

Interviewer: Hi. This is ***. I'm interviewing *** on April 29th, 2013. We're at the Sweetland Center for Writing. ***, thanks for coming. [...].

Interviewee: Okay.

Interviewer: If I'm looking at it, it's just to make sure it's not conking out on us. Again, we'll cover some general questions about how you see yourself as a writer. We'll talk a little bit about your upper level courses and writing experiences; how you think that influenced your work as you're finishing out your career here. The first question is very general. How do you describe yourself as a writer?

Interviewee: I mean I would say I have a good skill set. I'd say I'm a very good writer. I do well. I receive affirmation for it. I also would say I can be a very lazy writer, and I don't like to proofread. I like to turn in first drafts of things, and because I know it's usually sufficient that way.

I can often be very goal-oriented in my writing where I just to try to get a purpose, whether that's to communicate a message or to get an A or whatever it is, rather than present the best writing I have.

Interviewer: Those things aren't always overlapped necessarily?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Your purpose and sort of your absolute best writing?

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Okay, that makes sense. Other ways you think of yourself as a writer or the work you do when you are writing?

Interviewee: Yeah, I mean I definitely write as an outlet. I enjoy writing in my spare time.

Interviewer: Oh, interesting.

Interviewee: More of the creative non-fiction. I blog. I would say I definitely, I enjoy writing when I'm not under a lot of pressure for school. It can become this love hate relationship where when there's deadlines in place, it becomes very stressful. I just have to retreat into this survival mode.

When there is a lot of time to write it, I'll come to Sweetland twice or something and I'll really try to present the best work I have. I enjoy that process because there's not that pressure of—I mean if I have a whole week to write the paper, it's a lot better than having to write it in two days.

Interviewer: Sure, and when you mentioned the creative non-fiction and your blogging, is that completely outside of school? That's—

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: - for your own writing work?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: That's great. Thinking back when you first got to the University of Michigan, has it been four years—

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: - a little longer, four? Yeah, congratulations.

Interviewee: Thank you.

Interviewer: How would you have described yourself as a writer at that point, your freshman year?

Interviewee: I would say I was good by high school standards, but I definitely had a wake up call in [English course]. I had a very good TA [teacher's assistant], who was very supportive, but also critical enough of the whole class to [inaudible 0:02:50] student standard.

I remember crying after I received my first assignment back cuz everyone had done poorly because she was raising the bar to what you actually need to write at the university level. I did very well in the class. I would say it was one of the best courses I've taken here because I actually learned how to write well.

I remember taking that information back about how it's about the argument and not how nicely you say it, back to my high school English teachers, and said this is what they expect in college. They've implemented it, so.

Interviewer: That's interesting. How'd you raise it with your high school English teachers? Were you just, were they people you were close to, so it made sense—

Interviewee: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: - to have that conversation?

Interviewee: I went to a small, private school. I was very close to the English faculty. I guess they just asked about my English classes naturally. Then, I just told them about the book, *They Say, I Say*. I told 'em about some of the theories behind it.

The biggest thing was how a thesis doesn't have to be one sentence, stuff like that. The only reason that I know that they've implemented it is because I came back last semester to visit one of them. She's like, "This is ***. She's the one who had us do this. This is why do this now." I was like, "That's nice."

Interviewer: That is really interesting. Yeah. How would you describe your own growth and realization of your shift from high school? You said, "I was good by high school standards." You've talked a little bit about the [English course]. Were there other factors that changed your thinking about how you approached writing, what you thought was good writing?

Interviewee: Yeah, I mean I think in high school you have this [inaudible 0:04:30] people really care about how you say it, more than what you say. I think it's because the prompts aren't very complicated. That's part of it. The argument doesn't have to be that developed because maybe the questions that you're supposed to answer aren't very complicated. I think is part of it, high school writing.

