

Interviewer: Wonderful. Okay, well, this is \*\*\*, and today is the 28th. Is that right?

Interviewee: 27th maybe?

Interviewer: [laughter] Something like that . Close, close.

[...]

[...] I'm here with \*\*\*. \*\*\*, thank you so much—

Interviewee: Sure.

Interviewer: - for taking time. I know this is a busy time, especially getting ready for graduation and it's exciting.

Interviewee: Yep. I've got two finals, one tomorrow and one Wednesday and then I'm done.

Interviewer: Oh, my gosh. You're so close.

Interviewee: I'm so close. It's been irritating—

Interviewer: So close.

Interviewee: [Laughter]- irritating cuz all my friends are like, "We're all done!" and I'm like, "And I still have two finals to go."

[...]

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: What we're gonna talk about today is we're just going to think back on all of our experiences with writing since you've been here at the University of Michigan.

Interviewee: It's been a lot.

Interviewer: It's been a lot. That's good to hear. We're also gonna talk about the minor capstone course and your portfolio for that class. Then we'll talk about your experiences from the gateway through the capstone within the minor, and then that'll be it. It shouldn't take any more than an hour, probably less, and we'll start with some basic questions about how you see yourself as a writer. The first question I have is just how would you describe yourself as a writer?

Interviewee: I feel like I've answered this question so many times.

Interviewer: For the minor stuff or—?

Interviewee: Yeah, I just took a survey I think on Saturday.

Interviewer: Oh, yeah.

Interviewee: It was one of those. I guess I would describe myself as constantly evolving cuz we had for the capstone that writer's evolution essay, which was like this is a trick question. I'm not done evolving, but so I would definitely say still growing. I think that if I ever stop growing then there's a problem. I kinda wanna say something along the lines of having learned to look around myself, take in other perspectives in my writing. It's teaching me to look out and at the same time look in.

Interviewer: That's really interesting.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Can you tell me more about that? In what ways do you feel like you have learned to look out?

Interviewee: I wrote about this a lot in my evolution essay, where basically I was talking about how when I was in high school I had this project that was called the I-Search 00:03:52, which my teacher was just like, "I'm so clever" cuz iPhones were really new then. He called it—it's not the essay that you have to write; it's the essay that you need to write, which all the seniors were like," Oh, my God. No. Just let us graduate."

Interviewer: [laughter] Yeah . I don't need to write anything [laughter].

Interviewee: I wrote—it was probably my first personal narrative that I ever wrote and I was just trying to get a feel for creative non-fiction. I really just learned how to own my voice, and then through college, I kept in peer editing finding that when people just went on ad nauseam about things, it was like, "I'm not convinced that you actually know what you're talking about because you're saying my experience is the only valid and my perspective is the only one."

That just really irritated me, so the more that I realized that, the more I tried not to fall into that trap, which usually meant that I would write from experience and then say, "This is the limitation of my experience," and I would try to pull in other perspectives or at least acknowledge where mine was limited. The older that I got, I think I actually just wrote an essay for it was [English course] [Title of

course], and my last essay was—I crowd sourced all of my friends like, “What would you define this word as?”

I ended up writing it in but with a ton of conversations built in where I was getting other perspectives because I said, “This is what I think, but how do other people think of it?” Then it was kinda a definition essay where I moved from—like I started here, but then I ended with this by taking in my perspective but also a ton of other people’s perspective, which is fun—scene 00:05:18

Interviewer: That is fun.

Interviewee: I like interviewing and crowd sourcing, and I think that’s definitely how I have grown as a writer is learning to not just own my perspective, but learn how to take other ones in, work them in.

Interviewer: That’s really interesting. You talked a little bit about the essay you did in 12th grade.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Your I-Search essay. How would you describe yourself as a writer when you started here at the University of Michigan, like your freshman year? You came here as a freshman?

Interviewee: Mm-hmm, yep. I think was definitely kinda a conceited writer. I thought that I was just better than most of the other people in my first-year writing classes, which you come in and you think, “I know everything. There’s nothing that you can teach me. I’m good at this.” The longer I was in school, the more I realized I don’t know everything and I will never know everything, so I think when I started, there was a little bit of conceit there, probably a lot of conceit there. The growing process has been learning how much there is to learn [laughter], and it will also be.

Interviewer: That’s an important part of college. What do you think helped you figure that out?

Interviewee: That’s a good question. I think there were a lot of things, and it wasn’t necessarily limited to my experience in the minor and my experience with writing in general. The more perspectives in general for everything that was my collegiate experience, I just realized, “Wow, there’s a lot that I don’t know,” and then that necessarily means there’s a lot about writing that I don’t know, specially [English course], which I took this semester. We just read a lot of essays where people would tackle things in ways that I hadn’t considered or I think we read one David Foster Wallace essay where he was saying, “Consider the lobster.”

His assignment was to write about the Maine Lobster Festival and actually wrote kind of a treatise to think about how do we treat animals. It was kinda like a mind-bending like I don't know how you got me here, but you did.

