

Interviewer: Okay, so I think this is working. How would you describe yourself as a writer and when you began doing that?

Interviewee: When I began? I think I was really shaky with my writing, not like really shaky, but I knew that was probably one of the areas that I probably most struggled with. The freshman year writing experience was very different transitioning from high school writing to actually learning how to write the way they want you to actually write in college.

Interviewer: What do you mean?

Interviewee: Well, I think in elementary school and middle school they teach you like five paragraph essays. Then in high school they're trying to get you away from that, but they don't really—I don't know. I took mostly honors English AP, and I feel like they tried to explain it, but never really—I left like confused more. Then I was kind of thrown into the first year writing, and that was second semester for me. I kind of had a little practice with college writing, but the first year that was really where she like broke it down and was like a step-by-step process of what—like you don't have to do a five paragraph and you don't need to conclude like this. She taught a lot of different steps I wasn't really used to, so it took a lot of practice, lots of drafts. [Laughter]

Interviewer: Yeah, right. How would you describe yourself as a writer now?

Interviewee: I'm a lot more confident now. I think as a political science major they have you write a lot, so that's really helped me in just practicing. I think it's definitely a stronger thing when like applying to internships. When they're asking if I'm comfortable giving them writing samples and writing as a part of my job I can definitely say that I am a lot more comfortable with that and happy to do that as part of my work. Usually if I saw like writing had to be part of something I was like no, I don't think so.

Interviewer: [Laughter]

Interviewee: Now I'm definitely not afraid of it.

Interviewer: That's good. What language have you developed to talk about yourself as a writer or how you learned to write?

Interviewee: That question is kind of [cross talk 02:40].

Interviewer: Yeah, so like concepts, like ideas maybe. You mentioned like a five paragraph essay, so that would be like language you have to describe writing. Like a thesis statement, those kinds of terms, do you have that language or did you develop any sort of language?

Interviewee: I definitely developed, and in fact, going to D.C., our Michigan in Washington program, we had to write a 20 to 25 page research paper, so we really

developed like a hypothesis and a thesis statement and how to organize it more with like results. It was a lot more set up as in like these were my methods, here's that—so I definitely learned a lot about—especially like thesis statements too. I can definitely understand that a lot more and stuff like that.

Interviewer: Okay. To what extent would you say you've grown as a writer and to what would you attribute this growth?

Interviewee: I think a lot of it is in my confidence now that if I get a prompt I know myself more and how I work with papers. I think just all of the writing that U of M [University of Michigan] makes me do is what made me better. Also, I've had some really good GSIs [Graduate Student Instructors] and professors who are great at giving feedback of what needs to improve. Working one-on-one and going into office hours was something I would definitely attribute it to. I'd say confidence and just getting what I want to say across in a better, less wordy and more precise way.

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

Interviewee: I'd like to make it even stronger because writing skills are so important. In everything I look in they always want writing skills, so I definitely think there's always room to learn. I want to get better at organizing my papers. I know like what I want to write, and then I write it, and I'm like why did I put that paragraph there again? That's something I really want to try to work on and getting it more organized before the final draft and just being able to think it through. I'm a little better at brainstorming too. I hate that kind of writing. I just want to get it on a page and get it over with.

Interviewer: Right, right. Have these goals changed over time since you've been at U of M?

Interviewee: I think yeah. At first it was more just being able to like write a paper and be proud of it to give it to my professor, and I think I definitely reached that goal. Now it's getting more like precise areas. I think my goal was really broad before to just like become a better writer.

Interviewer: Thinking across your writing experiences at U of M, what do you think—were you at any other transfer institutions? Like were you at something—okay, so just U of M?

Interviewee: No, U of M.

Interviewer: What would you say—what do you think it means to write well?

Interviewee: I think it means a lot. All of my professors in any kind of area I've ever taken a class in, they always put emphasis on writing and how it's really important. I definitely learned all the different areas. It's not just English classes, but you need to write well, and it's everywhere. In my calculus class they make us write things. I've

definitely learned the importance of writing here, and just on how much you can actually convey in your message. It's really great. I've learned a lot from my peers too what a really good essay could be.

Interviewer: Yeah? What do you mean from your peers?