At the collegiate level, I think you really, you have a totally different purpose for your writing. You're really trying to create a niche in a field or even if it's like a small field, like the book Tom Jones. You wanna look at something that other people haven't looked at, or that people have looked at in a different way. Yeah, to say something well, and to not waste people's time by reading a paper. Actually communicating something that's maybe, it doesn't have to be this novel concept, but it should be well articulated. It should be significant I think.

Interviewer: That makes sense. As you're graduating now, do you have goals for yourself, for your writing?

Interviewee: Yeah, I actually just finished my honor's thesis—

Interviewer: Congratulations.

Interviewee: Thank you, and I got it back. It was very good feedback. There was one of the readers had like a whole paragraph on things that needed to work better, I mean, good criticism. It was fair. It was sound.

I was talking to the director of the honors program about if I changed these things, is it possible to get this published somewhere? She, and my advisor, was saying that, "Yeah, there's definitely undergraduate journals that look for this kind of thing." If I cut in half, of course, cuz it's really long. I didn't really think about that, but I'm really goal oriented. That's nice. I'd like to do that.

Interviewer: Interesting. What was the project?

Interviewee: The thesis?

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: It was on Charles Dickens and altruism and imprisonment and his texts. It was a very interesting thesis, in the sense that I think a lot of people can relate to it that aren't English Dickens experts.

Interviewer: Sure. Sure.

Interviewee: There's a lot on it that's about human nature that intrigues people, intrigues my grandma, intrigues my mom, that kinda thing. I identified a character set in three of the texts, Little Dorrit, Tale of Two Cities, and Great Expectations. [...].

Interviewer: They must have been—and those are great texts to work with—

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: - you must've had a good time with it, yeah.

Interviewee: Yeah, it was fun to sort of come up with my own idea. I think if there was a chance of it being published it's because it's sort of a way of looking at Dickens that people haven't before. It's an interesting idea. It's an idea that people look at, "Oh well, relationships are interesting to me." This is—people can apply it to something a little bit bigger than just these texts. I do that in my epilogue where I'm working out Dickens as a whole. The natural next step would be, "Well, is it just Dickens, or is it all literature? Is it all relationships? Are relationships really these transactions, or how do you make it not a transaction?"

Interviewer: That sounds great. Yeah, so that's one certainly writing goal then thinking about what else you might find for that going forward. You mentioned as we were setting up that you're going to work in marketing?

Interviewee: Yeah, I'm working, yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, so is that, will there be writing roles? Will there be writing goals in that world or?

Interviewee: Maybe a little. I mean I hope so cuz I like to write, but I think in terms of other goals, I would like to publish creative non-fiction. That's something I have a little more time to do now that I'm not in school. I definitely have a lot of essays that are just sitting on my computer that I can refine, and then look into different literary magazines.

Interviewer: Again, that would be outside of your professional work now?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: That would be still like individually motivated and—

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: - that's great. Good luck with all of that.

Interviewer: Thank you. If you're thinking about your writing experiences across U of M [University of Michigan], what would you say at this point it means to write well?

Interviewee: I think there's two levels to that. I think the first level of writing well is communicating an argument that is logical, that flows well, that is sufficient, that is consistent across the entire argument.

Then, I think another level of writing though is that it's part of the flow, that there's good—I know a lot of people that can write an argument. It's logical and everything, but the flow isn't there. I think it's important. It doesn't carry your argument, but there is a sense of syntax that moves the reader along very well and easily. Is the writing easy to engage in?

Interviewer: Sure, and you're thinking of that more as kind of stylistic point?

Interviewee: Yeah, but I don't want that to—I think that's a different level. I'm kind of separating it in the sense that people are often affirmed for being a good writer because of this, but both need to work together.

I've definitely read dense writing that's simple to follow; that has a good argument. I mean is it a good writer? I don't know. I don't know that I can answer that. I could say that have good arguments. I think there's two different lines that you could look at.

Interviewer: That makes sense. In the last couple years, have you taken upper level writing classes—

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: - at all. Can you tell me what they were and what you were experiences were in them?