Interviewer: [Laughter]

Interviewee: More exposure to different things helped me realize that there's a lot craft-wise and other kinda things that I just don't know yet.

Interviewer: As you graduate, what are your goals for yourself as a writer?

Interviewee: To not stop, not get lazy because I don't have anybody holding my feet to the fire anymore. Yeah, I think that would be the biggest one is just not to stop.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. That makes a lot of sense. What are your plans after graduation? What's next for you?

Interviewee: They're a little fuzzy, but I actually was doing an informational interview this morning with a woman from a company in Wisconsin. They were asking me if I would be interested in applying to be a technical writer there.

Interviewer: Oh, wow.

Interviewee: Which was cool. I hadn't even really been researching, and they reached out to me, which is always a nice little ego booster.

Interviewer: Very cool. How did they find you?

Interviewee: LinkedIn, which I thought that's funny and I'm glad that I updated that at the beginning of the year so it was—

Interviewer: Wow!

Interviewee: - relatively recent. If that doesn't pan out, my original plan and actually what I did my capstone on was I want to travel, which my parents are like, "No, please don't do that."

Interviewer: [Laughter]

Interviewee: "Please just stay here where we can have a grab on you at all times." I would really like to just travel around the U.S. and couch surf and not have a plan for a year.

Interviewer: Very cool.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Where do your parents live?

Interviewee: My parents live in [city].

[...]

Interviewer: [...]. As you're thinking about all of your experiences with writing, here at the University of Michigan, what do you think it means to write well?

Interviewee: To write well.

Interviewer: It's kinda a big question.

Interviewer: It is. I remember when I was doing the gateway portfolio, and we were looking at examples. There was one had a quote at the top that said something along the lines of, "You can't really teach writing; good writing has to come from a lifetime of loving words and just being in love with writing." I wanna say that writing well has to stem from that. Just you have to love it to write well. I would also say that writing well comes from I think a little bit of humbleness, realizing that maybe the first draft isn't as perfect as I thought it was and I need to revise.

Because when other people looked at it, there were problems that maybe I didn't see, so a willingness to revise would definitely be a part of it, I think.

Interviewer: Which upper-level courses have you taken?

Interviewee: Upper-level writing?

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Oh, goodness. There have been so many (laughter).

Interviewer: Most of our minors have taken multiple ULWR courses.

Interviewee: I know that I think I was a sophomore and I took I think it was [Communications course]-something. Actually, there've been so many that they're starting to blur together, but there was an upper 300-level COMM [communications] class that was basically research based, which was kind of fun. My ultimate project for that was design a research study with a group and then write the paper.

Interviewer: Oh, wow.

Interviewee: I was much more comfortable with writing than doing the research and designing that and doing the software, so I volunteered to write the entire paper if my group would do the research. They all thought they were getting the better end of the deal and I was like, “No, I’m getting the better end of the deal.”

Interviewer: [Laughter]

Interviewee: It was great because everyone did what they loved. There was that one. It’s hard to remember because there’s so many that I think should have been upper-level writing but weren’t.

Interviewer: Oh, okay.

Interviewee: Some that were upper-level writing, but I didn’t feel that they really should have been.

Interviewer: Can you think of one of those courses, just out of curiosity?

Interviewee: I’m trying to remember. They’re escaping me right now.

Interviewer: That’s fine.

Interviewee: [cross talk 00:12:49]. I feel like sometimes I need to look at my transcripts

Interviewer: It’s hard to be like, “Which ones were?”

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Let me change the question a little bit then. Which courses do you remember other than the COMM class that had experiences with writing that sort of stick out to you? That might be a better question.

Interviewee: Moby Dick. There was a 400-level English class that I took I think my second semester of my sophomore year where it wasn’t upper-level writing, but I thought it should have been where—I don’t think we actually wrote that many papers. It was just that every day we were writing logs, and it was just one of the most intense English classes that I have ever taken where we were reading and a ton of other texts that were themed around post modernism. It was difficult because we had to try to put into words this really slippery concept.

Postmodernism is really hard to talk about, and it’s really hard to explain, so that was a unique challenge in that I was having trouble grasping mentally what does this concept mean. Someone is telling you you have to write about it from a ton of different angles every single day, and I’m going to grade you very, very hard. I think that was probably one of most challenging.

Interviewer: Who taught that course?

Interviewee: [Instructor]. She's a ball buster, and she's awesome, and I loved her. I thought she was one of the best professors that I've had here. Yeah, that one definitely. Just how do you take a concept that maybe you don't truly understand and explain it so that somebody else can read what you've said and come away from it understanding it?

Interviewer: Do you feel like you learned to do that? By the end of the semester, could you—?

Interviewee: [laughter]. Definitely, yeah. Our last thing, we had an option to either do an in-class essay or a take-home essay, and we all said let's do the in class, because she'll grade it easier .

Interviewer: [laughter]. Do it, yeah

Interviewee: I just remember her comments were pretty short, but I remember her saying you had a really slippery concept here, but you handled it in a way that I could understand. I respected her as a professor, so I believe that she was being honest. If she didn't think it, she wouldn't have given me the grade that she did. Yeah, I feel like I came away with a good grasp of how to do that.

