

Interviewer: This is \*\*\* interviewing \*\*\* and it is April 25, 2013. Alright, so how do you describe yourself as a writer?

Interviewee: I'd say I'm a pretty strong writer. I'm really organized. I am a Communications major so I write all the time [laughter] and so it's not like a nervous writer or anything.

Interviewer: What do you mean when you say you're organized?

Interviewee: For my writing processes I start off with an outline and I organize it, introduction, conclusion, what I want to talk about in the body of the paragraph and I'm just going to go from there.

Interviewer: How would you describe yourself as a writer when you first began at University of Michigan?

Interviewee: When I first began? Well, I thought that I was a very strong writer and then I got my first English paper back [laughter] and then I realized maybe I have something to learn. I followed that five-paragraph essay that we're taught our entire lives until we get to college and you're not supposed to do that anymore once you get to college, not in academic writing or anything like that.

Interviewer: And you realized that with your first English paper?

Interviewee: Yeah and I didn't get a very good grade [laughter].

Interviewer: Can you talk about that a little bit?

Interviewee: I don't remember what the grade was, generally that I was shocked and I was really embarrassed. I went to my professor's office hours and was kind of like WTF. What just happened here? What did I do wrong? They explained to me that you're not supposed to do it in that format and you're supposed to delve deeper and you don't need to have three examples. It's different. That's what I remembered.

Interviewer: To what extent would you say that you've grown or changed since then, as a writer?

Interviewee: Grown or changed? I don't know. I think about things differently. That's a weird question. I don't know. I've gone through college. They teach you things. You think differently. I don't know, sorry.

Interviewer: How do you think you think differently now?

Interviewee: I don't think of things on the surface level anymore maybe.

Interviewer: Like the delving deeper that you were talking about a minute ago?

Interviewee: Sure, yeah, okay.

Interviewer: What do you think that looks like?

Interviewee: I guess I don't totally understand the question.

Interviewer: That's fine.

Interviewee: Sorry.

Interviewer: Nope, so you say you think you've gone from—you're more organized now you said?

Interviewee: No, I think I was organized before but I just was very formulaic and now depending on what the assignment is, what the class is for and what the topic is, it's different as every writing assignment is different.

Interviewer: Your first English paper helped you realize that?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: You think of anything else that helped you to realize that?

Interviewee: I think just the different classes here and a POLSCI [Political Science] paper is different from a COMM [Communication] paper, which is different from a business paper, which is different from a press release or whatever.

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

Interviewee: Oh, I want to go into PR so that's going to require a lot of writing. I know that a press release is different from a traditional academic paper so I want to be able to do that, do that well. Social media is totally different. That's also writing, being able to fit something into 140 characters in Twitter is more challenging than it sounds.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: I want to be able to just keep doing that.

Interviewer: Thinking across your writing experiences at UM [University of Michigan] what do you think it means to write well?

Interviewee: I think if you can get your point across in an interesting and concise manner then I think that's writing well.

Interviewer: Which upper-level writing courses have you taken?

Interviewee: I don't remember. I have written like half a dozen papers in all of my classes. I don't know which ones were upper-level.

Interviewer: Did you take [English course]?

Interviewee: I don't think so.

Interviewer: No, maybe something else. What were your experiences with writing in some of your courses?

Interviewee: Experiences with writing?

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: I guess I've written everything. I've written everything from a weekly two-page "What did I think about this?" writing, those reading assignment papers to a 20-page research paper on a topic of my choice to a 100-page document like an advertising campaign, so everything.

Interviewer: What do you think the effect of those writing experiences has been on you as a writer?

Interviewee: I think, I guess maybe that's what's developed me into the writer I am today, the different assignments and the different maybe audiences that I'm supposed to be writing to, the different purposes of the assignments.

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

Interviewee: Sure, so I guess the huge 100-page advertising campaign document. I worked in a group and we all had to, we're all responsible for certain portions of it and that is different because you're explaining some quantifiable aspects of research or something that you conducted on your own versus I just completed a paper about Friends and how that influenced language in the '90s. That's very academic and I took other people's research.

Interviewer: The TV show, Friends?

Interviewee: Mm-Hmm.

Interviewer: That's awesome.

Interviewee: It was great. It was fun.

Interviewer: You worked collaboratively on that or that was?

