

Interviewer: Alright. This is ***, and I'm here with *** and it is April the 28th. This month is flying by, isn't it?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: You graduate this weekend, right?

Interviewee: That's right, yeah.

Interviewer: Ohh. Are you so excited?

Interviewee: I am.

Interviewer: Yeah?

Interviewee: I'm, you know, bittersweet.

Interviewer: Yeah, it's a little sad, too, at the same time I guess. What is next for you after this?

Interviewee: Travelling this summer and then starting a job in [city] in August.

Interviewer: Oh, you're moving to [city].

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Well, that's exciting.

Interviewee: Yeah. I'm excited to be there.

Interviewer: Yeah. What kind of job are you gonna be doing?

Interviewee: It's at a hedge fund.

Interviewer: Oh, wow. Are you in the [Ross Business School]?

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Cool. That answered my question about your major, I guess.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Alright. Well, wonderful. Well, thank you so much for coming and chatting with me amidst all of the graduation preparations.

Interviewee: No problem.

[...]

Interviewer: What's gonna happen is we'll just have a little conversation. I have some questions about the writing that you've done here at [University of Michigan], so the writing classes you've taken and what you've learned in those classes. I have a couple of questions about the study archive that you've been uploading writing to for the past couple of years.

Interviewee: Okay.

[...]

Interviewer: Alright. My first question is a really broad general question, and it's just, how do you describe yourself as a writer?

Interviewee: As a writer. I'd say fairly concise, tend to take sort of an argumentative approach. Good at citing research. I'm trying to think what else. Yeah, that's about it.

Interviewer: Okay. How would you have described yourself as a writer when you came here to Michigan?

Interviewee: Definitely less focused. I think taking classes kind of helped me learn sort of how to structure thoughts better, and I don't know how much my writing skills have changed since freshman year, but that would be the biggest change.

Interviewer: Okay, cool. As you graduate, it sounds like you have some exciting things ahead of you: going to [city] and working at a hedge fund company. What are your goals for yourself as far as your writing is concerned?

Interviewee: I mean, at this point, most of the writing I'll do from here on out is gonna be emails, so I'd say following the proper conventions and not miscommunicating or upsetting someone over email.

Interviewer: That's a pretty good goal to have.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: As you think about the writing experiences that you've had here at [University of Michigan], and this is another kind of broad question, what do you think it means to write well? Or another way to think about this might be, what does good writing look like?

Interviewee: I think it's just a matter of how clearly you can express ideas, so I'd say good writing does that effectively. I guess, to some extent, it's a function of what those ideas are. If you're writing about an incoherent topic it's hard to write extremely well. I'd say within those parameters of you've got something to say and you need to explain it. Good writing is just doing that clearly.

Interviewer: Great. Which upper-level writing courses did you take?

Interviewee: Oh, geez, I took kind of a hodge-podge of non-Ross classes, so I don't know which would count as upper-level writing. This past semester I took an RC [Residential College] class that I think was also cross-listed as [Religions course].

Interviewer: Oh, how interesting.

Interviewee: I haven't taken any straight-up English or Lit [Literature] classes. I [German course] that I think met some of those, and everything in-between has been kind of like that, just sort of all my classes.

Interviewer: Yeah. Did you feel like you had any classes that were particularly writing-intensive, where you did a lot of writing in any given class?

Interviewee: The religion class I took this semester was—I guess it was more reading intensive, but each day the assignment would be a worksheet about what you had just read, and sometimes it would be pretty lengthy cuz if one day we were talking about Nietzsche or something, you would have to read a fairly short book, but write something about each part of it and that would get pretty lengthy.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. Do you feel like those classes, where you had to write a lot for the class, had any effect on you as a writer or your writing practices?

Interviewee: Mm. I think it had more impact on me as a reader—

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: - because when you have to summarize what you're reading about and explain it, it forces you to comprehend what you're reading. I don't know how much it made me better as a writer. I guess, in the sense of writing descriptively, I don't do that as much cuz most of the time you write an essay and you're trying to make a point.

Interviewer: Sure.

Interviewee: I guess it might have made me better at that.

Interviewer: Okay. It sounds like the writing that you've done here at college has really affected the way that you approach a text as a reader. Can you talk to me more about how you think about those writing assignments that help you read differently?

Interviewer: Yeah. I think, right now, there's some things that I have to read over the summer for my job, and as I read them, I read them more like a textbook than I would otherwise—

Interviewer: Interesting.