Interviewer: [laughter]. That's a really hard thing to grab ahold of

Interviewee: Yeah, sometimes I have to really sit down and think about it before I start writing, but that was a definitely a good writing experience.

Interviewer: That's fantastic. What other effects do you feel like your experiences with writing here, particularly in classes that were upper level or should have been upper-level writing courses, how has that shaped you as a writer? You've learned to deal with these slippery concepts and be able to explain them well. Have these courses had any other effects on you as a writer?

Interviewee: Can you give an example?

Interviewer: Well, the course, the English class where you didn't know how to explain these sort of abstract complicated concepts, and now you know how.

Interviewee: Yeah. The thing that's sticking out to me most is just learning how to incorporate other perspectives. Definitely in high school it was, "We're gonna write a five-paragraph essay, and you're going to pull supports from this text and whatever." I think one of the things that I unintentionally learned through definitely some of the essay classes was how can you use supports that aren't necessarily here's a quote from a book? Other perspectives that you have just

from your daily interactions or things like that. Also, how do you work around concepts?

Instead of saying, “Here’s my thesis and here are my logical four other paragraphs that are gonna follow, I learned a more organic structure. For instance, how do just set up a question without explicitly giving a thesis and then lead a reader through like here’s the linear structure of me myself exploring this question. At the same time, I’m leading you through it in that linear organic way. Then at the end, we both have the answer, which I think is kind of more fun than saying, “Here’s my thesis and here are my supports and…” It’s a little less stilted I think, which was fun.

Interviewer: What was your concentration?

Interviewee: My concentration, I had two majors, English and communications studies and then the minor.

Interviewer: Wow.

Interviewee: [laughter] Yeah, and it did it in four years .

Interviewer: That’s incredible. Wow!

Interviewee: Lots of summer classes.

Interviewer: [laughter]. Keeping yourself busy

Interviewee: [Laughter]. People always say, “Wow, that’s so much,” and I just kinda think, “Well, I don’t know. I live with all science majors, so I always felt like I had it easier than everybody else cuz they were saying—one of my roommates is the project manager [...], and she’s like, “Oh, yeah. This semester, I built a car that gets some ridiculous number of miles to the gallon.” I’m like, “And I’m over here writing my capstone portfolio with pretty pictures.”

Interviewer: That doesn’t mean the capstone portfolio isn’t just as important as the solar car. Wow. Wow, that’s a lot. You’ve been taking a lot of writing courses just—or courses with a lot of writing in them.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Just for your concentrations then.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Have you used the skills and strategies you’ve learned in those courses in other classes that aren’t directly connected to writing?



Interviewee: Definitely. I feel like everything that I have learned somehow got incorporated into another class even if it wasn't intended to do so. I had friends or rather a colleague say to me once, "When you reach that moment when you've realized how to incorporate everything and then use it—how to do the research or whatever work it is that you feel passionate about," he said, "that's when you're ready to graduate. Which was nice because it was at the beginning of my senior year and I said, "Yeah, I'm done."

Interviewer: [Laughter]"I'm ready! Let's do it!"

Interviewee: "Can you just let me go now?"

Interviewer: Can you give some examples of how you've sort of incorporated what you've learned about writing into your other courses?

Interviewee: Yeah, sometimes I don't really even consciously think about it. I have to write so many forum posts or logs every day for English courses or just kind of like a—instead of giving a quiz, I'm going to do this to make you prove that you did the reading. A lot of times, I would just incorporate different readings. I don't know if that's necessarily incorporating what I learned about writing, but there would definitely be things like different argumentation structures like the one I just mentioned about organically leading someone through like this is my realization, and I'm going to lead you through the same thing.

I did that in a couple of communications classes where it was the same thing, where it was a slippery topic that I was trying to explain and tried to do it that way, which was just not I think a structure that my professor had seen before in that kind of class cuz most of those people are not—I mean, they're good writers because if you're in communications you have to be able to effectively communicate, but that wasn't really a writing style that he had seen before. It worked out well. I got a really good grade but just maybe making my writing a little interdisciplinary. Yeah, I'm writing for a communications class, but I don't necessarily have to write in the traditional argumentation format.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. Makes a lot of sense to me.

Interviewee: [inaudible 00:21:05] I found that if your professor was entertained by your paper, you've to get a better grade [laughter].

Interviewer: [Laughter] Well, you know. When it's not a chore to read—

Interviewee: [laughter] Yes .

Interviewer: Right? I'd like to talk about your capstone course a little bit. What impact do you feel that the course, which is the [Writing course], has had overall on your writing?

Interviewee: Before the capstone course, I really didn't know how to write for an online medium. I mean, ideally, you're supposed to with the gateway, but with the gateway I really fell into the trap of I'm going to take my nine-page paper and just put it online. It was just a mass of text, and even looking back on it, I don't even like looking at this. I don't know how anybody else would go through it. For [Writing course], what I honestly did was I didn't write anything in Word. I wrote it all in the HTML editor.