Interviewee: Well, when we had to do a lot of like peer review stuff, so MIW [Michigan in Washington] made us do that last semester and just learning how different people write is really interesting to me. I learn a lot from like oh, that's how they said that. Maybe I could learn from there, and freshman year especially of having everyone have such a different high school experience. Everybody had to share one paper, and we all had to peer review that throughout the semester. I learned a lot about different writing styles and some things that I never even thought of on how to write.

Interviewer: What do you think is most important in learning to write?

Interviewee: The most important thing about learning to write? I think that's such a skill in all areas and no matter what I want to go into in my future it's just like—and being confident in it is really important because I learned that—I don't know. In high school I always felt like writing, okay, it's going to like—my teacher is going to read it and then it's never going to be thought of again, but now that I'm going to be leaving soon I can definitely tell that writing something that could be really helpful for others and really important in their future.

Interviewer: Great. Which first array requirement course did you take?

Interviewee: [English course].

Interviewer: Okay. What did you learn in this class that you continue to use in your writing?

Interviewee: I learned a lot. [Laughter] I think the whole draft process and editing was something that when they actually forced you to turn in a draft ahead of time and you got feedback from it and then you could build on that, that's really important because now I try to get my essays done before I go into office hours even if it's not required to get a draft in. That's like been really helpful to force me to like sit down and actually rethink my writing because I used to like to just finish it and turn it in to never look at it again. That was something really important that I learned.

My instructor was really great at just like sitting down with people and like figuring out what your weaknesses were. I learned the organization—like that was a big struggle part for me. I started to learn how to organize it a lot better, but I'm still working on that part.

Interviewer: Yeah. What language did you develop in the course to talk about yourself as a writer or how you learned to write?

Interviewee: I think in that course it was [inaudible 09:32] a lot about, again, like that's where I really learned thesis statement and just different types of writing. We did like a non-fiction, and then we also did fiction, so that was great that I really got an overall kind of taste of everything.

Interviewer: Okay, interesting. What experiences in and out of the classroom have had an effect on your writing?

Interviewee: In and out?

Interviewer: In and out, yeah.

Interviewee: Okay, mostly in. [Laughter]

Interviewer: Okay. [Laughter]

Interviewee: I guess out of the classroom—when I did my internship they made me write a lot.

Interviewer: Did they?

Interviewee: Yeah. I was expected to research about specific people or things and then write a summary for them. They were great about giving me feedback about the writings in the first couple of ones that I did, so that was really interesting to kind of get like the real world feel of how they want you to be writing and things like that. It's interesting that when I take different courses on how they like you to—like poli-sci [Political Science Major] is very like get your words out, be precise. We don't want anything like that.

When I took a history course I thought it would be really similar to political science writing, but as soon as I turned in my paper she's like, "I know you're a political science major by the way you write," so that was really interesting on just how I'm really comfortable writing poli-sci papers. The history class was good because it was challenging, but she was really helpful in just how you can write so different, in so many different styles.

Interviewer: What do you mean?

Interviewee: She didn't care as much as like poly-sci, which is like 300 words and don't go over. I was just very used to like this is my idea, this is it, and this is what supports it. History was more like explaining the background and getting the entire picture. She wasn't so worried about word count and was open to a little bit more of like style, I guess. Psychology writing is always interesting, but because it's trying to use the science and also the social science part too, so that's a lot different than political science which is usually my ideas and supporting it. I really don't have to throw in like scientific facts into it.

Interviewer: Okay, interesting. How has your writing process changed as a result of these experiences, I guess, of taking these different kinds of writing classes?

Interviewee: It's definitely taught me that there's no like one way to write a paper, so I think I was being really used to just writing it one way and getting it done. This opened me up to conveying my message in a different way, maybe a little bit more exciting for that reader to read. The actual reviewing process I used to, like I said, write it and turn it in and hope that there weren't that many errors. Now I'm a lot more open to starting a draft and rereading and not as afraid to start all over if I have to.

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

Interviewee: Reflective writing? I find that more as a way to like express yourself in a more personal way of writing, more of something that you would do in your own time or for like an English class. I wouldn't really put that word in like political science or something like that.

Interviewer: Have you used reflective writing in your own writing process whether it's assigned or voluntary?