Interviewee: Yeah, I've taken a few. I don't know which ones count. I know, I did [title of course], if you can count it.

Interviewer: I'm sorry, the what?

Interviewee: [Title of course].

Interviewer: [Title of course], okay.

Interviewee: Yeah, and that was like Tom Jones, Pamela, Pride and Prejudice, that kind of literature. I took [upper level English course], which is like—

Interviewer: [Title of Course]?

Interviewee: - [Title of course] and that counts?

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Okay, I lose track because I've taken a lot.

Interviewer: I understand, yeah.

Interviewee: I took [different upper level English course], which was [title of course] with [inaudible 0:11:30], that also counted I think. Then, I also took, my thesis is upper level.

Interviewer: That ended up being, you take that as its own course—

Interviewee: For two semesters.

Interviewer: - while you're working on it. Okay, all right. Thinking across those courses, or if you wanna talk about them individually, we're just curious what your experiences were? What kinds of writing you did? How it influenced your thinking about the work?

Interviewee: Yeah, I would say they're all good classes. [Upper level English course] was one of the best classes I've ever taken here. I loved it. I had Jeremiah Chamberlain; he's incredible. I think that that really got me interested in creative non-fiction. That was a different type of writing though than academic writing you do for a Ph.D. or something. Yeah, I mean I think—

Interviewer: I think if we just focus on that [upper level English course] class then, because it's hard. That's four really different classes. If we start there, maybe you said the course was great, and it was a different kind of writing?

Interviewee: Yeah, it's creative non-fiction writing.

Interviewer: Right, right, and so had you already been doing some of your personal writing in advance of that class or?

Interviewee: Yeah, I had written three essays before then that I'd submitted to the [inaudible 0:13:03] and that was my sophomore year. That was Fall term sophomore year that I submitted to [inaudible 0:13:08], and then I took the class the Winter term.

Interviewer: Great, and what experiences did you take away from it that maybe made you see your own writing differently or approach that particular genre of writing differently?

Interviewee: Yeah, I think I really liked it because the personal essay is memoir plus analysis. I think with analysis, I think there's some significance there, that so you had this experience, great, but what is the significance of it. The personal essay provides, and I think I really fell in love with that.

I remember, I wrote an essay on my experience serving in homeless service [inaudible 0:13:54] and just applying that to, it was a really big ambitious work, but trying to apply it to how do we look at this service work in general? Why do we go off to these foreign countries to provide for people who are happier than we are, and give them these amenities that we think they need desperately? Of course, we wouldn't wanna deny that, but it was just a really funny, ironic situation where they're often much more joyful than those of us in the United States are.

Interviewer: That's a useful example. If you think about some of the other classes you mentioned, were there other kinds of writing you were doing in those classes? Obviously, other than creative non-fiction—

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: - so if you're thinking about the Fantasy class, [title of course]?

Interviewee: Yeah, the Fantasy class was interesting because the essays were very short. The long essay was three pages—

Interviewer: Oh, wow.

Interviewee: - but you wrote a lot of them. Then, the short essays were all a page, response pages. That was actually good I think, looking back. I don't know if I appreciated it at the time, but I think it was good to be succinct because you do end up writing a lot of response papers in college. It was just good practice there to write some very short. That's actually really helpful for blogging, now that I'm doing a lot of nonprofit work for newsletters.

Interviewer: Oh, sure, right.

Interviewee: Just knowing how to write that; so to communicate something in a smaller space.

Interviewer: Right. that's true.

Interviewee: Then, [title of course] was more like your average six page paper, but again, just literary analysis.

Interviewer: Okay, and your concentration area is communication or is it English—

Interviewee: It's English Language and Literature.

Interviewer: Okay, okay, so these next set of questions, we may have already covered. They're asking about writing within your concentration. The question is whether the writing courses affected the writing you do in your concentration. It sounds like they're essentially one in the same—

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: - than if you were an English major.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. The next question, I think, is a fair one to consider, and it's how confident do you feel writing in your concentration? Especially as you were thinking maybe about finishing a thesis or some of your last few English classes, what was your confidence level working through that?