Interviewer: Oh, wow.

Interviewee: Because I wanted to see it here and think like if I can't see the whole paragraph in one without having to scroll down, nobody's gonna want to read this.

Interviewer: Oh, interesting.

Interviewee: I have to make it short and sweet, and that was really a challenge for me because I love—I'm a writer. I love going on at length and writing pages and pages and pages, but that was the challenge that I set for myself was how can I make this short enough that it still fulfills the academic requirement but for someone who maybe is not from academia or who is not required for a grade or as their job to read it would actually want to sit and look at it. That was not something that I ever had experience with prior to the capstone course.

I think that that's going to be valuable cuz—I mean, I'm not totally sure where I'm gonna go from here, but I think that being able to say something in a short, concise way will be good skill.[laughter]

Interviewer: [laughter]. You actually answered my next question too, which is about the project. I actually wanted to take some time and look at your capstone portfolio and I guess—I'm assuming you can get to it, right?

Interviewee: Mm-hmm. I definitely memorized that HTML by now.

[Pause 00:23:36 – 00:23:43]

Interviewer: A lot of people used Wix [web development platform] 00:23:44 I've seen.

[Pause 00:23:46 – 00:23:54]

Interviewer: Oh, cool. What I'd like you to do is look back through it and remind yourself of it, and I'm gonna ask you to talk about the most memorable aspect of this portfolio. It could be creating the portfolio. It could be the most memorable sort of piece that's on here, but feel free to look through it and remind yourself of what's there.

Interviewee: Sure.

Interviewer: It's hard to remember all of the things.

Interviewee: I think definitely one of the biggest challenges was figuring out how to structure it. I think I might have actually spent the most time on that because the creating the content was a lot easier. It was figuring out what's the structure and where can the content go, and I really wanted the home page to just not be a ton of text. I just wanted it to be a short explanation right off the bat, so if an employer was coming here—say all they really wanted was my resume—make it easy to explain what is this, why are you here, and where can you find what it is that you wanted. That was why I was just like, "I'm gonna make that really easy to find."

Definitely from my work, whenever I have to pull resumes for applicants, if they make it difficult for me to get a PDF version, I'm irritated and sometimes there were people that got skipped because they just made it so difficult to get a resume, so I just tried to make that as easy as was possible. My primary goal was not piss off my audience. [laughter]

Interviewer: [laughter]. That's a really good goal to have .

Interviewee: [Laughter]

Interviewer: I think it's a goal that not a lot of people really consider.

Interviewee: Yeah. Definitely the most memorable part I think was actually the project where I just wanted to do it in a linear structure. I wanted to ask this question and then guide the reader through it.

Interviewer: Oh, cool.

Interviewee: Yeah, I had a lot of fun doing it because I was trying to make it visual and make it a little bit funny like zero percent of people were willing to admit that they don't care about adventure.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's hilarious.

Interviewee: Then I also wanted to structure it where when you get to the bottom, okay, then what's next? Here's a link. You can click to what's next, which was

cool. I also included a bunch of links so that people could take the survey that I used to do my research, so that they could feel involved.

Interviewer: That's fun.

Interviewee: Let's see. I did this a little bit too so people could click on stuff.

Interviewer: The design is really interesting. How did you figure out how to do that?

Interviewee: How or how I wanted it to look?

Interviewer: Both.

Interviewee: I'd spent a lot of time looking at websites that I found attractive. There's one called [Web design company], [located] in Ann Arbor. Actually, about a year ago, I don't remember how I found them, but I was looking at their website and thought, "This looks cool," and I ended up e-mailing their general line and saying, "What you do sounds cool. Would anybody be willing to give me an informational interview?" I ended up talking to two of the owners.

Interviewer: Oh, wow!

Interviewee: They just sat down with me for an hour to talk about what they did and what my goals were, and they were saying, "It sounds like you would be interested in this kind of stuff. Let us connect you with some of our partners in [city] at a PR [Public Relations] firm."

Interviewer: Oh, how cool.

Interviewee: Yeah, it's been a cool way to just—I find that when I ask people, "Would you be willing to talk to me about your awesome job and your awesome life?" nobody ever says no. People love talking about themselves.

Interviewer: How did you start contacting people like that? What made you decide...?

Interviewee: I tried to remember, actually, the first time that I had done that, and I think I was maybe a freshman and I had a [relative] who was an editor for—is it [Learning company]?

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewee: Yeah, and I met up with her and had a conversation, and I realized this is a little uncomfortable, but it's much more comfortable than an interview. I

didn't really realize that there was a name for it until I'd been doing it for a couple of years. Now that I know that there is a name for it, I'm just pretty shameless about reaching out to total strangers and says, "Hey, you have a cool job where you something that I want to know about. Can you talk to me about it?"

Interviewer: That's so cool.

Interviewee: It's made talking a lot easier so that when I actually do do interviews, it's easier and I'm not as choked up. I mean, I still choke up all the time, but it's a little easier.

Interviewer: What an interesting way to get information that you need. That's fantastic.

