviewer: Got it, got it, wonderful. Have you had any experiences with new media writing such as writing for blogs or websites?

Interviewee: In high school, I was editor and chief of my yearbook, so I think I did some of those little subsets of writing for that. Yeah.

Interviewer: Anything here on campus? I mean, even PowerPoint presentations or anything?

Interviewee: I mean, yeah. I've done some PowerPoints. I've done the PowerPoint 17:48. I mean, recently, I did a PowerPoint for my organic chemistry class. Yeah, that was small writing.

Interviewer: What type of PowerPoint was that? What was the objective of your presentation?

Interviewee: To teach the rest of the class a specific concept that we really weren't covering in class, so...

Interviewer: What was that specific concept? I'm just wondering [laughter].

Interviewee: It was looking at—what do they call it? Chelating agents in their blood and how they affect a specific reaction. Yeah.

Interviewer: This is something that was kind of outside of the covered course material that—

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: - you were responsible for teaching basically?

Interviewee: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: In doing some of these kind of multimedia projects—

Interviewee: Oh, okay. I've also—sorry.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: I also did a PowerPoint this summer for—I had a fellowship at the cardiovascular center here, so I did a PowerPoint for that to show my—what I'd been doing and explain the concepts behind it and explain the results, so yeah.

Interviewer: As far as these kind of composing in PowerPoint or in yearbook [laughter] types of areas, what kind of experiences have those processes had on you as a writer? What kind of effects?

Interviewee: I mean, I guess it's—I think it's all going in the same direction kind of. You have to show the bare minimum on your slides. If you want to talk about more, you can, but you just wanna get your ideas out there, get the information out there. That's maybe where—yeah, sort of just limiting what you—what I can write is sort of how it has affected my writing the most. Yeah.

Interviewer: You've been uploading pieces of writing to the study archive on CTools [learning management system]. That's correct?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: How has that process been going for you?

Interviewee: It's fine. Yeah, it's fine. I mean, I just—yeah, it's not—yeah, I just upload some of my writing from everything 20:12 from the semesters and [cross talk 20:14].

Interviewer: No challenges or anything that way?

Interviewee: No, it was good.

Interviewer: Then what pieces did you choose for the archive? You can—we can pull them up here if you'd like.

Interviewee: Well, yeah. I think that is a good idea.

Interviewer: [Laughter]

Interviewee: I don't remember. It's been a while.

Interviewer: Certainly. Can you see okay with that?

Interviewee: Yeah. That's fine.

[Pause 20:35 – 20:58]

Interviewee: Yeah, so I wrote a final paper for my [Sociology course class last semester, so I uploaded that I think. Yeah, I uploaded that. It was—yeah, it was a self-reflective paper mostly with some references to some of the readings we'd done in the class. Then—and I think I uploaded for winter of 2012, I uploaded my final paper for the AAPTIS [...] class I did—I took, which was a ten-page paper on the Arab-Israeli conflict and—Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Same thing I guess.

Yeah, which I enjoyed writing a lot. Then I wrote—for my first-year writing, I submitted a paper on—from my Great Books class. I'm pretty sure it was my last one, but I think it was on—it was a comparative literature paper. It was on Aeschylus', the Persians', and Herodotus' histories and looking at—

Interviewer: [Laughter 22:22]

Interviewee: - if I can remember, yeah.

[Pause 22:24 - 22:32]

Interviewee: Looking at barbarism and how it's displayed in both Herodotus and Aeschylus.

Interviewer: Why did you choose each of these? If we can maybe go through cuz there were other papers I'm sure that you could have—

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: - could have uploaded. If we look at the first one. The sociology final, right?

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Was there a particular reason why you selected this piece of writing to use?

Interviewee: I mean, for that class we did weekly one-page reflections, but I felt like this was—I mean, it was a pretty big paper that I thought was the best display of the things I'd done in the class and learned in the class. I felt like it would be most relevant to the study. I think I also put the most effort into it for that class [inaudible 23:36].

Interviewer: How was the process of writing this when you were actually in the composing mode?

Interviewee: It was really fast. As a reflective piece of writing, I think I wrote it in a couple of hours. It's probably my most efficient paper. Considering it's almost eight pages, took me three to four hours to write.

Interviewer: Why do you think it was so quick?

Interviewee: Because I was just writing my thoughts, so there was a lot less information. It was just like everything—my thoughts and my experiences, which are a lot easier to get at than composing new thoughts and thinking about a thesis and stuff like that. This is more just like reflection on the class, which I had been doing all along.

Interviewer: It was kind of based on your experiences as well?

Interviewee: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: If we go to the next one—that was the winter 2012 Arab-Israeli conflict. Is that right?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: What about this one?

Interviewee: This is also—we also did three- to four-page papers almost every week for this class because it was an upper-level writing class, but I enjoyed writing this paper the most cuz I'm the most interested in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict out of the things in the Intro to Arab Culture class.

Interviewer: What other sorts of things did you look at if you remember?

Interviewee: We looked at the role of Arab women and how they're treated in Arab culture. We looked at more basic things like clothing, like music. Yeah, those are all things—this is the intro class, so just looked at a lot of the cultural elements of Arabic culture and of the Arab world, yeah.

Interviewer: In writing this, I know you said the sociology piece was pretty quick.

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: What about this? Did it feel like it came pretty easily or—?

