

Interviewer: This is *** interviewing ***, and it is November 22nd, 2013. Alright. How do you describe yourself as a writer?

Interviewee: I guess methodical would be the word I use. I try to plan a lot for how I write. I don't write that many drafts. I just sort of organize everything that I'm going to say, and then usually spend one or two sessions writing the whole thing.

Interviewer: Great. How would you describe the role of writing in your life?

Interviewee: I guess mainly writing that I do work on and spend time with is just mainly an academic thing. I see it as part of schoolwork, really. There are other things that I guess I do that involve writing that are important, like if I'm applying for a job or communicating with a professor or something. It's mainly, I guess, academic for me.

Interviewer: Okay. How would you describe yourself as a writer when you began here at the University of Michigan.

Interviewee: About the same, really. I think I've become a better writer just in terms of seeing what professors want and the writing styles that are important to them. I don't think my style or the way I approach it has changed that much.

Interviewer: Okay. How do you think you've grown as a writer, if you happen to know.

Interviewee: I've definitely gotten better at writing longer papers. I never had to write a long-term paper in high school or anything like that. There's, I guess, more structure is needed for that. I've gotten better at organizing papers in that respect. That would be the main thing, though.

Interviewer: Okay. How do you—to what would you attribute that growth? How do you think you learned that?

Interviewee: I guess just through practice and having to do it repeatedly. I guess a couple professors have been really helpful in going over my writing. Really, just having to do it often.

Interviewer: Okay. Can you say a little bit more about professors being helpful in going over your writing?

Interviewee: Yeah. I guess some that are outside of my major—I had a poli sci [political science] professor that was really helpful. GSI's too, really. Going over work before I submit it, talking about what they want to see. That's been helpful in making me adapt my style or improve certain things that I wasn't aware of.

Interviewer: In a poli sci class, especially?

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: What kind of things did the professor or GSI help you with there?

Interviewee: I guess this was last year, but paragraph length was a part of it. Distilling ideas into discrete paragraphs, as opposed to having a really long section about a general topic. Integrating the things I cite into the paper better. I remember that being part of it. Having it flow with the stuff that you're writing and your opinion on it.

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

Interviewee: I guess just communicate effectively so that I can do well in classes. I guess be able to transfer those skills to a professional workspace at some point.

Interviewer: Okay. What kind of skills for the professional workplace are goals of yours?

Interviewee: Being concise, being clear, just getting the point across in a way that people can understand. Pretty mundane, but—

Interviewer: Yeah, okay. Thinking across your writing experiences at U of M [University of Michigan], what do you think it means to write well?

Interviewee: Conciseness is a big part of it. Writing well? Yeah, really just getting your point across in a clear way. I think saying something original is important for a lot of classes where—especially things like a paper-focused class.

Interviewer: What do you mean “a paper-focused class”?

Interviewee: Some classes, for instance, might have one paper in the semester. For instance, I had one—they didn't have exams or anything. It was just papers throughout the semester.

Interviewer: Okay. You think being clear and getting the point across is important in those kinds of classes?

Interviewee: Mm-hmm, yeah. I guess saying something original too.

Interviewer: Oh right, okay. Which first-year writing requirement course did you take?

Interviewee: I don't remember. My freshman year, I was in the honors college. I don't know if Great Books satisfies that requirement, but I'm in the business school [Ross Business School] now, so there's no writing requirement.

Interviewer: Okay, but you took Great Books in your first year?

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: What were your experiences in that course?

Interviewee: I wasn't crazy about the class, to be honest. There was a lot of reading. I didn't mind the papers that much, and I had a pretty good GSI. I just remember having a lot of reading and stuff that I wasn't that interested in.

Interviewer: Okay. What were the writing experiences like?

Interviewee: I guess since that was the first paper I had to write in college, it was a little bit novel. I don't think they're that long. They were pretty specific about what they wanted you to write about. It was really just finishing the assignment.

Interviewer: Okay. Do you think that those experiences with writing in Great Books have had any effect on you as a writer overall?

Interviewee: Not really.

Interviewer: Not really? Okay. Are you still making use of anything that you learned in your first-year required course, Great Books?

Interviewee: Not really.

Interviewer: Not at all?

Interviewee: No. [Chuckles].

Interviewer: That's okay. Did you ever take [writing course]?

Interviewee: Huh-uh.

Interviewer: What is your concentration? Business? Is that—

Interviewee: It's in finance, but I've only started to do elective work this year. It hasn't really narrowed down that much.