Interviewee: The Friends one was all by myself. The previous one, I did a Jack Daniel's brand advertising campaign last semester. It was a large document. There was a group of four or five people and we were all responsible for different sections of it.

Interviewer: You think the different assignments and their different purposes and audiences affected your writing?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Do you still make use of what you learned through those writing experiences in your courses now?

Interviewee: Yeah, yeah, I've written everything she's given me since my first writing assignment. Freshman year has obviously stuck with me.

Interviewer: What kind of things do you think have stuck with you that you still use in your coursework now?

Interviewee: I guess something like my biggest mistakes and some of my biggest triumphs. I remember that first paper was really embarrassing so I remembered not to do that. Then I've had a couple of other assignments that I'm just really proud of. I did really well, but the Jack Daniel's one was a huge assignment so it was really exciting that I was able to finish it. We got a good grade on it. It was very different from anything that I'd written before because it was with a group and we did our own research and we were writing to a business audience instead of just our professor. I'm trying to think what else.

Interviewer: What do you think you did especially well in that Jack Daniel's group paper that you would still use now?

Interviewee: I think working with other people to write something 'cause that's hard 'cause everyone writes in their own way and none of them wrote poorly. I don't write poorly but we write differently and trying to make something sound coherent and like it's written by the same person or group of people was difficult because we write so differently.

Interviewer: You feel like you'll still use that?

Interviewee: I'll use that definitely in the future because I think that PR is a very collaborative work environment and you do a lot of writing with a bunch of different people so that'll be good.

Interviewer: Great, so did you take writing courses in your concentration in Communications?

Interviewee: Yes, definitely.

Interviewer: How have those writing courses affected you, the ones in your concentration?

Interviewee: I guess I think about TV differently. I love the show Friends but I never thought about how it affected language development. That assignment had me thinking about how the show Friends affected society. It made me think about Friends differently and TV in general differently and the writing assignment, maybe not so much affecting my writing but affecting how I think about the world and things in it, has changed.

Interviewer: What course was that for?

Interviewee: It was [Communications course].

Interviewer: How confident do you feel about writing in your concentration?

Interviewee: Very confident. Yeah, I'm a graduating senior. I don't think I've gotten below an A- in any of my COMM classes. I got this [laughter].

Interviewer: Great, so you say you feel confident about that Friends paper?

Interviewee: Uh Huh.

Interviewer: Can you talk about that a little bit? How you feel confident about that paper?

Interviewee: Because it was in my last COMM paper, I've done it before, I did, I thought about it. I guess I've used everything that I learned up until this point and applied it to that paper. I did well and I didn't do well on and when I turned it in, it was both a relief to be done with my major and also I felt confident about it.

Interviewer: Have you had other writing experiences in Communications that you feel, helped you feel confident as a writer?

Interviewee: Let's see, oh there's another course last year I think where we had to write blog posts instead of just your traditional paper, and I don't blog on my own so that was interesting. We had to learn how to use WordPress [content management system] and had to include pictures or videos along with what was essentially a two- or three-page paper but make it look cool also.

Interviewer: That helped you feel confident, that blog assignment?

Interviewee: Mm-hmm because I think I'll use that in the future too and I'd never done that before and I ended up doing pretty well on it and it looked cool in the end. We weren't assigned to write just a white piece of paper with black writing on it.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Great, so how often have you used skills or strategies that you learned in one of those writing classes in another course? You have been taking outside of Communications?

Interviewee: Yeah, so?

Interviewer: How do you use the writing experiences from COMM classes in other courses?

Interviewee: I guess, I'm also an International Studies major so I have to think about the world too so thinking about TV or media from COMM and applying it to writing and how the world is affected by it, the war in Iraq or whatever is interesting I guess and changed me.

Interviewer: Have you had writing experiences in your International Studies courses?

Interviewee: I mean I've written in other ones but they're not focused on writing.

Interviewer: Do you feel like you use what you learned in your COMM courses to write those papers in International Studies?

Interviewee: I think so, yeah, because I guess the COMM courses, the focus is more on writing so I guess they teach you how to write a little more than the International Studies does.

Interviewer: Can you talk about a writing experience in International Studies?

Interviewee: Last semester, we had to write a couple of different papers for this one class that was about non-violent protest. The professor just gave us a very vague prompt and no guidelines of what he was going to be looking for. I was, "Okay, well, he's not making himself available. I don't really know what he wants. I'll just apply what I've learned for COMM in the writing and that seemed to work out."