Interviewee: I mean—I mentioned this before. This was the paper that I initially didn't really have much of a direction with.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: It didn't take me that long, considering that I wrote it in a few days probably. Yeah, I started it early because I had a lot of exams coming up. It was due on a Friday, and then I had maybe one or two exams that Wednesday and Thursday, so I started it really early. I wasn't considering that—I wasn't too stressed about my other classes while writing it, so it was not too bad to write, yeah.

Plus, I was really interested in what I was doing, so it took me— yeah, it was probably one of my shorter papers because I think also it was more information based, more history based. It was easier to write. It was a lot less—I don't know, yeah, like a lot less of making up things I guess. I don't know. Not making up things but introducing new elements. It was more just using already—information that was already there to prove a point that I had.

Interviewer: How did you—you'd said that you had started kind of without that thesis statement, right?

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: How did you finally come to what you ended up arguing?

Interviewee: I mean, once I realized I needed a thesis, I started thinking about pretty much what the Israeli—my thesis ended up being that I believe there should be a compromise, that there should be kind of almost a two-state solution. Allow there to be a

Palestine as well as Israel, separate Jerusalem so that it was both a Israeli and Palestinian place so that there would be less conflict.

I mean, that was just something—I just came to that conclusion based on my own thoughts and looking at the history that I had compiled already in the paper.

Interviewer: Then if we go to the next piece, and this was the first-year writing Great Books.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Barbarism.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Do you remember about this composing process?

Interviewee: Yeah, this was one was probably my longest one because I felt like it just required the most, just making up my own ideas. Yeah, so that's pretty much the reason why it was so long. It required me to sit down and find things. I mean, to think of things on my own cuz there's no part of it that was really—other than maybe the proof behind it. Not only was the thesis up to me; the little subset parts were really up to me, so...

Interviewer: Out of that class, what made this particular piece the piece to submit as opposed to others?

Interviewee: I also thought it was my strongest piece, so at the very end it was just—I sat down with my GSI before writing it. We thought it was—we talked about the thesis and, I mean, it was my strongest piece, so I thought it was concise. It also had a lot of good ideas that I had thought of on my own, so I thought it portrayed best my development as a writer I guess.

Interviewer: What I'm hearing is all of these pieces were kind of things that were done at the end of the semester.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Is that correct?

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Was there another piece in there or was this—?

Interviewee: I think these two might be the same thing. I might be wrong, but—no, actually, yeah. This is—yeah, I think this is a different first-year writing piece. Yeah,

from my Great Books class. Yeah, so yeah, this is another comparative literature looking at violence and how they're 29:36 powerful agents of change.

Interviewer: Do you remember much about this—composing this one?

Interviewee: I mean, I think it was my second one, so we had three throughout the year. I did well on my second two. The first one, I mean, I didn't do badly on. I got a B+, but it was my lowest grade coming into school.

Interviewer: Got it [laughter].

Interviewee: [Laughter] It was—I enjoyed writing this one too. I liked the books that I was writing about probably more than I liked writing about Aeschylus, Persians—I mean, I actually liked the Persians, but I didn't like Herodotus' histories. It was a really dry book, but—and this one.

I liked Ajax and I liked Medea, so it as fun to write, but yeah. It was interesting to write cuz it was like my first progression out of—into more thoughtful words and less flowery words.

Interviewer: These are all pieces that you did pretty well on then, right?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Good. Let's see. That is pretty much it for me.

Interviewee: Cool [cross talk 30:51].

Interviewer: Do you have any questions or any other comments about writing and your experiences here?

Interviewee: I mean, I guess even looking at these, I can say I probably had a pretty good experience with improving my writing here. Yeah, yeah, I enjoyed the classes I've taken so far where writing was necessary. Maybe Great Books more than AAPTIS [course], but yeah, I liked both. I mean, writing—I've enjoyed writing here, yeah. It's been good.

Interviewer: Do you have a sense of why you enjoyed Great Books more than the other? Is there—?

Interviewee: I think it was just—I felt like Great Books did a better job at making me a better writer because my GSI was so present and also liked to help all the time. I developed a much closer relationship with her. Whereas, for—after [AAPTIS course], it was more just getting through it and kinda just doing the best I could because even though I did have a GSI, and he was really sweet, he just was not equipped with the tools to make us better writers really.

Interviewer: I don't know if you can, but can you tell us kind of what tools were helpful in that? What—?

Interviewee: I guess maybe just even sitting down and talking to us about our ideas and whether we had the right ones and stuff like that. Yeah, I didn't feel like—it wasn't—yeah, it wasn't his fault cuz English wasn't his first language and stuff like that. He really tried to help in the ways that he could, but—

Interviewer: Sure.

Interviewee: - My GSI for Great Books, she would do a workshop with us on writing and what—she'd tell us what specifically she wanted. Whereas, my GSI for AAPTIS [course] maybe he didn't really do that. He did a little bit of grammar work, which isn't necessarily something I need at this age. I mean, because for AAPTIS [course], it was more about just the information and getting that down more than it was about what the writing was like.

Interviewer: Anything else for me or questions? Anything? [Laughter]

Interviewee: [Laughter] I think that's it. Yeah, no. Yeah, I think you answered all of my questions [crosstalk 33:20].

Interviewer: Yeah. Cool. That's perfect. I really, really appreciate you coming in—

Interviewee: Cool.

Interviewer: - and being available.

[...]

Interviewee: Okay, sweet. Thank you very much.

Interviewer: Thank you. Have a wonderful rest of your day.

Interviewee: You too.

[End of Audio]