

Interviewer: [...]. I'm \*\*\*, and I am interviewing \*\*\* today.

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Today is April 5<sup>th</sup> [...]. Okay, that's all. Okay, first we're gonna talk about how you view yourself as a writer.

Interviewee: Okay.

Interviewer: Just off of the top of your head, how would you describe yourself as a writer?

Interviewee: Actually, I'm in engineering, so I'm not that much of a writer. I do more technical stuff, which comes easier to me, cuz it's very straightforward. I don't think I'm all that creative. [Chuckle] A lot of the technical stuff is good for me, cuz I know exactly what I need to write, and there's an outline.

Interviewer: Okay, so technical writing?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: What purpose is served there?

Interviewee: It's like lab reports and things like that, operating procedures, technical stuff. [Laughter] It's more like reporting of data that I have collected and analyzing it, which takes a little bit of creativeness, cuz you have to know how to analyze the data that you're given and the data that you receive. Overall, it's just you have stuff, and you just tell people about it.

Interviewer: Okay, so it seems like there is creative, and then there is technical. Do you see writers as being creative and not technical? Why the juxtaposition of technical and creative?

Interviewee: [Laughter] I love reading, but I like reading nonfiction. All that stuff, it seems really creative to me. As a writer, I don't see myself ever being able to come up with different ways of writing things and different ideas to write about. I think writing is both, but I think, at least in my mind, there's creating writing, and there's technical writing. They're both writing, but they're two separate fields of it.

Interviewer: You see yourself doing more of the technical.

Interviewee: More technical, yeah.

Interviewer: Right. Was that always the case, or did that change when you got into school or when you got into your program?

Interviewee: I think it probably did, cuz I know in high school I did the standard English classes, and I took AP English classes, and a lot of that was writing a lot. I did very well in them. I did really well on the AP test. Actually, I started off in LSA [Literature, Science, and the Arts] when I got here. I took the first-year writing courses, and I did well in those. I think when I got into engineering, it was no longer required of us. Actually, in the College of Engineering, it's kind of a joke: Engineers don't write.

Interviewer: Oh, really?

Interviewee: The English and the grammar, it's just not ...

Interviewer: It just doesn't matter.

Interviewee: [Laughter] Yeah, it's kind of a joke there. I'm good at grammar. I had a grammar Nazi teacher [chuckle] in high school, so I'm good at that. I think it's almost a level of expectation that's not necessarily there in the College of Engineering. You're expected to be able to write well and show your ideas efficiently and condensed. I think that takes away a lot of the creativeness of the writing. You're supposed to condense everything and say it as quickly and just bare—

Interviewer: Concisely as possible?

Interviewee: Yeah, as concisely as possible.

Interviewer: Interesting.

Interviewee: Definitely I think my style changed because of that, cuz I was all of a sudden being taught not to use all the adjectives and all these—adjectives and adverbs and superlatives and all this stuff. It's just telling what exactly you found.

Interviewer: It's a new way of writing?

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Do you think that—do you think that your past experience has helped you to write this way, or how did you learn to write this way?

Interviewee: The technical way?

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: I think they did, because I got such a good education in the grammar and everything. I never really was that creative. I could fake it when I needed to write an essay in high school or something, but when it comes to editing something, I've always been really good at that. That definitely helps in the technical writing also, cuz you still need to be grammatically correct. You still need to have the formats down correctly and

all that stuff, otherwise it's distracting from what you're actually trying to say in the paper. I think it definitely helped.

Interviewer: Since coming to U of M [University of Michigan], to what extent would you say that you have grown as a writer or changed as a writer? You've talked about changing, but do you think you've grown or ...

Interviewee: I definitely think I have. My first-year writing class, it was a different kind of writing than what I had done in high school. In high school it was more analytical. They gave us a paper, and find the oxymorons, and find the metaphors and all the things, and write about them.

When I got here, I took [English course], and it was definitely more creative. There was analyzing portions, but each essay we did, there was an argumentative essay, an analytical essay, different creative writing essays, and different exercises that we did. I definitely think they helped. I got better as I progressed in that class. I think, as I said, it's definitely helped me, even in engineering, just being able to think of different ways to think about things and different ways to look at things. I think it's helped.