Interviewer: Have you had an opportunity to do any writing in your concentration?

Interviewee: One class that I took this semester had a term paper, and that was a business ethics course. I did some writing for that. I'm in a group project where there's a write-up involved, but there isn't that much emphasis on writing papers, at least. I guess part of the core curriculum for business involves one or two courses where it's like communications business. You have to write cover letters, things of that nature. I don't write that many papers anymore.

Interviewer: What has your experience been like with writing the cover letters and the technical writing?

Interviewee: I think what I mentioned earlier about being concise and clear is especially true for those settings, because you're writing for an audience where it's basically someone who's busy and doesn't want to read anything unnecessary. It's definitely made me more word-efficient. I think that's useful pretty much for anything professional.

The rest of it has just been seeing what the professor wants. I'm not a huge fan of those classes, because it's like they apply the business school curve to it, but it's only 20-30 people. The difference between an A and a B on this assignment, it might be just a word choice that the professor didn't like.

Interviewer: Okay. Interesting. Then what have your experiences been like doing the group writing project you mentioned?

Interviewee: It's interesting when you have to write something as a group, because people are at very different levels in the way they write. They have different styles. If you're editing something, you have to keep everything in mind and make it sound cohesive, like it wasn't just four sections that everyone plastered together.

Interviewer: What was the assignment you guys were writing?

Interviewee: Since I'm in a group for a marketing class where we have to analyze [local sandwich shop] and their marketing strategy. We all had our own sections of this write-up that we're doing. Bringing them together, it sounded a little disjointed. We all had to edit it. It's tricky to edit things in a group.

Interviewer: Do you think that that experience of editing in a group has had an effect on you at all as a writer overall?

Interviewee: Maybe made me more attentive to mistakes I make when I write, and also seeing how other people make mistakes. Not a major one.

Interviewer: Okay. What kind of mistakes do you see in yourself or other writers in that group setting?

Interviewee: Part of it would be somewhat organizational. Someone might be making a point and then say a separate thing at the end of a paragraph that might need its own space. Also, just mundane stuff like spelling mistakes that I make and things like that that I don't really pay attention to.

Interviewer: Alright. What were your experiences like writing that major term paper in the business ethics course?

Interviewee: I guess for this, it was like a hypothetical; like a case study. "A company has done this. What do you recommend they do?" That was interesting, because it was way more of an opinion-based paper than anything I've had in college. Even if you're making an argument in another class, usually it's "Based on this evidence, something is true." It's not like, "I think they should do this." I guess I haven't had to do that much normative writing in college. That was unique for that class.

Interviewer: Okay. What effect has that experience had on you now?

Interviewee: I guess it's made me think a little bit more carefully about how I make arguments. Anytime I'm writing, if I'm trying to convince someone, because that was essentially the paper for that class. That's about it.

Interviewer: Okay. What kind of things did you learn about making an argument?

Interviewee: A lot of it was anticipating other ideas. It's like you'd have to say, "This company should do this." Since the paper—since you don't really get to defend the paper, you just submit it. The professor might have ideas about other options for them to take. You have to anticipate those and build in responses to your argument.

Interviewer: Okay. How confident do you feel about that writing in your concentration that you've been doing?

Interviewee: I don't know. I still haven't gotten the grade for the class. I honestly don't know. *[Chuckles]* I feel confident that I can write effectively for the things I'm interested in. Within the classes, it depends, just 'cause the thing that frustrates me the most about writing in college, it's different professors want different things. Sometimes it's hard to anticipate that. Yeah, I guess I feel pretty confident about just writing in general.

Interviewer: Especially in your concentration for your business courses, or?

Interviewee: Mm-hmm. Yeah. I mean, I have some deadlines coming up where I have to submit a cover letter for an internship that I want. I'm not extremely confident about that, because I've never done it in an official capacity. I've never had to submit that to a company before. But I think it'll work out. I'm not too worried about it.

Interviewer: That's completely separate from any classes you're taking?

Interviewee: Right. This is just on my own time.

Interviewer: Yeah, okay. What kind of experiences like that outside of the classroom have had an effect on your writing?

Interviewee: I had an internship over the summer where I had to do some writing, 'cause I was organizing a report for the people I worked for.

Interviewer: What was your internship?

Interviewee: It was at a non-profit in [city], Australia. Their thing is they help businesses [with transporting goods]. I did some research about investment, basically bureaucracy in places like [continent].