Interviewee: [...]. All of these books, aside from, that was for a class and I decided well, I might as well put the two together and do less work overall.

Interviewer: Yeah, fair enough.

Interviewee: All of these got recommended to me by my mentor who I had actually met because he's the director of [an Office for University of Michigan] here, and I thought, "Oh, that sounds cool, and I know you through my current boss. Would you be willing to talk to me?" He was telling me about his law degree and then he mentioned, "Oh, I took a gap year and traveled the U.S. between undergrad and starting law school." I was like, "Wait. What? Tell me about that. I don't care about law school. Tell me about that."

Interviewer: Yeah, tell me about that. Yeah.

Interviewee: Lois on the LooseHe recommended to me a ton a of books, Female Nomad. This one was awesome, The Man Who Quit Money. Seriously, he just quit using money and lives in caves in [inaudible 00:29:29], Utah—

Interviewer: Crazy.

Interviewee: - and has done it for decades.

Interviewer: In a really cool way crazy.

Interviewee: [Laughter] There was I think one other that I just didn't finish, but—

Interviewer: Oh, that's neat. Suggest other books?

Interviewee: Yeah, I love getting people to do work for me.

Interviewer: Yeah, and have you gotten a lot of response from that?

Interviewee: Not yet. I also feel like I haven't really publicized this outside of the minor yet.

Interviewer: Wow.

Interviewee: Yeah, this who thing is resulting from info interviews that I've done pretty much.

Interviewer: Wow, this is cool.

[...]

Interviewee: [...]. On my contact page I had a sponsor me link. Oh, this is definitely a really memorable part of the project for me. I took a class taught by a friend of mine called [Title of course], and part of it was she was advertising the pilot offering of Impact Self-Defense through the university, which is this really cool group from [city] that teaches defense classes. I took it because the biggest thing that I came up against when I told people that I wanted to travel was—

[...]

Interviewee: [...] It was kinda cool unlearning all of those cultural stereotypes and realizing that you don't have to be afraid, and also if you do feel afraid, that's usually—that was actually a project that I did for violence prevention, which was a fun way to match these projects was learning how to take that gut instinct that I feel like there's just something wrong.

I read a book by Gavin de Becker, which I probably should include in this, where he was saying when you have that feeling it's because there's a bunch of signifiers that you're not consciously aware of but that are telling you something if you listen to them. It works for you, learning to trust your own fear. I had mentioned up here, “ loves to say if you have a bad feeling about turning right, then turn left.” It's always what I tell my parents, and they're like, “Well, what if something goes wrong?” I was like, “Well, we'll try not to get into that situation, and if worse comes to worst, there we go.” [...].

[...]

Interviewer: It sounds like you're goals we were just talking about a few minutes ago are a big part of this project. The idea of traveling and taking this gap year is a big part of what you've done in this class.

Interviewee: It is really cool. I wanted to if I was gonna do all this work, make it personally relevant. Plus, I've always found that the essays and projects that really resonated with me most were—especially with research—ones that I could

understand why are you doing this? Why are you the one to do this research? It just was more powerful as a result, so I decided this is what's important to me. If I'm going to spend four months working on it, I'd like this to be what I'm working on.

It was cool because it just incorporated pretty much everything that was doing, from my essay class to my violence prevention class to this. It was just such a nice way to tie a perfect little bow on my college experience. I loved it.

Interviewer: That's fantastic. Do you think that creating this e-portfolio has had an effect on your actual writing?

Interviewee: Definitely. Mostly because when I start writing, I usually want to write for pages and pages and pages. The challenge was how can I achieve the same effect but in a visual format or in a format that is something besides a printed 8 x 11 piece of paper? I had never done that before. Nobody had challenged me to do that before, so doing this portfolio definitely taught me how to do that. For instance, I wanted to—originally, my idea was I was gonna try and do—are you familiar with BuzzFeed?

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Sort of like BuzzFeed articles. I kept finding when I was trying to answer my own questions, I would start writing for paragraphs, like for each bullet point. I said, "Okay, how can I figure out how to make it academic but at the same time not go on for pages?" I would pick out quotes where it was making the point that I wanted but over and image, so you're not just immediately assaulted with a ton of text. You have to scroll over it to see it. It was a lot of learning to write in a way that made the content work for the form, the form work for the content, which we talk about that with essay classes but never in something like this. That was a definitely a unique challenge and I think a good growing challenge.

Interviewer: Yeah. I love the design you have here. It's really great.

Interviewee: [laughter]. I've got ideas that I'm gonna edit because I had the readers who would go through and give you feedback, but I'm not doing that until after graduation .

Interviewer: [Laughter]. Gotta get through graduation first.

Interviewee: Yeah, and take those other finals.

Interviewer: It makes sense to me. It makes sense to me. What did you learn from the reflective writing that you've done? I think the Writer's Evolution Essay? Is that what that's called?

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: Yeah. I always learn something different when I try to do reflective writing. One of the fun things was when I did my reflective writing, I looked back on the reflective writing that I did for the gateway course, and I had thought that it was all gonna be disjointed and not necessarily have the same kind of views. Cuz usually when I look back on stuff that I wrote a couple years ago I'm like, "Oh, this is terrible and I wouldn't think this anymore. I wouldn't say this anymore."