Interviewee: Yeah, I would say, yeah, I'm confident. I can, I don't, I'm not scared or shy whenever I receive a prompt. I get excited, especially when it's something I'm interested in. I know that I can write something well if I put an effort in. Especially like I was saying earlier, when there's really not this pressure to get this deadline [inaudible 0:16:35].

Yeah, I mean I don't—the thesis ended really well. My advisor was really happy. He thought it was a really good work, and I respond well to verbal affirmation. I'm very sensitive to it also. If someone will say, "This needs work," I will take that seriously. If they say, "This is great. I'm proud of it," then I will weigh that seriously as well. I take people's words very seriously so, especially people who are faculty or people who actually have an authority on my writing; my friends, not so much.

Interviewer: Okay, and the last question in this section, it's still asking you to think about writing in your concentration. The question is how often how used skills or strategies from writing classes in other courses? Maybe you can talk a bit about any of your coursework outside of Lang. and Lit.—

Interviewee: Okay.

Interviewer: - and did you feel like there was crossover in terms of the work you were doing there? Was it able to apply to writing in other courses?

Interviewee: Yeah, I would say, yeah, this has been invaluable, not just in course work, but honestly, I have seen my English education apply to every area of my life. Where I think the English program really promotes you to articulate and communicate well, to set up an argument, to follow through logically, and that's such a good skill set to have.

I've taken some business school classes, and I'm looking at these tasks and [inaudible 0:18:09] these business school kids, and I'm writing better and communicating better. I'm articulating better, also, in history classes, and other classes, and anything that's writing.

Even, I had this criminology class last semester where if you got questions wrong, you could appeal them. You could appeal a wrong answer, cuz it was very, it was a little bit ambiguous so there wasn't a directly wrong answer. You could make a case for something. I enjoyed that a lot because that's what English educations prepared me to do. We always won our appeals and our group loved it.

Interviewer: That's funny.

Interviewee: Even I would say, I'm doing a lot of nonprofit advocacy work, and it's because of my English education that I can articulate well and on the spot and be able to present an argument for whatever I'm opinion I'm trying to [inaudible 0:19:00].

Interviewer: I'm glad you brought that up. It actually leads to the next question and I had wanted to circle back to it cuz you mentioned it a few times, the work you've done with the nonprofit. The question is thinking back especially over the last two years, so your upper level classes, what experiences in and out of the classroom have had an effect on your writing?

We've talked a fair amount about within the classroom, but are there also experiences outside of the classroom is what they're interested in, that have affected your writing? You've started to talk a bit about this nonprofit work.

Interviewee: Yeah, I'm in two different—involved in two different types of nonprofit work. One is for a children's camp.

Interviewer: Oh, really?

Interviewee: I'm on the board actually, and it's very—the writing that I do for that is much more emotionally driven. You're trying to get donors to respond by sending their kids, by whatever, by writing a check, whatever it is. It's a little bit different than the other work, than the advocacy work in a political cause. That is much more, when I say, I don't know.

It's not like I'm doing that much writing for it, but you have to make these logical arguments because there's a lot of arguing that's happening cuz it's a very contentious issue. I think that has really improved a lot. It's been a mutual relationship where my writing has informed that, and that has informed my writing. Iron has sharpened iron in this.

Interviewer: That's good. If I use the term reflective writing, what does that mean to you?

Interviewee: Writing which I would step back, and look at some experience and articulate it on paper about how it has affected me or affected something else.

Interviewer: Sure, yeah. Have you ever been required to do any reflective writing about your own work in any of your English classes or?

Interviewee: Yeah, yeah, definitely, [upper level English course]. It was the final essay, or short essay was on looking over the whole class and seeing what has changed. Then, the thesis, there's a little bit of reflection that had to happen at different stages in the process.