Interviewer: Okay, so thinking across your writing experiences at U of M [University of Michigan], or any other college experience that you have had, what do you think it means to write well?

Interviewee: I think it definitely has to have—to write well, someone has to want to read what you have written. I think if you're writing and nobody wants to read it, then I feel like, "What's the point?" Cuz writing is to get your ideas out, to tell people what you have to say by writing it down or tell a story or anything. I think people need to want to read it.

Definitely a big part of writing well is making sure other people want to read what you've written, and a lot of that comes with talking about things maybe in a different light, a way that people have never thought of something before, or bringing up things, maybe ideas that people have never thought of, things like that. I think that would be a big part of writing well.

Interviewer: That audience aspect of it, does that—you mentioned writing things in a new light.

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Do you have those kinds of experiences here?

Interviewee: Yeah. In my [English course], we had to take a word. It could be any word that we wanted, and we had to write an entire essay about what that word means to us.

[...]

Interviewee: We had to write an essay about that word means to us, and it could be any word, any arbitrarily chosen word, that we wanted. Then we had to talk about that, not in the final stages, but in the beginning stages. When we were first forming our ideas, we had a class discussion about—we each had to tell our word and tell what it means to us and things like that.

It was definitely interesting going around and hearing people's views on just a word. Somebody chose the word, "ball." It's just like, "Oh, it's just a ball." But then the way they talk about it, they talk about maybe some memory that they have where a ball was a really important part of it. It's just really interesting to see the way that they brought their personal experience into it, and made it a whole new feeling and meaning.

Interviewer: It sounds like a cool activity.

Interviewee: Yeah, it was definitely very cool. [Laughter]

Interviewer: You mentioned [English course].

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Were there any other experiences that really stood out in this course, [English course]?

Interviewee: I think that was definitely my favorite one. We only wrote four big essays. I think that was definitely, definitely my favorite one. We also had one where we wrote about—we had to watch a documentary, and write about the documentary, and write our views on it.

It was really interesting. I enjoyed hearing them—even if it's not really bringing a new light on things, most of them are documentaries that I had not seen. By hearing people's views on 'em, and hearing them tell about it, it was kind of like, "Oh, that sounds interesting. Maybe I should watch it. It sounds like something that I'd be interested in."

Interviewer: Each person—

Interviewee: Had a different documentary that they wrote on. Yeah, it was cool.

Interviewer: Was that like you got to choose any documentary, or was there like a list?

Interviewee: They had a—they had a really big list. It's not like there were 25 kids and 25 documentaries. It was a list of like 100, and she just said, "Pick one."

Interviewer: I see. Cool. What did you choose to write about?

Interviewee: Mine was The Grizzly Man. It was about a guy who decided to live in Alaska and up in Canada with grizzly bears.

Interviewer: How interesting.

Interviewee: He thought that they were his friends. He made his own documentary kind of thing, like a hand camera. Then he ended up getting eaten by one, but they found his camera. It's kind of like a story about his life and his experiences with the grizzly bears. It was pretty bizarre, but it was interesting to watch. [Chuckle]

Interviewer: I can't even imagine.

Interviewee: I know. [Chuckle] He was fully convinced that they were his friends, which is kind of like, "Oh, [chuckle] interesting."

Interviewer: Overall, what kind of effect did these experiences have on you as a writer?

Interviewee: They helped me, cuz a lot of it, like for the word one, I had to be able to not necessarily be creative, because it was all personal. I didn't necessarily make anything up or anything, but I had to be able to tell about it in a way that would make people interested, but still get my point across, which I think is a big part, as I was talking about earlier, making people want to read what you've written.

It definitely helped there, cuz in high school, you were writing it for the teacher. You just write it and it's done in high school. Definitely when I got here, it was more of a group course where everyone worked together, and everyone had groups where we analyzed each other's papers, and we helped each other. It helped me. It definitely helped me be able to write things that people actually want to read, which I think is good.

Interviewer: I guess I'm gonna probe a little bit further.