Interviewer: Why do you think it worked out?

Interviewee: I don't know. I got an A [laughter].

Interviewer: Alright, what kind of skills did you use to write that paper that you had picked up from COMM?

Interviewee: I guess starting with an outline and fill out the draft and editing and everything. When I was first thinking about the assignment I was thinking about how—I forget what the actual assignment was but it was something about how does this one

particular thing affect something else? I was thinking about how the media played a part in it, that I learned from COMM and yeah.

Interviewer: Over the last two years, what experiences in and out of the classroom have had an effect on your writing?

Interviewee: I guess in the classroom, it's all the assignments I get, varying, typical varied, what we expect. I get the assignment. I write it. I turn it in. I get an A. I get it back. Then outside of the classroom, I did an internship in New York this last summer where I was in a PR office. I had to write press releases and I was doing social media on behalf of our office. When I was drafting the press releases for my supervisors, they would give me feedback. I learned how to write differently for that setting and the same with the social media.

Interviewer: Yeah, so how has your writing process changed as a result of that internship experience?

Interviewee: I think I'm more concise now because of the processes of social media. You only have so much space that you can't go if it'—it's not five to six pages like here. You have 2,000 words and that's it; 2001 words doesn't work. You'd better figure out how to do it, how to make that work.

Interviewer: Did the feedback that your supervisors were giving you help you to do that?

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Can you talk about that a little bit, the feedback experience?

Interviewee: I mean if I wrote you 2,005 words that they'd figure out how to cut out those 5 words. You can't go over 2,000. It just doesn't work. Then also a press release is written like a newspaper article. You have to lead with the most important thing, and then you give the background information later on. Whereas, in college I'd been writing, have the background information at the top and then get more and more specific or get to your point at the bottom.

Interviewer: Yeah, interesting, so has that experience at the internship writing affected your writing at Michigan now?

Interviewee: Yes and no, I guess when I first came back I thought, "Okay, great. I know how I'm supposed to write for PR. That's communication. It's what I want to do so I'm going to try and apply that here." I started writing and then I hadn't turned it in yet, luckily, but then I realized, "Oh, wait, that's a different setting. I have to go back to how I was writing before the summer and I did much better on those assignments after that."

Interviewer: You were able to make the switch?

Interviewee: Yeah, I switched back, yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, if I used the term reflective writing, what does that mean to you?

Interviewee: It sounds like you're thinking back on something that's happened. It's kind of like memory writing, good enough for your diary or your journal, good to be kind of reflective.

Interviewer: Have you recently used reflective writing in your own writing processes, whether assigned or voluntary?

Interviewee: I don't keep a diary so, no. I've never been assigned a reflective writing piece so I wouldn't do it, no.

Interviewer: What have your recent experiences been of working with other writers in your courses or at your internship, other contacts?

Interviewee: I had another gigantic, group project this semester where I had to write with a bunch of other people and I don't like it. I know it's necessary.

Interviewer: What were you guys writing about?

Interviewee: It was another business course and we had to write a strategy for how a company can make some changes and grow and be better and more prosperous. We divided up into sections and I wrote--I forget what I wrote, but I wrote one section and someone else wrote another section. We had to combine it together and make it cohesive. The writing on my own was great because I got to do what I wanted when I wanted, how I wanted to do it. Then when we combined it, everyone was doing exactly that. We had to spend some time and make it, everyone, make sure that everyone was using not passive tense or using the same tense and then instead of being past tense or present tense, stuff like that. Long and frustrating but it turned out pretty well in the end.

Interviewer: Oh good, good, why do you think it turned out well?

Interviewee: 'Cause we took the time to listen to each other and figure out how to—it wasn't just one person dominating the conversation. We were a good working team so that we could make sure that everyone's strengths came out and that's good.

Interviewer: Yeah, so you said you don't like those assignments but you know they're necessary?

Interviewee: Right, yeah but everything's, of course, easier when you're doing it on your own. You can do it your own way at your own pace but it's necessary in the real world to be able to collaborate with others.

Interviewer: Have you done workshoping or peer review in your courses?



Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: Can you talk about that a little bit?

Interviewee: I think it's a complete waste of time. No one wants to do anything other than correct grammar mistakes and we argued. At the University of Michigan everyone has pretty decent grammar so it's a complete waste of time. No one wants to talk about how to make your idea better.