The writing for that, again with the conciseness, the people I was giving it to didn't want a bunch of unnecessary info. I guess that reinforced that. I guess made me better at proofreading. You can't make a mistake and have grammatical errors in your sentences. Things like that.

Interviewer: Has that writing that you did for your internships, or for applying to internships, affected your school writing at all, your academic writing?

Interviewee: I don't know. It's tough to say, because the lesson that I drew from that internship and the classes—pretty much the same thing. It's hard to say what affected what. It's definitely reinforced what I've learned. The things that professors have told me or that I've learned from writing papers. Definitely true in that setting. It's hard to say if it's affected me much.

Interviewer: What about your writing processes? Has writing for outside the classroom affected your process for writing at all?

Interviewee: Not really. The way that I write papers is kinda weird. I have a template on my computer that I use for the [University of Michigan club]. When we put out a file for the [University of Michigan club], there's a certain format, headings and stuff that you use. As a result, if I open a blank word document, it looks like that.

I don't mind it though, because when I write papers, it's a similar process, where it's like I'll basically have a big document with different headings and stuff. If I'm writing a paper where I have to quote a bunch of people, I'll just throw the quotes in one area and drag it around. In terms of the way I approach papers, that's probably the biggest influence, 'cause it makes it a lot easier to organize my thoughts.

Interviewer: The template from [University of Michigan club] helps you organize your classes—your papers for classes?

Interviewee: Yeah, just on a basic formatting level. I'll usually have a big document with quotes and maybe a works cited or something. I'll do the actual writing in a Google document [web-based word processor application] or something. Just having one place where it's all the things I'm gonna cite and all that stuff is organized. It helps me a lot.

Interviewer: What kinds of writing do you do for the [University of Michigan club]?

Interviewee: I'd say it's really specialized, because there's a lot of jargon that is unique to [University of Michigan club]. The way that things are presented is kind of unique. [..]. It's not so much writing persuasively in that respect, and more having—basically having a file where you can find what you need.

If you're arguing about one thing and it's a big issue, like trading with some country, having an organized file where you can be like, "Okay, I need to find evidence for this," then you can find it.

Interviewer: Do you take those files with you into the [University of Michigan club]?

Interviewee: Yeah, it's all on my computer. It's basically just a folder system with a whole bunch of word documents. A whole lot of Word documents, actually. Yeah, you'll have that on you in the [meeting]. In your speeches, you'll basically organize your document for that speech with the evidence that you're gonna cite. Maybe if you've pre-scripted one or two things that you're gonna say, you'll have that. Yeah, a lot of computer stuff.

Interviewer: Do you compose those [University of Michigan club] writings as a group, or on your own?

Interviewee: I guess individually. There's some collaboration. Everyone has their own assignments. If I'm researching a certain **team's** argument or whatever **going into a tournament**, that'll be my work. I might talk to other people on the [University of Michigan club]. Maybe they've [had] them before, or they have

ideas about what to say. Most of the work is individual, even though everybody uses it.

[...]

Interviewer: Okay. Do you think those experiences on the [University of Michigan club] have effected your writing other than giving you the template? Do you use anything else you learned?

Interviewee: No, not really, because the style of writing is very—like I said, it's specialized to what you're saying in that area. It's also not so much writing a persuasive paragraph as—it would be much more something like a list or sort of taglines for something that you're citing. I don't think I'd be able to use that for the way I write in school.

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

Interviewee: Nothing much. [*Chuckles*] Writing where you think about your writing? I don't know. [*Chuckles*]

Interviewer: Where you think about your writing?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Do you use reflective writing in your own writing process?

Interviewee: Sure. I definitely think about the process I use when I write, or how I'm going about the issue.

Interviewer: Can you say a little bit more about that?

Interviewee: I see that as proofreading. Whenever you think about how your professor or audience is going to see in your paper, you reflect on what you're going to say and how you're going to tailor that. If I write a draft and I'm proofreading it, I'll try to think about it maybe from the perspective of the professor, whoever I'm writing to.

Interviewer: Okay. Do you think you use reflective writing in any of the writing you do outside of class?

Interviewee: Sure, yeah. I mean, it's ultimately the same process. Just what I'm trying to get across to the person reading the paper, reading my writing and what they wanna know or what they wanna hear.

Interviewer: Okay. Reflective writing has something to do with thinking about who's going to read the paper for your audience?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay, great. What are your experiences of working with other writers in your courses?