Interviewee: Okay. [Chuckle]

Interviewer: How did it help you be more aware of writing in a way that people wanted to read?

Interviewee: Mm-hmm. I think it was because of the group thing. She broke our class down into I think five groups of maybe five or six people. They were with us—it was the same groups all semester, so we got really close and very comfortable with our groups of people that we would work with. Before each essay was officially due, we'd pass 'em out to our group, and they'd all read 'em and give us critiques and things.

It was really helpful having the feedback from other people about what they found interesting, what they thought could be changed. I think a lot of that—I noticed for the first essay, everybody said the same thing. It was just like, "Oh, this one thing, this one

thing.” For the second essay, I fixed that one thing, and then there was a different thing. By the end, all of the critiques, they decreased throughout the process of the class.

Interviewer: How interesting.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Even across genres?

Interviewee: Mm-hmm, yeah, cuz it was a lot of things that could be applicable to a wide range of writing. It helped in that aspect, where I learned from the critiques that people were giving me, and then was able to fix them, and improve on my writing across the course of the class until the very end when it was perfect.

Interviewer: Then it was done.

Interviewee: Yeah, done and as perfect as I could make it. [Laughter]

Interviewer: Are you still making use of those things that you learned now as an engineering student?

Interviewee: I think so, yeah. At the end of that class, as a class exercise, we made a list of the ten most important things every writer should do. My teacher ended up typing ‘em up and putting ‘em up on this little bookmark thing. I still have it, and I still use it every time that I am writing something, cuz it’s a lot of stuff. Some of it, it’s a lot of general things that maybe people aren’t necessarily always conscious of. It is definitely applicable, things like make sure you use commas. It gives an example of a way that you are supposed to use a comma the right way.

Be aware of your audience, which is really important in technical writing especially, cuz you have to know—cuz you’re usually writing to your superiors, but you have to know how superior, what they need to know. Because it’s supposed to be more concise, the higher up, the less they actually need to know. It’s just more the most important things. Keeping in mind your audience is very important in technical writing as well as creative writing. It’s things like that. It has definitely helped me even now, cuz I still have that little [chuckle] bookmark. I look at it every day.

Interviewer: That’s great.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Have you ever taken [Writing course]?

Interviewee: I have not.

Interviewer: Okay. In terms of your concentration in engineering [laughter] what effect have those experiences had on you as a writer? I know you talked a lot about it, but is there anything else you would like to add? You talked a lot about technical writing, but maybe thinking about your engineering writing in terms of your whole writing experience in and out of the classroom.

Interviewee: Okay. You mean the writing associated with my major, how has that affected things outside of school?

Interviewer: Yeah, or what effect has those writing experiences in your major just affected you as a writer as a whole?

Interviewee: Okay. I think because I've learned how to say things concisely and accurately given the information that I have, it's definitely helped me in email writing, which is a completely different kind of writing, but it's still very important, especially in today's society where everything is electronic back and forth. Actually, we spent an entire lecture in one of my classes talking about writing good emails to people, how to address different levels of people, like your superiors, your people underneath you.

Interviewer: This was in engineering or in—

Interviewee: This is in engineering. Yeah. We spent an entire class about that, cuz it's a lot of—you have to show respect, but at the same time, you're demanding their attention. You have to say, "I respect that you are my superior, but at the same time, you need to listen to what I have to say." I think it's helped me in that aspect.

In addition to just the writing, it's helped me speak that way. A big thing in engineering is the career fair, where hundreds and hundreds of engineers all have got their suits on. It's a big deal. That concise, to-the-point writing really helps with that, where you only have maybe two minutes to be able to essentially sell yourself to whatever employer you want to work for. I think it's helped with that, knowing what to say and how to form it to make it sound best to them, but still be honest and accurately portray who you are.

Interviewer: This I guess interpersonal consideration when you're writing, does that transfer to other aspects of your life, like emailing to other people outside of engineering?

Interviewee: I think it does. I've noticed as I have done this technical stuff, the whole way I communicate with people has become much more concise, which I don't know if that's necessarily a good thing. [Laughter] It might not be, but I think it definitely is. I've emailed my mom and did all the proper email formations, just because it's what I have been taught to do and it's what I'm used to, having emailed professors and other higher-ups. I think it has, which may not necessarily be the best thing.