Interviewee: I think we did have to do some of that freshman year, but I am not writing on my own time. [Laughter]

Interviewer: [Laughter]

Interviewee: I have enough papers to write in class that usually by the end of the semester I have like a break from it. Definitely though in like reflective writing, like finding yourself through it and more defining myself as like a writer and just student in general, I usually like to like go back and read it and see like how I've grown.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's interesting. What are your experiences working with other writers in your courses or in other projects?

Interviewee: Freshman year it was really a little stressful because I feel like they just pulled—[University of Michigan] is great because it's so diverse and we come from so many different high schools, but it was a little overwhelming the fact that everyone was such on different pages. By the end of the semester I think we kind of were more on the same track, so that was really kind of—I didn't really enjoy that that much.

Now that I'm like—in junior year we had to, like last semester we had to peer review and read other people's writings. In poli-sci they do blogs a lot that you have to respond, and I really enjoyed those because critical thinking skills always come out in that. You're like wow, I didn't even think of that. I just like when they give a good writer's example in class. I really enjoy that because I can kind of see how they did something differently,

even if it's a small change, how more effective that writing was then something that I had done wrong.

Interviewer: Right. Have you done collaborative writing?

Interviewee: I don't think so. I don't know. Oh, yes, we did one for a psychology class. There were three of us for our final. That actually went really well. I think my group was pretty much on the same track of how we wrote as well, so that was really nice. We ended up pretty much writing the entire thing together, and we broke up a small chunk of it to write on our own. We kind of fixed it, but that was actually a pleasant surprise that it went so well because I don't always think that collaborative writing is the greatest thing. I think that's the only time I did it, but it was a good experience. We learned a lot from each other.

Interviewer: Oh, good. If you're going to give someone advice about writing what would it be, someone starting a paper?

Interviewee: Someone starting a paper?

Interviewer: Yeah, what are some of the things they should think about?

Interviewee: Well, a little hypocritical, I would tell them to definitely brainstorm and take time to actually get the thoughts out, like outlining and being open to changing your paper I think is always really important. I think we don't like to get to the deadline and be done and when it comes close to just turning it in, but not being afraid to change something and being open to other people—I really like to have people read over my papers before I turn them in too. I think that's really great just to give it a fresh set of eyes to see strengths and weaknesses on it.

Interviewer: Right. What's your concentration? I mean, you said political science.

Interviewee: Yeah, political science and a psychology [cross talk 17:33].

Interviewer: Okay, you've had both, okay. You've obviously had opportunities to write in both of those. What do you think those experiences—how have they affected your writing?

Interviewee: I think I've definitely grown most as a writer from my political science classes. Psychology always sticks a couple papers in there, but they're never—the tests are really important in that, so political science is always about papers or if you have tests they're essay tests. It's definitely just giving me a lot of experience, and I think that's one way I learn really well is just by doing it over and over again.

It's really great because I've done short writings for poli-sci, but I've also done longer writings which is good because sometimes I would get, I think psychology does a lot of like longer papers. They kind of balance each other out really well too because I think if I

just took poli-sci, like I said, when I came to [inaudible 18:35] into a history course, they're like oh, you write like a poli-sci major. It's kind of interesting to get those two different views.

Interviewer: How confident do you feel about your writing and your concentration, or yourself as a writer?

Interviewee: I'm pretty confident. When I turn it in I'm—yeah, I would say that if I turn it in I'm expecting a good grade from it. I'm actually proud to show it to people.

Interviewer: Okay, okay. Have you had any experiences with new media writing? You mentioned blogs, so that would be blogs or websites using sound or video, PowerPoint? If you've done that what have they looked like?

Interviewee: Blogs, I definitely have sophomore year. We used a lot of those of just reading and responding. They're usually shorter, like 300 to 500 words. History, we also had to use it in that class as well. It's always been you write something and you respond to someone else's too, so I like those a lot because they're pretty easy to do weekly. It's not as much stress as doing a large essay, but you learn a lot because you have to get your message out with little words and also be able to read other people's message.

I've done PowerPoints pretty much throughout my years. We just had to do one. I like my PowerPoints to be very simple and just straight to the point, so I'm not really wordy on my PowerPoints. I never use like sound or [inaudible 20:17].

Interviewer: Okay. What effect has that kind of new media writing had on your self-image as a writer or what you think about [cross talk 20:28]?