Interviewer: Have you ever had a peer review experience where someone commented on something other than grammar?

Interviewee: No.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: No.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: Never.

Interviewer: Where, in what courses have you done workshopping and peer review?

Interviewee: That first English class, [English course], we did all the time. Some COMM courses and I'm sure at other times. Teachers like it for some reason but we all end up talking about other things, what we're doing on those weekends instead.

Interviewer: Did you give each other feedback in the peer collaborative group writing setting?

Interviewee: Yes, but I think that's more so because our grade depended on making sure that what they were writing made sense and their idea was actually good. Before we actually sat down to write, we'd all discuss it, what we were all going to write so it was no surprise when what was actually being said was just how those things that they'll need to correct.

Interviewer: You used each other's feedback to make it more cohesive?

Interviewee: Right, yeah.

Interviewer: Great, so now that you're about to graduate what advice would you give to college students about writing? What are some of the things they should think about as they begin writing a paper?

Interviewee: I think they should definitely go to office hours early on and often because the professor is grading your papers, and you want to make sure you know what they want and what they expect. I'd say being as concise as possible is really important because just saying stuff just to fill up the page never goes over well. I think I'd get rid of that five-paragraph essay formula that we're taught in high school because it doesn't work here. I think a thesis is really, really important, make sure you have that down before you do anything else. Just have a good process and know what works for you.

Interviewer: You said go to office hours is your first one?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Did you do a lot of that?

Interviewee: Yes, yeah, I did a lot of that starting when I got that paper back that first time and it didn't go over well. I went to the office to complain but really then I learned what I was supposed to do instead and after that I was in the office all the time.

Interviewer: For that course and other courses?

Interviewee: For that course and other courses, yeah.

Interviewer: Before you would even start writing?

Interviewee: Yeah or at like I have a general idea of what I want to write about. I go there with something whether it's a thesis or an idea or questions or an outline. Before I turn in a paper I always go into the office and have to know.

Interviewer: You also said, "Have a good process," was one of the other pieces of advice?

Interviewee: Right, for me I have to read the prompt, think about it, write, get an outline, get a thesis, draft, read, edit it, then turn it in. I have other friends who just sit down and write and that works for them so just find what works for you.

Interviewer: You said a thesis is important?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Can you talk about that a little bit?

Interviewee: It's the foundation of your paper. I've been taught here that theses are really, really important. You have to make sure that your idea for what you're trying to write about is clear and stated and it's near the top and there's no surprises so to make sure you know what you're going to be writing about and stick to it.

Interviewer: Have you had any experiences with new media writing?

Interviewee: There was that blog assignment that we did and then I guess my own personal Facebooking and Tweeting.

Interviewer: Then for your internship also, right?

Interviewee: Right.

Interviewer: What effect have those experiences had on you, the new media writing?

Interviewee: I guess I go back to like the white paper and the black writing on it and it looks, really, really boring now because I want to add pictures and colors and things like that but it is what it is. Then I guess also I'm even more concise than I was before because I have those constraints so I pay more attention to the, "must be five to six pages" so I can make sure it's a full five pages and not a whole lot more.

Interviewer: You said earlier about your blog too that it made you feel confident because it looked good.

Interviewee: Yeah, yeah that's right, that's right.

Interviewer: Can you talk about that a little bit?

Interviewee: Well, it was just a very new, different experience. I've never written like that before and it looked cool. It had the colors and it had the pictures and the video. When I saw that in the end I was extremely excited. I was really proud of myself for making something that looked so interesting.

Interviewer: What kind of things were you writing about on the blog?

Interviewee: It was for a COMM class. It must have been some kind of media. I forget what the actual class was about but I remember writing about Mad Men and the opening sequence for one of them. I think it was, why was the Mad Men opening sequence with Don Draper, the cutouts and everything, why was it important or interesting? Or is it different from other opening credits? Then I think I played the video and I had other pictures of advertisements from Mad Men in there so it looked cool.

Interviewer: Have you had any other important experiences with new media writing?

Interviewee: I can't think of anything.

Interviewer: What about at your internship? You were writing tweets for them?

Interviewee: Tweets and Facebook and Google+, but no one uses Google+ anymore.

Interviewer: For the company that you were working for?

Interviewee: Right.