Interviewer: Why?

Interviewee: I think not necessarily that it would be bad, but I definitely think if I'm talking to my mom, I should be able to be more laid-back and not necessarily have to have the structured email with an intro and a concluding sentence and a "sincerely" and all that stuff. It's not bad, but it is definitely something that is not necessarily completely necessary when I am talking to friends or anything. I've actually noticed also, [chuckle] my texting has changed, which is funny.

Interviewer: [Laughter]

Interviewee: I'm using periods and commas and all proper punctuation and grammar and everything when I text now, which is funny. [Laughter]

Interviewer: It's interesting. Does it influence the way you receive other's people's messages that aren't as concise or don't follow—

Interviewee: Sometimes. Actually, it probably does, now that I think about it, cuz I'm so used to everything just being need to know, like tell you what you need to know and that's it. It's bad, but I find myself getting annoyed with people who go on and on and on. I'm just like, "Okay, just tell me. Just tell me what I need to know, and just call it good." [Laughter] It's probably not good. It's probably not good, either.

I think it's definitely not necessarily even annoyed all the time, but sometimes I'd think back on a conversation I've had with someone, and been like, "How much did we actually talk about in that half-hour conversation? How much information or what useful knowledge did I actually gain from that?" Sometimes I'm like, "You know what, not that much. They just talked on and on and on about something that didn't really matter all that much." [Laughter]

Interviewer: The way that I am seeing how you've learned to write efficiently, that seems like a really useful skill. The joke that engineering students don't know how to write—

Interviewee: Can't write. [Laughter]

Interviewer: I don't know. I feel like you are learning to write in a very efficient and skillful way.

Interviewee: Yeah. I think it's because there is the creative writing, and then there is the technical. When you say someone is a writer, at least my personal experience is your brain automatically jumps to nonfiction books or some sort of—sorry, fiction books, not nonfiction—some sort of creative outlet. I think that's where most people's mindset is.

That's why the joke that engineers can't write, because we don't write creatively. We just write very to the point and things like that. A lot of times, the grammar is not always the best. They'll have a super-long sentence followed by a five-word sentence. You're like, "That could have been arranged differently." [Laughter]

Interviewer: Overall, how confident do you feel about writing in engineering?

Interviewee: I feel pretty good about my writing within engineering. If someone asks me to write a short story about something, I'd be like, "Well, I don't know if I can do that." [Chuckle] I have a friend who is a creative writing major, and I have huge respect for what she does, cuz there is no way that I'd ever be able to do it.

In terms of within engineering, I think I'm pretty confident in the way I write, and I think a lot of that is because in high school I had all that grammar training and all that. It's not necessarily technical, but things that every writer should at least know, like proper grammar.

I think a lot of engineers don't know all that stuff. I've gone through things that my lab partners have written about the project, and like, "Okay, you need some commas here. This should be ..." I have to mess with things to make it look right. [Chuckle] I think my personal writing is pretty good.

Interviewer: Do you have any examples of projects or pieces of writing that you're particularly proud of?

Interviewee: This semester I'm in a 300-level lab class, which is a lot of—it's a lab plus technical communications. It's a lot of writing, and they're critiquing you specifically on your writing. One of those papers in particular—we had two big projects and two smaller projects throughout the semester. We are currently working on our second large project, but the first one, I think the report ended up being 30 pages long. It was just so much.

I'm proud of that, [chuckle] cuz even as a creative writer, if someone says, "Oh, write me seven pages," which to a lot of people is just like, "Oh, seven pages." But to me, I was just like, "Whoa, that's a lot. I don't know if I can do that."

I am definitely proud of that piece, because I think it looks really good. It looks very official. The way all the graphs and all the charts and the headings and everything is formatted, it looks very official. I also think that the point I was trying to get across, I think I did that well. My partner and I, I think we did it well, and I think overall the paper was pretty good. I'm proud of that one. [Chuckle]

Interviewer: Nice.

Interviewee: It's my first big paper.

Interviewer: What made you communicate the point across well? I guess what was the point?