Interviewer: Okay, did you find it to be a useful process or—

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: - or change your thinking about your own writing in any particular way?

Interviewee: Yeah, I mean I don't think it's a fun process when it's required. I do see the value in it in the sense that you think, it's something in your head and until you actually see it on paper, you sort of realize, "Okay, maybe this isn't as effective as I think; maybe this is actually a better way to go. Maybe this is actually what I want as my thesis."

Interviewer: Is that something that you would, would you do that kind of reflective writing at all when it wasn't required? I thought it was interesting when you said, "When it's required, it's not that great, but."

Interviewee: Well, I'm just, I'm very reflective in general. I don't know that I would write in that same way. I mean my blogging is very reflective, but it's not really about my writing because it is writing in itself. Yeah, I mean I probably wouldn't write it, but I definitely, I am always thinking and reflecting on my own, pretty analytical, so.

Interviewer: A couple questions about working with other writers in your classes. The question is what have been your recent experiences working with other writers in courses, or in other contexts? Again, if any of your outside writing work involves peer collaboration at all?

Interviewee: Yeah, yeah, this is always, I've always gone head to head with the English department on this one. There's a big glorification of peer workshop and I don't think it's as effective as everyone thinks. Because people say, "Well, workshop isn't for you. It's not for you to actually receive good feedback, as much as it is to see the feedback that's wrong in other people's writing," and that works—

Interviewer: [inaudible 0:23:00]

Interviewee: Yeah, and that works when everyone's at the same level I think, and it works when people are held accountable through a grade, where you have to actually provide good feedback.

What I've found is when you have these different levels in the class, the people up here don't get any benefit, and the people down here, probably get a benefit of some sort. I don't know. I'm sure there's some improvements happening. It's hard because the people who are up here aren't receiving—they don't have the same problems in their writing as the people over here. I'm not saying this as an elitist, I'm just saying this is a reality that exists in English classes.

Honors class is a little bit different because they're smaller, like eight people, and they're all the same level. I think peer workshop works very well for that. The thesis though, one problem I had and I brought this up at the end, but it was dismissed. That's a little frustrating. That people didn't give good feedback because there was nothing to hold you accountable to it. You didn't have to give feedback—

Interviewer: Are you talking about other peers who were also in the process?

Interviewee: Yeah, so you'd have a peer workshop day. An example would be was three of us would have a five-page draft due on the same day. Then, the whole class, which was only ten people, would look at it. It has a potential to be really good because we're all doing the same process. It's more or less, I mean, just obviously many different avenues we're taking. What was happening was that people hadn't read Dickens; so then they were lazy. They were like, "I haven't read it." I'm like, "I haven't read post-Modern lit. I mean I'm still giving you—

Interviewer: [inaudible 0:24:41]

Interviewee: Yeah, a fair shake; so that was really frustrating. Also, the professor had, in the fall term, thought that I always had really good feedback. He had mentioned it in office hours. He mentioned in some of his verbal, I mean his written commentary that he really appreciated that I was always very, he called it "spot on" in my criticism.

I think part of it is, cuz I have a pretty thick skin so, and because you wanna improve this and I think I'm just pretty critical in general. It's easy for me to see things that are going wrong, but I wasn't receiving the same feedback back. That's a little bit frustrating because I did want to do well, and I did want to give something, but when it's not a grade, and even the director of the program was saying that, "Well, you just wanna encourage people to speak and everything."

I don't know. I just really think there needs to be more accountability there, where if you're not giving good feedback, then you will be hurt in some way or punished in some way, whether that's through some grade or some reprimand, but that never happens. I mean there's definitely this pressure to talk. Of course, you have to make a comment.

Yeah, but it's just frustrating. People are like, "Yeah, it's good, yeah, great, nice job." Okay, clearly it's not that good or I could just submit it right now.

Interviewer: Was there some peer feedback or collaboration component like this in most of your writing classes?