I was actually surprised that it was all still true, and this was just adding to it. I feel like the reflective writing has helped me realize I am a little bit more cohesive than I had previously thought. I'm trying to think of how I could better explain that. It helps me realize that I have grown up as a writer. I mean, I'm never gonna be done completely growing, but I've gotten to a point where I can look back a couple of years and think, "No, I still think that this is true, and this is still an accurate representation of who I am as a writer, who I am as a person," which was fun. I really, really enjoyed it.

Interviewer: What do you think that people who are interested in writing development—so program administrators at Sweetland, people like who teach writing and research writing—what could we learn about writing development from your e-portfolio here?

Interviewee: Hmm, it's hard for me to separate writing development from personal development cuz I think that the two really are tied together. I have found that particularly with journaling when there were a couple of crisp moments for me when I feel like I grew up as a person. When I look back on my journals from those points, there is a definite shift in the way that I was writing.

Interviewer: Interesting.

Interviewee: One in the style and two in the topics that I was picking, which was kinda cool. I think that those two are definitely tied together because I mean who you are determines a lot of what you'll write about and the way that you look. If I could give any advice for Sweetland, it would be really encouraging people to maybe not think of this as another research project that you have to do so much as what's the research that you need to do. I really did think of this as the I-Search 2.0, the college level. I was like, "What's the thing that I personally need to research and write about?"

For me, that was adventure, what was coming next and what had I learned. That was it for me. I also feel like I was kinda resisting. A lot of my classmates did



economic analyses or things that I'm sure were personally interesting to them, but all I could see was that just sounds like another research paper that you're really passionate about the economics of the Olympics or stuff like that where...? Yeah, I just think that if you have something that really forces you to reflect on yourself, the writing will be better because of it.

If I could give any it would like a gentle nudge to students like you can do something like that. You can do something that's personally reflective. Just because it's personal doesn't mean that it can't be professional. Plus, all of the feedback that I've had is that people said, "I really got a sense of your personality" or my reader actually used the word "integrity," and that was interesting. I hadn't even thought of that, but I had a really great bonding with my capstone professor, [inaudible 00:42:11] Julie 00:42:41. I love her.

We were having a conversation about how sometimes when you're just trying to be a little more honest like this is actually who I am as a person; I'm not putting up a front for prospective employers because this is who I am and this is what I would bring to your organization, and this is really me. I mean, obviously, I'm not putting up pictures of like, "Here's Friday night!" There is that kind of filter, but this is my honest self. I think that when people are encouraged to bring that or really dive into that reflectively, I think that does help you grow as a writer. [...]

Interviewer: Wow. It's really interesting.

Interviewee: I think that those two things, personal development and writing development are just—you can't separate that. I really don't think that you can, which is hard seeing like your task is teaching them to write, is teaching them to develop themselves as people. At the same time, what a cool charge is that?

Interviewer: [Laughter] That's why I picked this job, right? Yeah.

Interviewee: That's amazing. How many other professors get to say, "I facilitate—"

Interviewer: Right. It's so interesting.

Interviewee: - my students' personal growth?

Interviewer: Yeah. It's a really interesting connection that you're making. Thinking back then, thinking back through that growth process back to the gateway course, how did your experiences in the capstone course compare to your experiences in the gateway course?

Interviewee: [pause]. I loved that it was smaller, that had maybe nine people in my gateway course as opposed to I want to say 20 plus or nine in my capstone

and maybe 20 plus in my gateway. I think that that experience was good getting to the top because this was a bigger project. I mean, maybe it wasn't actually bigger. It felt bigger, and it just offered more personal connection with my peers and with my professor. I'm trying to think of the other ways that the two were different. Hmm . It's hard to put my finger on. I feel like I was coming to it as a more grown up person.

The things that I got out of it were different. Certainly, you could choose to come to it the same way that somebody came to the gateway. I think that's the biggest thing that I could put my finger on is it was a smaller group and you had to get more in depth, and you had to articulate to your classmates a little bit more what you were thinking. You got more personalized feedback because it was the same small group all semester. You were saying, "I know you, so when I look at this I'm not necessarily getting you or I am getting you because I know you and I know what you're trying to convey and it works or it doesn't work." I think that was the biggest thing was just it was a more intimate group.

Interviewer: Yeah. Could you talk a little bit more about your experiences working with other writers? Not just in the capstone but across the minor?

Interviewee: What sort of working with other people?

Interviewer: However you did.

Interviewee: Hmm.

Interviewer: I mean, you may have done some collaborative writing.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: It sounds like you've had some good experiences with peer review and maybe you writing group style, like giving each other feedback.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: You may have done some more informal kind of working with writers.

Interviewee: One thing that I liked in the minor—I'm remembering being a freshman and the peer edits were really, "You need a comma here or you have the incorrect whatever sentence structure," whereas the higher we got up in the minor, especially through capstone, there was none of that. It was more like your ideas and your basic structure or the way that you're presenting your information visually or that sort of thing where it was more holistic instead of nitpicky. That was great.