Interviewee: I was an experiment [chuckle] that we had to—we had to discuss our—we had to present our results and our data, and then analyze it. We say, "This is what we got, and this is what it means," which is the point of a lot of these technical papers is that's

most of what you're supposed to do. I think the way that we did that well is a lot—it's not almost completely in what you say, but it's the how you say it part.

The formatting, it helps. Because these papers are so long and so dense, [chuckle] I think the formatting helps a lot to break it up. We have I think three different levels of headings and all these charts with the captions and appendices and all this stuff. I think the way it's broken down makes it easier to understand, and it definitely helps that our audience is technical. This is what they wanted to have to read. [Chuckle]. Definitely the way it's broken down into different headings and things so you can say—this one was about an ion exchange thing. [Laughter]

Interviewer: I believe you.

Interviewee: Part of it, with the heading you can say—different levels of headings. If someone sees a heading that says, "Hydrogen Concentration" or something, and they say, "I already know about hydrogen concentration," they can almost just skim that. They don't really need to read that part. Then they come to a part where they're like, "Oh, this is what I really want to know about," and they read that more in detail.

I think that definitely helps, and that helped in that paper where we could have things broken down into specific parts where people could be more concentrated on what they really wanted to know, and then not really focus as much on the other stuff.

Interviewer: The organization helps guide your reader.

Interviewee: Mm-hmm. Yeah, definitely.

Interviewer: Any other ways that help you communicate your point across to your readers well?

Interviewee: Aside from the organization, I think the figures we used—this could be applicable to creative writing, too, if they have pictures that show the reader what they're supposed to be seeing in their mind. It's the same thing. We have different charts and things, and a picture of the actual equipment that we're using with labels on it. It definitely makes it a lot easier to understand.

I know that, cuz they've had us read things also, but analyze them and critique them. It definitely makes it easier to understand given the pictures. You can say—you can explain in words what you are trying to say, but a lot of times, especially in technical writing, it just doesn't really sink in until you see the physical plot of the data, and you say, "Oh, okay. I know what you mean now." I think that definitely helps, too.

Interviewer: Cool. Let's think back to in and out of classroom writing experiences. What experiences, in or out of the classroom, have had an effect on your writing? We talked about emails.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Anything else?

Interviewee: I don't know if I actually write that much other than emails and reports. I'm trying to think. [Laughter] I have written a couple of handwritten letters, but I don't know if that's really had an effect on how I write. It's just like thank-you notes and things. I figured it'd be nice to get a handwritten, in-the-mail thing. I don't know if I have anything else outside of it.

Interviewer: Okay. If I use the term "reflective writing," what does that mean to you?

Interviewee: I think to me, it sounds like something where it's more internal, reflective, like you're reflecting on something and how you personally see whatever the object is or whatever the situation is, and what it means to you. I think that's what that sounds like to me. [Laughter]

Interviewer: Have you used reflective writing in your own writing processes, either in courses or voluntarily?

Interviewee: I definitely have, like the example with the word paper from [English course]. That was definitely I think reflective, because it was all about personal experiences and what feelings you put on that one word. I think that was definitely reflective. I think that was the point of the paper.

Outside of that, I keep a diary on and off, which is very what I would consider reflective writing, cuz it's all your emotions and your feelings poured out on this paper. It's only for your eyes, or they're supposed to be, [chuckle] unless you want to show someone. I think I've done that on and off throughout my life. [Chuckle]

Interviewer: That's an out-of-classroom experience.

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Has that had any effect on your writing, keeping a diary?

Interviewee: I don't know if it's had an effect on my writing directly, at least, but it's definitely—when I would use my diary and write things down, it's definitely helped me think through what I am feeling. I think a lot of that would help with writing also. I know as I have been writing something, I just start going. It's like I don't really have an idea where I'm going, but then as I go, I realize—it helps me think it out and say, "Oh, okay. This is where I want this to go." I realize that halfway through a paper. [Chuckle]. I think that definitely would help, because it really makes you think about how you're feeling and how you're thinking about whatever it is. That's probably how it has helped.

Interviewer: You mentioned in [English course] you would get peer feedback.