Interviewee: - so like highlighting and taking notes and stuff. Definitely habits I picked up from classes.

Interviewer: Yeah. You wouldn't have done it that way before.

Interviewee: Right.

Interviewer: Yeah. That makes sense to me. Did you take [English course] or any other kinds of writing courses?

Interviewee: No. I placed out of some of that when I came here. I think that included some of the English cuz I took some AP [Advanced Placement] classes in high school.

Interviewer: You didn't take our first-year writing class at all? Great Books or ...

Interviewee: Oh, yeah, I took Great Books.

Interviewer: Okay. Yeah, Great Books counts as the first year writing. Okay. How did that class, that Great Books class, do you think that affected the way that you write at all or ...

Interviewee: I don't know. That class was so early-on, that it's hard to say.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. Hard to remember.

Interviewee: I was probably still figuring things out at that point.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: Yeah. I just remember having to read a lot of long Odyssey chapter.

Interviewer: Yeah. [Laughter]

Interviewee: I didn't like the class that much.

Interviewer: Yeah. It sounds like a rough class to me. You said you probably don't remember these things, but do you remember what you had to write in that class? Did you write long papers or responses to the reading or ...

Interviewee: I don't think any of the papers were super long, but they were usually about the reading or about some concept we discussed.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. It's hard reading.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah. How confident do you feel about writing in the [Ross Business School]? You mentioned you have to write a lot of emails and personal communication at a business professional level. How confident do you feel about your abilities to do that?

Interviewee: I feel pretty confident. The biggest concern I have is just knowing all the conventions for how to address someone in an email. In my experience, people don't really care about that. It's just nice to not have to worry about it. I had to take some classes in Ross that were focused on business communication. I never did that well in them, just because they were really tedious and annoying.

Most of the class would be you'd write a cover letter draft and they edited it in class, but if you're not actually applying for that job, it's hard to write a good cover letter, especially if you don't really care about it.

Interviewer: It's kind of hard to write a cover letter that's not for a job you're actually—

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: - right? It's kind of—when you it decontextualize it like that, I imagine that would be really tricky.

Interviewee: Yeah. We did all that, but I had a hard time taking those classes seriously, just cuz they met once a week, and it was 1½ credits, so it always kind of an afterthought.

Interviewer: Yeah. It maybe didn't feel as important to you.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah. That makes sense to me. Have you used the skills or strategies that you've learned in those classes in any of your other courses? In the [Business

Communication Class] or in the other classes you've had where you've done a lot of writing.

Interviewee: Yeah, I think so. In some of those non-business classes I've definitely used the skills. From those business classes specifically, I've later on had to write cover letters and professional emails and stuff. I don't know how much I struck to the script on that. I think I just figured it out from scratch at those times. It may have helped.

Interviewer: That's fair enough. As you think back over the last two years, what experiences that you've had in and out of the classroom, so this may also be things that happened outside of school or classes, have had an effect on your writing?

Interviewee: I think the biggest influences on my writing were pretty early-on. I'd say, if I think about it, someone or something that changed the way I write. The only thing I can really think of is a high school teacher I had who was just really good on avoiding passive voice and structuring an essay around an argument. I see college and most of the things that's happened is just doing that more effectively, so whether—

Interviewer: Sort of adding onto what you did in high school?

Interviewee: Yeah. The biggest change, I guess, would be doing that in a paper that cites a lot of research. I never had to write a super-long research paper in high school. I had to learn that skill of how to integrate someone else's thoughts into your own paper.

Interviewer: Since high school then, how has your or has your—I guess the first question is, has your writing process changed from high school to college?

Interviewee: Yeah. I don't really remember too much about what my process was in high school. Now there's probably a lot more information-gathering, whereas, in high school it would probably just be about one book or something.

Interviewer: Sure.

Interviewee: I'd say I spend most of the time or, not most, maybe half the time writing a paper just gathering quotes and cites. I don't make a formal outline, but I put it all in a row and get a general sense of how the paper's going to look. The paper itself I write slowly. I don't do too many edits.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm, okay. That makes sense to me. If I use the term "reflective writing", what does that mean to you?

Interviewee: I'd say, I guess writing that shows some degree of self-awareness or that is, I guess, maybe about a topic, reflecting on a topic. I'm not really sure.