Interviewer: What was the company?

Interviewee: It was a PR firm. [...].

Interviewer: Great, so how did that new media writing have an effect on you?

Interviewee; Just like, what makes something like re-tweetable I guess. Why were some of my tweets re-tweeted by a thousand people or some of the things not re-tweeted? I guess I learned how to make that interesting and how to get more re-tweets and I applied that to my personal social media. That's more fun when you get a bunch of people to re-tweet you.

Interviewer: Yeah, right, so what is a re-tweetable tweet? Did you learn?

Interviewee: You saying, like you use a lot of hash tags and "all done" was like, "I'm all done with college classes forever, yahoo, go blue." The hash tag goblue, that got re-tweeted because that's something that's applicable to a lot of people and a lot of your followers especially.

Interviewer: You think the hash tag has a big thing to do with that?

Interviewee: Yeah, yeah because if they're not following you but they're following that hash tag, then they can still see your tweet so you can have non-followers re-tweet you.

Interviewer: Do you think that new media writing, the tweeting especially, has an effect on all your writing, your writing in school and stuff too?

Interviewee: I guess that I want to make sure that my academic writing is interesting. The professor won't re-tweet my paper or whatever but I want him to enjoy reading it a little bit more than maybe I thought about it before.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah, okay so have those experiences affected your sense of your writing, you think?

Interviewee: Mm-hmm, yeah I want to make sure that it's interesting to read and if possible just to look at, I guess.

Interviewer: Have you had to create an electronic portfolio at all for any of your courses or anything?

Interviewee: I don't know what that is so I guess not [laughter].

Interviewer: Alright, great, okay so you've been uploading pieces of writing to the study archive on CTools [learning management system]?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: How has that process been going for you?

Interviewee: Pretty easy, you order a binder every semester and I just upload something that I'm proud of and it's nice and easy.

Interviewer: Why did you choose the pieces you've uploaded?

Interviewee: Because they were from that semester and they were something that I was really proud of. I got a good grade on it. It was interesting to read. It was interesting to write about. It was something that I could talk about, get excited about.

Interviewer: Can you give me an example of that? What's something you've uploaded to the archive that you're proud of?

Interviewee: I am blanking on what I just turned in. I think last semester I uploaded a paper for, I think it was an International Studies course about that non-violent protest course. I think it was what can people do to start a revolution or something. It was just an interesting topic. It was a culmination of everything I learned that semester in that course. It was tough to think about 'cause it's hard to—what are the steps you can take to start a revolution if you're just like a kid. I ended up being pretty proud of the paper overall, some good ideas. It was good writing. It was interesting.

Interviewer: What was it like looking back over your old writing and uploading some of it for the study?

Interviewee: It was weird, especially when I had to upload—I think last year maybe I had to upload something from the first semester of freshman year maybe. Looking back at my old work stuff is, some of it's really good and some of it's really bad. I remember thinking at the time that this is great but I guess I've changed and grown and my writing style now is different than it was in the past because of my experiences. It's interesting.

Interviewer: Weird and interesting?

Interviewee: Yeah, weird and interesting, it's like going back through your elementary school in your yearbooks. You're looking at your friends and your signatures and everyone is writing "Have a great summer, hags" and it's just dumb [laughter].

Interviewer: Good, so looking back on your writing did make you think differently?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: About writing?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: How so?

Interviewee: I don't think it's good anymore but I was really proud of it at the time [laughter].

Interviewer: Why do you say it's not good now?

Interviewee: Because it's not organized well or it's just really boring. It's really formulaic. It follows that five-paragraph essay. I don't think that the topic was interesting anymore.

Interviewer: What do you think your instructors should know about teaching writing at the undergraduate level?

Interviewee: I guess early on spell out what your expectations are and encourage them to come to office hours. I think that my [English course] professor was really great in doing that. She wanted us to fail at the beginning so that we would come to her and then she would teach us. I think that was a great example of a professor.

Interviewer: Do you have advice for teachers other than your [English course]?

Interviewee: No [cross talk 29:36].

Interviewer: Do you have specific advice for writing and Communications or for International Studies?

Interviewee: Know your topic as a thesis, everything I've been saying [laughter].

Interviewer: Yeah, great, do you have any other comments you want to add?

Interviewee: No, I think we've covered everything.

Interviewer: Alright, great thank you.

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