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Has there been any other experiences of working with other writers in your courses or in any other context?

Interviewee: In my courses, definitely, because for my class this semester, the lab class, we always have a partner. A lot of—almost all of the writing we do, it's two people's ideas coming and trying to form this one report. It's a lot of working with the other person, and getting their viewpoint and my viewpoint, and trying to make them fit together, which is not as difficult in technical writing because you have a set, like, "Here is what we have." There's no way you can look at the data and be like, "I don't think that data is right." It's just like, "Well, that's what we have." [Laughter] I think there is that, but then definitely the way things are organized is a personal choice. There's no set standard for how things are organized. That's definitely a way that we would have to work together.

A lot of times—we have written three papers so far for this class. Things from the first paper that I might not have thought of that my partner thought of to put in it, I used in the second paper because I was like, "That was a great idea." Then I used it in the second paper, and the same thing. You learn as you go. By the fourth paper, I'll use all of those things that the other three partners have done that I might not have thought of that I think are good ideas. I'll hopefully be able to use them in the fourth paper that I'm gonna write.

Interviewer: Have you enjoyed working with a partner in these projects?

Interviewee: I definitely have, cuz a 30-page report is a lot to do by yourself. [Chuckle]. It's definitely helpful to have a partner. Sometimes it can be a little rough, cuz there is that whole cooperation part where someone might be very against whatever you want to do. You have to somehow work together to be able to come to a consensus. That's difficult.

Also—what am I trying to say? [Chuckle]. A lot of getting the ideas across—I just had a problem just now. You have to explain what you want to do to a partner. Sometimes it can be difficult to explain things, in technical writing and in creative writing. If I feel like one set of data means one thing, and they feel like it means a different thing, and I feel like I'm right, I need to explain to them what it is and why I'm right, and try to convince them of that. They need to do the same to try to convince me of their viewpoint. I think a lot of that can be difficult, but it definitely helps in the end, having to process everything that you're saying to make people better understand it.

Interviewer: That coming to a consensus helps you in the final product and the writing?

Interviewee: Mm-hmm, definitely, cuz I think both partners need to feel confident about what they're turning in as a report. Coming to a consensus—and a true consensus, not just somebody giving in, cuz then that person is not gonna feel like they were really

heard. Being able to cooperate and come to a true consensus with what we're writing helps both members feel confident in the final product.

Also, we have to do oral presentations for this last paper. Coming to a consensus, it'll help [chuckle] our oral presentation feel more fluid and more like we both agreed on what we're presenting, cuz I think an audience can tell if that's not there. If there was conflict or something, I feel like the audience, it will conquer us, and we don't want that to happen. [Chuckle]

Interviewer: How often does this kind of debate happen when working with a partner?

Interviewee: I think it all depends on the partner you're working with, but in my experience, it hasn't happened all that often. Maybe one big issue per project, per report that we're writing, and nothing huge. We can come to a consensus, but it's definitely something that we need to try to convince the other person of. It doesn't happen that often, but when it does, it takes a little bit of [chuckle] effort.

Interviewer: Do those experiences affect your interpersonal skills overall with other people?

Interviewee: I think they probably have. Ever since I was little, my parents told me I'd make a great lawyer—

Interviewer: [Laughter]

Interviewee: - cuz I'm really good at arguing, I guess. I think maybe in that aspect, it's helped me really be able to think about what I want to say, because if you say one thing wrong, somebody will pick up on it and then use it against you. At least it's happened to me. [Chuckle]

It really makes me think about what I want to say before I say it, so that that way when I'm with other people and we're trying to decide what to do, it really helps me get my point across efficiently and accurately the first time, as opposed to having to keep saying it over and over again. I think that's helped in this class. I've realized what people will take in and what they will they say, "No, I didn't hear you." [Chuckle]

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

Interviewee: Definitely know the audience, cuz I think if you start writing a paper without having the audience in mind, you're going to have to go back and almost change everything when you realize that maybe you're writing to who you were not supposed to be writing to. That's definitely something that will affect the entire paper is having the audience in mind.