Interviewee: Yeah, well, in my writing classes, yeah.

Interviewer: This is critique [inaudible 0:26:28] across the board

Interviewee: The most, yeah and the most pressing example I have is the thesis because that's all you did is workshop. I mean and like I said, I've seen why it's glorified. I understand that yeah, that peer feedback is good, if everyone's on the same page and the same level.

Actually, that's honestly why I did not wanna do a Ph.D. anymore. I came in my freshman year and I started to hate workshop. That's all you do when you're in a Ph.D. program. I didn't wanna do it anymore because it's such a draining process and not even, it wasn't really getting my things critiqued, but just having to critique everybody else's. I couldn't see myself doing that for another six years, but yeah.

Interviewer: There's a question about advice for other students. It's bridging off that idea of collaboration. Now that you're about to graduate, what advice would you give college students about writing? What are some of the things they should think about as they're beginning a paper?

Interviewee: Yeah, I'd emphasize how the argument is important. That you have to ask what question are you asking or what argument are you trying to make here and to present it logically. I would say have that set up before you begin, but don't be confined to your conclusion. It'll develop as you write it, but that it's helpful to have a strong case coming in.

Yeah, I think there's two different ways you can write. You can either be asking this question, or you can be making a case for something. Either way, it can be very effective. I think it just depends on your style as writers.

Interviewer: I forgot that question was on this list. We started by talking about that when you were mentioning that you had gone back to your high school—

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: - and you shared what you think beginning writers should be doing. That's nice. The next question is about new media blogging. You can maybe talk about this both in the classroom and out. The question asks whether you've had any experience with new media writing such as blogs, websites, electronic portfolio, and what were the experiences? You've mentioned that you have a personal blog.

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Did you do any work like this for classes at all?

Interviewee: Yeah, I took [title of course] my junior year.

Interviewer: Great.

Interviewee: It wasn't blogging so much as it was a video series—

Interviewer: Oh, interesting, okay.

Interviewee: - on, it was for [a Center in Ann Arbor] and just making—I interviewed the—it was more showing what the process is. Step one is you can make an appointment. Step two is [inaudible 0:29:26]

Interviewer: Oh, sure.

Interviewee: It was very to make it really chill and really calming and peaceful for people in a very stressful situation; so that was the idea. The website already does a very good job of putting you at ease. It says like “Breathe.” It's in nice green colors, very nice. The idea was that this website or this video would—it just showed, it was me narrating in the background. Then, it had people going through the motions of going for the ultrasound—

Interviewer: Oh, good.

Interviewee: - [inaudible 0:29:59] things like that.

Interviewer: Any other classes that had a new media requirement? Was there any digital writing of any sort?

Interviewee: Just CTools [learning management system], comments, we had to put on a few classes. Yeah, I don't think there was anything else besides that.

Interviewer: Then, your own blog, how long have you kept that?

Interviewee: I started it, I think, last year, my junior year, and I'm not a very consistent writer. I started doing it because I used to write a lot of Facebook notes. It just had a lot of writing to it, but then I was just writing things that I didn't really want 1,000 people to see; so I started blogging separately.

Interviewer: The blog is more personal, in a way?

Interviewee: Yeah, and then I'll just text friends and say, “Hey, check out the new post,” and they have the URL, so.

Interviewer: That's nice. The act of keeping that blog, of deciding to move your writing to that space, do you think it's changed the way you think about the composing you do there or writing in other venues?

Interviewee: Yeah, it's much more freeing because you're writing something that you actually wanna release rather than writing for a specific audience; cuz I don't tell anyone if I don't want anyone to see this.

Interviewer: It's interesting though that you're still choosing to have it in a format that you are able to share it.

Interviewee: Well, it's public, yeah, it's interesting. It's, yeah, I mean definitely wouldn't want, I wouldn't share the URL with an employer. It's a private blog so you would have to have the specific URL in order to get to it. I don't think it comes up in searches.