Interviewee: I mean, I guess the most concrete thing I could name would be that group paper I was talking about where we all wrote our sections and tried to organize it. It's tricky, because any time you edit a paper, you're going to edit it from your perspective. You'll have to change the way other people have organized things and stuff like that. It's tough to edit a group paper.

What we did is we basically delegated a lot of writing to one person, and then we edited as a group our respective sections. I had a section where I gave him the info. Basically gave him an outline and he wrote it. Then I would edit that, and each person would edit their own thing so that we're not stepping on each other's toes.

Interviewer: Okay, interesting. Have you done any workshopping or peer review in your courses?

Interviewee: No. Not much. I'm in a class now where there's a term paper due on Monday. In discussion sections a little bit, we had to bring our outline and other people would look at it, or bring a paragraph and have someone review it. That's the only class I can think of where we've done that.

Interviewer: Okay. What was your experience with that? What did you take away from that?

Interviewee: I didn't think it was very helpful, because usually I'd either get comments that were like something I was aware of and trying to fix. It would be like, "You should maybe do this instead." It's like, "Yeah, it's a rough draft. I'm trying to fix that too." Or it would be useless.

I don't think that would always be the case. I could see it being helpful. Since I'm a procrastinator, any class that's assuming you have part of your work done before the deadline isn't that helpful. *[Laughs]* Because I usually haven't done enough by then to get constructive feedback.

Interviewer: Okay. What kind of useless feedback do you think you've gotten in peer review?

Interviewee: I guess like word choice things that I would already go over if I'm proofreading it. It would be like, "Maybe you should create this sentence

differently.” That’s helpful. I think that’s good advice, but it seems like a lot of things that would’ve either come up to me when I was proofreading my paper or that would get caught at some point in the process.

Especially if you were writing a term paper where it’s your own thing and you’re researching it, people aren’t gonna have—unless it’s the professor, people aren’t going to have that many helpful things to say, because they don’t know much about it.

Interviewer: Okay. Did you have any kind of peer review or workshopping in your Great Books class that you talked about?

Interviewee: Oh, actually, we might’ve. I honestly don’t remember. Yeah, we probably might’ve done something similar to that where we brought an outline or something. But I definitely remember a similar thing where, for the final paper in that class, I procrastinated and did it in the couple days before it was due. It wouldn’t have been that helpful to go to discussion the week before and talk to people about it, ‘cause I would’ve just had preliminary stuff.

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

Interviewee: As they begin writing a paper. I mean, just what the evidence says. Usually, if it’s a paper for a class, they’re expecting you to cite the readings for that course, or the course material, and make an argument based on that. Maybe it’s a little original, but usually it’s something consistent with what the authors and your class have been saying. You just make your argument based on that.

I’d say figure out what the coursework for your class says, or what the general message is, and write something consistent with that. otherwise, it’s going to be really opinionated and, “What do you think as a person?” which a lot of times professors don’t care about. [*Chuckles*]

Interviewer: What do you mean by that?

Interviewee: What comes to mind is if you’re in a poli sci [political science] class and you’re doing reading throughout the term about, I don’t know, about different types of governments or something. The stuff you’ve been reading for the term has a certain theme or a certain message, and then you write a paper that’s inconsistent with all of that, it’s going to be really hard to cite any of them without taking things out of context.

The paper you would write would just be like, “Well, I think things are this way.” If you’re a really good writer, I guess you can do that. The professor might appreciate it. But it’s an uphill battle.

Interviewer: Okay. Starting by gathering your evidence and building an argument around that?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Is that your process that you use to write?

Interviewee: Definitely when I'm in class. If it's a different setting, like an—well, I guess that's also true for an internship. For applying to a job or an internship, that's more just talking about yourself. I guess that is opinionated writing. Anything for a class, even though you're making an argument, it's usually pretty descriptive. Things are this way. I think it helps to write something consistent with the reading for that class, or what the professor usually says.

Interviewer: Any advice you'd have for other writers?

Interviewee: I had a teacher in high school that was really good about getting me to not use the passive voice when I write. Stronger verbs. Things like that. Instead of just "this is that." When I look at other people's writing or I edit or go over something, people do that too much, I think. People use the passive voice too much.

Interviewer: What advice do you have for helping people not to do that?

Interviewee: You just have to really police yourself. I don't have a technique for changing a sentence. I usually just think about it until I can find a way to phrase it effectively.