Also, this is just my personal experience, but if I am writing a paper, and I have different things that I need to accomplish, maybe I can't think of anything for the first one, but for the second one, I'm like, "Well, I know what I want to say to that." I'll just go ahead and write that part first and then connect them later, which I don't know if that's a good practice, because then maybe the fluidity of a paper might be messed up a little bit. A lot of times I've also realized as I am writing that part that I know what I want to say, I think of how that's gonna relate to the part that I wasn't sure about before. It helps me process my ideas that way.

I would tell people write what you know first, cuz otherwise, if you can't even—I think starting a paper is the hardest part. Just starting to write is always the worst. I think as long as you're just getting things down, everything else will come to you as you go along.

Interviewer: I think that's great advice. [Laughter] Have you had any experiences with new media writing, like writing for blogs or websites or using sound or video in your writing or PowerPoint presentations?

Interviewee: I have not, not recently. We're gonna use a PowerPoint in our upcoming project, actually. Next week is when it's due. I haven't done it yet, but I'm going to. [Laughter]

Interviewer: You'll be using PowerPoint?

Interviewee: Yeah, I will be using PowerPoint along with our written report, basically saying the same thing, but presenting our ideas as opposed to writing them.

Interviewer: How long is your presentation gonna be?

Interviewee: They said 10 to 15 minutes is how long it's supposed to be.

Interviewer: You could do it. [Laughter]

Interviewee: Yeah, not bad.

Interviewer: Okay. Actually, in thinking about preparing for this presentation, what are some things that you want to keep in mind, or how are you starting to think about this presentation?

Interviewee: I think a lot of it is we have to know what we have. We have to know our data. We have to know how we have—the process we use to analyze it to find the results that we got. That's a big part is knowing what you have to work with so that when you're presenting it, you sound knowledgeable. [Chuckle]

Again, knowing the audience, cuz if I were presenting this technical presentation about diffusion to fifth-graders, they would have no idea what I was saying. I'd have to phrase things—even if I had the exact same data and the exact same information, the way I say it

and the way I present it to them would have to be completely different. I could make them understand probably if I did it the right way, but it's the whole knowing the audience.

I'm presenting to my classmates, who most of them have done what I have done already. They know what I'm talking about, and I know that. It really helps that I don't have to say some things, because it's just assumed that they would already know and things like that. I think that's definitely one of the things that I have been thinking about.

Interviewer: So what things you might just gloss over, cuz they already have the background knowledge on it?

Interviewee: Mm-hmm, exactly. Yeah.

Interviewer: For this project you have been uploading pieces of writing onto CTools [learning management system]. How has that process been going for you?

Interviewee: It's been great so far. Yeah. [Chuckle]

Interviewer: What pieces did you choose?

Interviewee: I don't exactly remember. I think I only did it last semester. I think that was my first semester doing it maybe. Probably technical reports. I don't exactly remember which ones. In engineering they say, "Give us—I think they say, "Give us an example of something you have written this semester," and that's really all I've written. [Laughter] It's all the technical stuff, so I feel bad for whoever has to read 'em.

Interviewer: You chose the technical reports, cuz that was the only thing that you wrote.

Interviewee: Yeah, that was the majority of what I've written.

Interviewer: How do you feel about those pieces of writing?

Interviewee: I feel pretty good. I think the ones that I submitted are the ones that I feel best about. I feel pretty good about those, the ones I've submitted, at least.

Interviewer: Do you remember any pieces of writing?

Interviewee: I don't remember which ones I specifically turned in. [Laughter]

Interviewer: Do you think your writing has changed since last semester?

Interviewee: Probably yeah, because this class I am taking right now is technical—they're teaching us how to write. It's definitely changed in the more technical, concise aspect, whereas before I might not have written that way. This semester has been really digging it in, "Be concise." [Chuckle] I think last semester, it probably wasn't, and I was

a little more creative in the way I said things. I had a little more freedom in how to say things, I think. It's probably been different, at least from last semester to this semester, in that way.

Interviewer: It'd be interesting to just—

Interviewee: To look back and see, yeah.

Interviewer: This semester, if the project was gonna ask you to archive more work, what do you think you would submit?