I love working with other writers just because I always have in my head this is what I'm conveying, but when somebody else with a different life experience or with just a different set of eyes looks at it and says, "I totally got something else," that's really valuable information that you can't get by yourself. I think that's my favorite reason for working with other writers is just they see things that I don't or they see it in a different way, which is valuable because sometimes you think I'm conveying X and really you're conveying Y or two different subsets of readers, they'll get different things.

Those different perspectives I think were my favorite thing about working with other writers, and their [University of Michigan] students, to they're all extremely diverse. Which really I think was just to my benefit. I was lucky having that group of people.

Interviewer: What differences do you see between the gateway and the capstone e-portfolios that you made?

Interviewee: I hated my gateway portfolio.

Interviewer: How so?

Interviewee: I'm trying to put my finger on why I hated it so much. It was just bland and boring. I was very nervous to put anything personal on it. It was not visual. It was just a bunch of text that really wasn't broken up by anything. It wasn't really multimedia. I mean, there were links, but just in the text, like here's a blue word here and there. It was just boring. I really wasn't I don't think pushing myself very hard because I had this idea that it really needs to look like a resume but just like a normal paper thing but online so you don't actually have to have paper.

Whereas, with the capstone portfolio, I was challenging myself not to take paper and put it online, but something that was created online and lives online. The content was made for that form. I think that was the biggest difference in my mind.

Interviewer: Both the gateway and the capstone courses emphasized different kinds of reflective writing. How would you describe your experience with that kind of reflection?

Interviewee: See, if I'm remembering correctly, the kind of reflection that we did in the gateway was why do you write and how do you write. There was also some reflection on how do you revise, which I feel like I didn't actually do that much of. Then when we got to the capstone, it was more how have you evolved, which I think it's good that it was set up that way because to answer how have I evolved, I needed to look back on those how do I write, why do I write essays, which that was useful that it was structured in that path. In terms of the differences between

the two, I think that they were the questions that I needed to be asked at those points developmentally.

Because I hadn't really evolved that much yet when I was a sophomore, but I really did need to look at why do I write? I came up with a couple basic reasons, and I still like my essay, and it's still true, which really helped me to then to when I was answering the question, "Well, how have I evolved?" I had to look back on why do I write and is that still true for me. Since it is still true, what's changed? I think that it's—I really enjoyed that it was structured in that pathway. Yeah.

Interviewer: Has this reflection given you new ways of talking about writing, so new terms or concepts or...?

Interviewee: [pause]. Ooo, terms and concepts. Hmm. I'm sure that it has, but there's not really any that are coming to mind right now.

Interviewer: That spring to mind.

Interviewee: [laughter]. I feel like most of the terms and concepts that I've gotten I got from essay classes, where we'll say, "Oh, you pulled a Sheryl Strayed in your essay," which is just we were referencing how she would transition through flashbacks. I'm trying to think if there were any buzz words that we had in our classes. I know that I'm better at talking about it in general, that kind of writing about writing. That's easier now. I know that in the gateway I definitely was like, "Wait. You want me to do what? I don't know why would I do that ."

Definitely has gotten easier. I don't know if I'd necessarily have concrete terms, but I do feel more confident in terms of how can I talk about writing or write about writing.

Interviewer: What suggestions would you make for the people Sweetland as they're thinking about the minor? It's still pretty new.

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: What kind of suggestions would you make as we look forward and think about future cohorts?

Interviewee: I understand the reasoning behind in the gateway we had—halfway through the semester, we switched groups. When I say groups, I mean the people who we were commenting on each others'—

Interviewer: Peer review groups?

Interviewee: Yeah, but I almost wanted it to be like an all the way through the semester sustained kind of thing because when we switched halfway through, it

was hard. It was like, “I don’t really know you people because we’re in such a large class and we’re only here for a couple of hours a week.” That would be one thing because you’re already in a group of 25, and it’s hard to connect with 25 other people. I don’t know if that would really their needs, but I would have encouraged—

Interviewer: You would have preferred that?

Interviewee: Yeah, just if you can’t have a sustained relationship with 25 people then you could have a sustained relationship with five or three or four. I would have liked that. It’s definitely easier in the capstone because it’s already such a smaller group of people, which I would say absolutely keep that. I don’t think the capstone classes should be any bigger than nine or ten, and I don’t know if other classes were a lot bigger than that.

Interviewer: I have no idea.

Interviewee: Mine was nine and I loved it.

Interviewer: Was a good size?

Interviewee: I thought that was great, yeah. I mean, it was especially great because we were in the same groups for almost the entire semester, which was great because by the end when I was commenting on forum posts or blog posts rather, I knew why they were writing what they were writing. I remember what your project was and the things that you’re dealing with, so I have a better idea of—

Interviewer: That would make a difference.

Interviewee: - how to help you. Whereas, in the gateway, I remember thinking like, “I have no idea why you’re—I don’t remember what your project was. I just can’t remember.”