Interviewer: How did your high school teacher find passive verbs and change them?

Interviewee: For this class, literally, when you turned in a paper, if you had more than five verbs like that, he would just knock you down a grade. He was pretty helpful in the editing process. If you were like, "I don't know how to say this sentence." He would be helpful for that. Part of it would be a lot of times, if you're describing something, like "This water bottle is round," a lot of times it would be more effective to be like, "This round water bottle," and then say what's actually important about it.

Usually, the thing that you're using—usually if you have a sentence where it's like X is Y or whatever, that's not the most important thing. You're just describing X. You can describe it and then make an actual argument. Usually that argument will have a stronger verb.

Interviewer: Okay, great. Have you had any experiences with new media writing?

Interviewee: No. [Chuckles] I don't even know what that is. [Chuckles]

Interviewer: Writing for blogs or websites, using sound or video, giving presentations even.

Interviewee: I give presentations a decent amount for my classes. I guess at least the business ones. There's basic Powerpoint [presentation program] stuff. That's really more bullet points than writing.

Interviewer: What have those experiences been like?

Interviewee: It becomes a lot more of a design thing than a writing thing. The best way to write what you're trying to say might not be the best way to give a presentation. For instance, if you have a really eloquent way of describing a situation and you just throw that on a slide, it'll be too many words. The most common thing that I—when I'm making a presentation it's just too many words.

It becomes a lot more of an aesthetic thing, where, "Does this slide look cluttered? What do I get out of this when I look at it as an audience member?" I guess that's a little drifting from writing, but that's the most important thing for those classes.

Interviewer: Okay. What kind of process do you go through for those kinds of presentations?

Interviewee: I don't have as systematic of a way to prepare for them as I might for writing a paper. I usually just create a really blank and ugly Powerpoint with the things that I wanna say, and then I'll come back to it. Make it look good. Trim down the ideas and organize them.

Interviewer: Okay. What effect has that experience of making a Powerpoint had on you, as a writer?

Interviewee: I don't know if they spill over that much for me, because you can't really do the things that you do—you can't give a paper where it's just bullet points. Yeah, I don't think it's affected my writing that much.

Interviewer: Okay. Have you had any experience with writing online? Anything like that? Writing on the web?

Interviewee: In terms of blogging, stuff like that? No, not really. I mean, only in—I guess if you could claim social media stuff as an example of that, then a little bit. But I don't see that very much with writing.

Interviewer: Okay. You don't think any of that social media writing has had an effect on your writing for work or internships or classes at all?

Interviewee: No. It's also like it's hard for there to be a spillover, because if I'm posting something on a friend's wall or whatever, I'm not gonna review my syntax and stuff or check my spelling, just 'cause nobody cares.

Interviewer: Okay. Very separate for you?

Interviewee: Yeah. I guess that's all informal to me. It might be different if I had a class where I had to blog or something like that. That would be a different instance. I've heard of classes where you have to do that, and it usually sounds like a big hassle. *[Chuckles]* A friend of mine is in an econ [economic] class where he has to blog every week or something like that. That's definitely more of a writing process where you have to check the way you phrase things and all. It also sounds like a pain to do. *[Chuckles]*

Interviewer: Okay. None of that kind of writing in your internships at all either?

Interviewee: No. 'Cause all the work I was doing was internal. I didn't publish anything. For my desk, it would always go through someone who was a superior.

Interviewer: Okay. You've been uploading pieces of writing to the study archive on C tool, yeah?

Interviewee: I have. I haven't done anything this semester.

Interviewer: Not yet? Okay. How has that process of uploading your materials in the past been going for you?

Interviewee: It was fine. I remember there were instructions for uploading. I think I put my Great Books paper up there or something. It was pretty straightforward though.

Interviewer: Why did you choose that piece for the archive?

Interviewee: It was I guess easy to find, just on my computer. I still had that file. A lot of—pretty much everyone in the honors college takes that class, more or less. It seemed like they were trying to look at the way students write in a helpful way.

Interviewer: Okay. What other pieces have you chosen to upload to the archive?

Interviewee: I don't really remember. I think there might've been a poli sci [political science] paper that I there up there. I definitely haven't put anything from this year's classes on there. I don't remember the last time when I did all that.

Interviewer: Okay. Do you remember why you chose to upload your poli sci paper?

Interviewee: No. [Chuckles] Sorry.

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