Interviewee: I think it's just another tool in my kit to use. I'm really confident with PowerPoints. I think that's really important because they're used a lot in the workplace as well, so being able to get a point across and have that as a helpful tool is really great. I think the blogs helped me more personally as a writer that I could see other people's writing and that I had to be confident enough to post it with your name on it. That was kind of scary at first, but now I feel a lot more confident about that.

Interviewer: You've been uploading pieces to CTools [learning management system] of your writing?

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: How has that process been going for you?

Interviewee: Oh, that's really easy. [Laughter]

Interviewer: [Laughter]

Interviewee: I always have a couple of things to choose from, so it's been really easy to do.

Interviewer: Oh, good. What pieces did you choose to archive?

Interviewee: Recently, my last semester I took a Middle East course while I was in [Washington] D.C., so I had a research paper. I did the effect of higher education on the speed of the Arab spring 21:40.

Interviewer: Wow!

Interviewee: I studied three different countries and then saw if their percentage of people enrolled in the college had an effect on the speed. Unfortunately, with the Middle East getting the data is a little difficult, but it was really interesting. I'm trying to think of the other paper. It's been so long ago. I think I did a psychology piece for positive psychology.

Interviewer: Okay. Why did you choose these pieces?

Interviewee: They were a good length. I felt like at least if you guys were doing research about it and it was long enough to get the point of them, and I was really proud of both of them too. The good thing was I had choices, so that was kind of neat that I was proud enough to be able to like look at different papers and I wasn't just like stuck submitting one. I really liked both of them.

My positive psychology was kind of a reflective paper, I guess, because it was something that you wanted to implement in your life and how it had an effect on you. That was really an interesting piece to do.

Interviewer: Oh, cool. What kinds of writing do you think will be most valuable for your career?

Interviewee: I think all the writing was really important like throughout my time at U of M. I'm not going to be—I know I envision myself writing 20 page papers in my career, but I do want to go and possibly get my Master's or more. I think just knowing how to write in general is going to be really important for a Master's and being comfortable with writing long papers is a good skill to have. I think the most important was the shorter pieces of just being able to get the point across, what you as the writer want the reader to know, and also how to put that support in there and not use too many words. It's already been really helpful with my past internship of knowing how not to write a five page paper if they want like ½ page for summaries and knowing what main points to put in there.

We did a lot of grammar freshman year as well. We had a little grammar unit, and that was just good as a refresher. I think sometimes being a senior or going to be a senior in college that I'm like oh, I know all of this, but it was a good refresher because

grammatical mistakes just are awful to read. I'd be really embarrassed to have my future boss read that if I didn't have good grammar now.

Interviewer: If you could tell your teachers one thing about writing or how to teach writing what would it be?

Interviewee: To give good feedback. I know they have a lot of stuff to do, and I think grading papers is probably very daunting on them, but as a student I like to take the time to actually read all of their comments and really learn and try to take that into account in my future writing. I think being open for office hours is really helpful. I know not every student uses it, but every time I've gone in there I've always had good feedback. Even if I didn't think the professor was that great at the beginning, one-on-one time has always been extremely helpful especially for the writing process because they all have their own styles too. It's really interesting to learn how they would go about the paper.

Also, I always walk out of those meetings learning more about my writing, but also just over the topic in general and stuff like that. Being open to getting criticism—and it's always nice when they point out something that you're doing well, so that's really helpful too. My freshman lecturer was really good at pointing out like both strengths and weaknesses so that you know. That's what I would say is definitely a lot of constructive criticism.

Interviewer: Okay, constructive criticism. Are there any other things that you might want to tell that writing teacher?

Interviewee: Peer review is really great. I never met anyone who loves to do peer reviews and they kind of stink, but I always end up learning a lot more than I think I'm going to learn from them. Sometimes I feel like the big final papers I rush through, put at the end of the thing, and it's kind of like go and do this paper and turn it in, and you'll never see it again because it's the final. I think just stressing to them that, again, making the whole writing process for one paper so not just like here it is, turn it in and be done with the paper, but being able to like go in and see them through the [inaudible 27:05] is really helpful.

Interviewer: Right, right. That's great. Well, thanks. I think that's all we have as far as the questions go. That was—you really thought a lot about this, so I appreciate that. Thanks.

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