Interviewer: Okay, that's interesting. Have you ever kept an electronic portfolio for a class or for your resume work?

Interviewee: No, I haven't. I don't think it's a good idea.

Interviewer: You have been uploading some pieces to the studies archive on CTools?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Has it been going okay? You were able to upload?

Interviewee: Yeah, I think I've gotten everything.

Interviewer: Okay, great. Can you talk to me a little bit just about how made the choices you made for what to include that we'll have a chance to look at?

Interviewee: Yeah, I don't remember what I started with, but yeah, I did actually. Yeah, I wrote—I tried to give my best work each semester. I think I wrote one on, I think it was [inaudible 0:32:28] for my honors class, but all the writing previous to my honors class I thought was really good because it was just a really good class.

Then, the second term I submitted one on Dickens actually. It was David Copperfield. It was on exile, a really metaphysical essay. It was really fun to write actually. I thought that was the best writing of the semester; so I submitted that. Then, last semester I submitted either on Pride and Prejudice or Tom Jones, I think it was Tom Jones, but again it was writing that I thought was good. I mean I definitely have writing that I don't think is that great that I haven't submitted—

Interviewer: Right, that makes sense.

Interviewee: - to CTools. Then, I have my thesis as last term cuz that's the only writing I did.

Interviewer: Okay. It's interesting that as you were looking back over your old work, either to make choices or looking at things you had uploaded earlier per our request, did that make you think differently about your writing at all, that sort of taking stock, looking back?

Interviewee: Yeah, I mean, yeah, it's interesting to look back and see what is effective writing and what isn't. Where you're looking at it, not because I think it's effective or not, but because some outside source who actually has some understanding of good writing, cuz that's what they're researching, is finally actually going to evaluate this in some setting.

I think you have this third party involved, it's a lot different than when you're just looking, "Here Mom, look at my essay."

Interviewer: Sure, sure, that's true. As you were looking at your work, assessing, making the choices, because you said, "Well, I picked my best to post," which I mean, makes sense, and we've heard that from other students, what were you noticing about your own writing that made you think, "Well, this was better than this other piece"?

Interviewee: Yeah, I think I mean I wouldn't say it was great, but I don't think it was usually, that was pretty consistent. I'm thinking more of this [title of course]. I don't remember which one I ended up choosing actually, between Tom Jones or the Pride and Prejudice, but the process was definitely looking at which argument was more substantial.

Interviewer: You're meaning process by which you chose?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay, okay, so part of was the substance of the work?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Great. Good. I think it sounds like you had a lot to choose from, which is awesome.

Interviewee: Yeah, I made [inaudible 0:35:19] writing.

Interviewer: Some times I've talked when I've been doing the interviews were like, "Well, I posted that because that was the paper I wrote that term."

Interviewee: [inaudible 0:35:29]

Interviewer: Yeah, exactly. Just a couple other questions, and this is quite broad. We're interested to hear what you think instructors should know about teaching writing at the undergraduate level?

Interviewee: Yeah, I mean the workshop comments I've made that there needs to be some accountability in place.

Interviewer: Sure.

Interviewee: I think instructors, the best classes they have are those where instructors actually own their teaching, instead of following the university way of doing things. You step out, and own your classroom, and own your teaching style.

Interviewer: That's an interesting expression. How are you thinking of that? What's an example of someone you felt owned the classroom? What did that mean to you when you were watching it happen?

Interviewee: Well, I would say the difference between [instructor's] class, and where he obviously has some very strong beliefs on writing since that's what he's engaging in all the time. That's his work. He's not gonna do it just because that's the way everyone else does it. He has his own style that he brings to the classroom.

He's constantly looking for feedback and constantly looking at, "Is this working for students? Isn't it?" [inaudible 0:36:50] result, instead of being regimented to the syllabus. That did not happen in the second semester of my thesis when the cohort was under the director of the writing program. There's a lot of like, "This is the way things are done."