Interviewer: [Laughter] Yeah, it’s a lot to keep up with when there’s 20 people.

Interviewee: [pause]. It’s a lot, yeah. I think just having that smaller group really helped. In terms of other recommendations, I know that they’ve pared down the capstone a lot in terms of requirements, and I think that that was good, especially because it’s overwhelming having this enormous project that I’m trying to work on all semester. I think having the two basic requirements, the writer’s evolution essay and the capstone project, I think it’s good that they’ve pared it down that much.

I think one thing that was not that helpful to me was doing the project proposal. I know that the goal is to have you have a plan to go through everything, but it

think my end result looked absolutely nothing like my proposal. I trying to think how can you revise that because we're [University of Michigan] students, and we're inclined to bite off way more than we can chew. Sometimes the project not looking like the proposal is just us realizing I cannot do the hundred thousand things that I committed to in this.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: Maybe take some of those classes that were dedicated to working on the proposal and really just working on pairing it down a lot because that's I think the biggest problem that each student is gonna face every single time is just "I don't think that this is too much," but in practice, this is way too much cuz you're gonna be doing this project when you're trying to graduate and have a lot else on your plate.

Interviewer: It's a lot. It's a lot.

Interviewee: [laughter]. I think, yeah, that would be my biggest recommendation is retooling that to just focus on okay, we all already know that you have too much. How can we force you to pare it down? Which is hard because you will meet resistance.

Interviewer: Of course.

Interviewee: I don't know how to actually implement that, but that would probably be I think much more helpful than actually going through all of the writing the proposal and all of that. I feel like we spent so much time on it, and it might have been more useful to me to have had less classes doing that and more classes coming in with drafts of our portfolio. Whereas, if we only have maybe three or four classes at the very end when we're working on that, I think that would have been more helpful.

Interviewer: Do you have any suggestions for writing instruction for undergraduates more generally? Maybe not for the writing minor professors necessarily, but just undergraduate professors in general.

Interviewee: Undergrad professors, hmm. I would definitely encourage in terms of peer review, have the focus be—I found that the best classes that I had were where they said, "We want none of your comments to be about grammar. We want them all to be about structure and the flow of ideas." I mean, it's helpful when someone writes down oh you had a typo here, but the actual conversation really just being about the structure, the flow, or how are you conveying an idea, I think that those were the most valuable peer edit sessions that I had when that was the only thing that we were allowed to focus on. In terms of other general conversations, that's a hard one.

Interviewer: That is a hard one.

Interviewee: Cuz everybody's at such a different stage and especially the experience was really different for LSA students versus engineering where they were like, "Well, we just don't have to write ever because that's not what I'm here for."

Interviewer: It's helpful.

Interviewee: Yeah. Anything that steers them away from the five-paragraph essay, making people really step out of their comfort zone—I know with all of my essay writing classes it's really hard to write a five-paragraph essay when you're writing a personal narrative or when you're writing a story or something like that, they didn't always work. Sometimes my end product was like, "This is a terrible story," but the point was that it forced me to try something that was a different structure.

Then having that experience ultimately when I was trying to write an argumentative essay for a communications class helped me to come to it with more ideas for how I could argue something that isn't just the traditional essay format. If you can find any way to just really push them kicking and screaming outside of their comfort zone, I think that that's a good thing to do.

Interviewer: That's a great suggestion.

Interviewee: They will fight you, but ...

Interviewer: [laughter]. Yeah .

Interviewee: Maybe if you could say up front here's the reason why we're doing this cuz I always found I resisted most when I didn't understand why I was being forced to do something. Then again, it's hard to explain, "I want you to learn this" when you're at the beginning and you haven't learned it yet.

Interviewer: Right, right.

Interviewee: Yeah, just force them out.

Interviewer: [laughter]. Yeah . Push them.

Interviewee: Just push them.

Interviewer: Pus them out of the nest. That's really helpful. Do you have any other comments or anything else you'd like to add?

Interviewee: I think that you guys are on the right track. I learned a lot.

Interviewer: That's good to hear.

Interviewee: A lot that I wasn't expecting to learn. I have total faith that Sweetland is gonna do a great job every time that they revise. I think that they're already really on the right track having pared down the capstone so much because they really are really big things that you're working on. If there's only one or two of them, then it makes it easier, but I think that absolutely key for the Writer's Evolution Essay and keep the capstone project. I would just encourage people like this can be—personal and academic aren't necessary mutually exclusive.

Cuz I think that if that had been made clear to us—I was the one who was just like, "I'm gonna see if you're gonna let me get away with doing this." Whereas, I think that if other people had been told that explicitly maybe they would have been more comfortable doing it.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's really helpful. That's really helpful. Thank you so much for your time.

Interviewee: Of course.

Interviewer: This has been really interesting to hear about your experiences and—

Interviewee: [laughter]. I enjoy talking about it .

[...]

Interviewer: Thank so much. We really appreciate your help with this.

Interviewee: No problem.

Interviewer: Have a good day.

Interviewee: You too.

[...]

[End of Audio]