Interviewee: I'd probably submit one of my big papers, cuz I'm very proud—

Interviewer: The 30-page?

Interviewee: Yeah, but I feel bad for whoever has to read that. I feel terrible. [Laughter]

Interviewer: Why would you feel terrible if you feel so good about it?

Interviewee: Cuz I know personally I feel good about what I wrote, and that I accomplished what I needed to accomplish the right way, but I wouldn't necessarily want to read it. [Laughter] I don't know. The whole thing about good writing, like I said earlier, somebody needs to want to read it.

I think also, in addition to that, it has to—if someone tells you, “You need to write this,” the good writing would be give ‘em what they want, even if they don't necessarily want to read it. I don't know. I have never understood people who grade essays, cuz personally I'd be like, “I don't want to have to read hundreds of pages of essays.” But somebody wants to read it, and they want to see what you have to say. I don't know who reads and who uses the things that we submit, but I have to assume they don't want to read a 30-page technical report. [Laughter]

Interviewer: Is that an artifact of the discipline of—me knowing that much at all about engineering, if I read your paper, would I be able to understand it, I guess?

Interviewee: I think it depends on who writes it, but I think the stuff I have written, I try to make it at least somewhat understandable to everyone. But at the same time, we actually have a technical written page limit of 10 pages, and then the extra 20 pages are all appendices and descriptions of the things that we said that we couldn't fit in the 10 pages.

Because we only have ten pages, we have to be really concise about what we say, cuz we have a ton of information to fit in there. I think a lot of times I try to make it so that anyone could understand it, but at the same time I have to use jargon, and I have to use other things, because it's the shortest, easiest way to say something. I know that the people grading my papers, the people reading my papers, will know what it means.

[Chuckle]. I think I try to balance it, make it understandable to the layperson, but at the same time keep it short and concise.

Interviewer: Why is it important for you—why is it important to be able to write towards the layperson if you know that the audience has specialized knowledge?

Interviewee: That's a good question. [Chuckle] I think it's just the way I am. [...].

Interviewer: [Laughter]

Interviewee: Then I'll just use big words [...]. I think a big part of that probably goes into it.

Interviewer: That's cool.

Interviewee: It's just subconscious, wanting everybody to understand.

Interviewer: If somebody in the project did read your paper, then maybe they would understand. [Laughter]

Interviewee: Maybe they would understand a little bit hopefully. Fingers crossed.

Interviewer: Is there anything else that you want to share about your writing or your writing experiences, anything that we didn't talk about in terms of your writing or writing experience?

Interviewee: I don't think so, not really. I have noticed [chuckle]—this is kind of sad. Since I've been in engineering, we also need to take humanities classes in LSA. I'm doing an international minor, so I have to take international classes. I'm taking [CICS course]. It's the Center for International something. I don't know what that actually stands for, something International Studies.

Interviewer: Okay. [Laughter]

Interviewee: Part of that is we have to write two papers. Actually, because of engineering, I have actually had a harder time—not necessarily harder, but I don't think I am able to give my GSIs exactly what they want because I write so concisely. I noticed on the first paper I got back they say, "I want you to explain more about this," and, "You said this, but what about this?" There's page limits, too, on those. I think my brain is just like, "I can't go over my page limit, otherwise my grade will be affected."

I say things short and sweet, and I think in that type of writing, they want more explanations about things, whereas in my technical writing, the explanation and the data are together. We assume that they know what we're talking about in my technical writing. You don't know need as much explanation, because they already have the knowledge that you have, whereas for my international studies class, they don't

understand what's going on in my head. I think that kind of writing is more personal, whereas the technical is concrete. You have this specific data. I think that's almost harmed me a little bit, my engineering writing, how it's affected my non-engineering writing.

Interviewer: Interesting.

Interviewee: On the second paper, I'll hopefully fix it. [Chuckle]

Interviewer: Yeah, it's stretching you—

Interviewee: Exactly, yeah.

Interviewer: - back in the other direction a little, maybe.

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Well, cool. Thank you so much.

Interviewee: No problem. Thank you.

Interviewer: It was a pleasure talking to you.

[End of Audio]