I think there was a lot of pressure, when you're the director of the program, honestly and that's part of it. You're trying to follow up these great professors who've left this huge impact and everybody's celebrating them. That's a lot of pressure and I understand that. It wasn't necessarily, it wasn't a very good class, like class itself, in the classroom because it was a lot of dragging out until 5:30 came. When clearly it's 5:00 and there's nothing else to talk about, can't we just write some more?

That sort of thing where you have to, they want to stick into, they wanna stay in these boundaries of, "Well, we're gonna do workshop because that's what we do. I can give you the reasons why workshops good," but it's not working right now. You're not willing to change. You say you're willing to change it, but it's gonna be too much work and too exhausting. Then, you're not going to. I mean that's really what it is.

I mean I understand that. I understand politics. I understand you're under a lot of pressure in other areas, your researching and publishing, and that's stressful, but the question is about teaching.

Interviewer: I think your comments are interesting, too, if you think about teaching writing because it is so individual.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Then, of course then in any class, you've got 10 or 18 or 22, however many individuals with really different writing styles—

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: - and so you're thinking about how do they own it. It's interesting in terms of how you're reading how people are responding to the class, what's useful; because it can really vary group to group. that's a useful thing. Other specific things about writing instruction that you've found useful or approaches that did work for you?

Interviewee: Yeah, I mean the They Say, I Say I think book was really good at the beginning.

Interviewer: Was that from your [English course]? Was that when you first encountered it?

Interviewee: Are you familiar with the book?

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Then, we read the Craft of Research. I don't remember who it was. It was three different authors, Booth, [inaudible 0:39:23] Booth. For my thesis, I didn't think the whole thing was that great, but some of the feedback, I mean some of the suggestions in there was really good.

It was about all these things you know about research, that we do intuitively. It takes a step back, and breaks them down into why you do this, and what's actually happening in this process. That was really helpful because there are things that we take, that we approach for intuitively, just raised to do it that way.

Interviewer: Right. Right. That's good.

Interviewee: Yeah, I think one example from that book was that even on a stylistic level, writing from good writers is very organic. It flows well, and it's very natural. It was cool to step back and say like, "Why is this effective?" It's because good writers, for whatever reason, are able. What are they doing well that we're considering this good writing? It's the fact that there's a natural sense of breaking up a thought into different paragraphs. It's a sense of knowing when a paragraph is complete. It's something that you know intuitively. This book is really good in saying, "Well, this is actually what is happening when you're doing that," so.

Interviewer: Right, oh very good. I'm glad that worked. All right, any other comments at all before we get out the door here about your experiences in writing classes or again, how you think your own writing has changed while you've been here?

Interviewee: I think I've covered most of it. I would say that I really, I know that I've done a lot of "Oh, workshop," but I really think—

Interviewer: I think that's useful. It's really useful feedback.

Interviewee: I do think that the writing program is excellent at Michigan. It has definitely prepared me for the corporate world well. I feel very prepared because of it. I wrote a cover letter last semester on why my English education has prepared me for corporate America. Yeah, I really enjoyed it. I think if I could do it again I would have engaged more, so.

Interviewer: In the classroom?

Interviewee: Yeah, I would have, I think I would have really, yeah. I told you I was goal-oriented in trying to get the A's. I think I would have really found pleasure in the process that I didn't otherwise.

Interviewer: That can be a hard thing when you're in the middle of it.

Interviewee: Yeah, I mean.

Interviewer: Right, to see that.

Interviewee: - and I mean overbooked. I've been overbooked since freshman year.

Interviewer: There's probably also ways for instructors to carve out space for that—

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: - to let you know that it'll be okay on the grade side. You can go ahead and engage more, yeah.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: That's useful. Terrific. Anything else at all I didn't think to bring up, or you wanna make sure that the study folks know about?

Interviewee: I think I'm good.

Interviewer: Good, all right. [...].

[End of Audio]