Interviewer: Okay. Do you use reflective writing in your own process or anything?

Interviewee: I don't know. Not that often. Usually, when I write, it's not about me personally or even my attitude on an issue. It's more just explaining something or say that something is a certain way.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. What have your recent experiences been of working with other writers in your courses or maybe in other contexts? I'm thinking here about group or collaborative projects, peer workshopping or peer editing, maybe outside of school, extra-curricular kinds of activities where you get together with other people and write or compose something.

Interviewee: Most of the group work I've had for school is usually oriented around a presentation. Sometimes it will be a paper that goes with that. I think that was true for one class in the fall in the Business School. More often than not I found it frustrating cuz people make basic writing mistakes, and if you work together you usually have to edit for them cuz you're not just going to ignore stuff.

Interviewer: It's more work for you that way.

Interviewee: Yeah. I'd say more work. In other contexts, I guess, I was on the [University of Michigan club] for four years here.

Interviewer: Oh, wow.

Interviewee: Even though that's like speaking, a lot of it, I'd say about half of what you say in a speech is based on citing or quoting research that you did earlier, so there's a lot of writing that goes into that. I find that's a lot easier to collaborate with people on cuz there's I guess more of a shared vocabulary and set of conventions.

Interviewer: Yeah. And a shared knowledge, I would imagine.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's really interesting. Did you guys get together and plan out, do the research together, or compose the responses together before you went into the [meeting], or ...

Interviewee: We'd talk about it a lot before. We had our own areas of responsibility [...]

Interviewer: I see, yeah. It was based on your expertise or interests or—

Interviewee: Yeah, and also just like—

Interviewer: - I'll just take this and be responsible for this.

Interviewee: Yeah, kind of. Some of it's a reaction to, oh, this other team that we compete against a lot are our rival, [...] so I'm gonna research this, too, so we're not behind it.

Interviewer: I see. You're responding to what you know they're going to be taking about.

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: That makes a lot of sense to me. How much writing then did you do for the [University of Michigan club]? Did you guys meet every week or—I guess I'm just curious about how much time would go into something like that.

Interviewee: A lot. We didn't necessarily meet every week, especially later on in college. We knew what we were up to and we might talk on Gmail [free Web-based e-mail service] or something. We would only meet if we wanted to run through a practice [...] or talk about a specific thing in detail. For the most part we'd just exchange a lot of emails. The writing itself was pretty vast. I'd say more than ten hours a week. Sometimes up to like 40.

[...]

Interviewer: Wow. It's like ten hours a week of writing and researching year-round.

Interviewee: Yeah. Ten hours is definitely at the baseline. I'd say, in advance of something like a big national tournament, it would be closer to 30 or 40.

Interviewer: Wow. That's a lot of writing—

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: - that you're doing then.

Interviewee: Yeah. It's all in its own style because people have their own jargon, and you're also talking really fast, so a lot of the things that you associate with writing drop out of the picture. It does force you to just be writing a lot.

Interviewer: Do you feel like—and this could go in either direction. You have this extra-curricular activity that you're doing, and there's a lot of research and writing that you're doing in that. Do you feel like that skill either translated into your classes, or what you did in your classes translated into the work you did with the [University of Michigan club], or both? Does that make sense?

Interviewee: Yeah. I'd say more the first, that it translated into skills in classes. Partly that's just because of what I took more seriously. I was more interested in that than classes, for the most part.

Interviewer: Sure. It sounds interesting.

Interviewee: It seemed harder to me than classes, so I think I got more out of that that helped me in classes than vice-versa.

Interviewer: You were taking what you were—the skills you were learning and putting them into your writing in class?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: That makes sense to me. That's really interesting.

Interviewee: Yeah. I did this in high school, too, so it was basically—

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: - eight years of that.

Interviewer: You had already started learning those research skills way back in high school.

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Yeah. Really interesting.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah, wow, cool. Okay. That's interesting. Fascinating. Now that you're about to graduate, what kind of advice would you give college students about writing? If you were going to go back to your high school in [city] and say, "Here's what you need to know about writing in college," what would you say to them?

Interviewee: I'd say, "Be concise." I think the most common mistake people make is trying to write pretty sentences or use really descriptive words, and they end up just taking up a lot of space and not getting the idea across.

Interviewer: Hmm. Do you have any experiences with the new media writing, so writing for blogs or websites or creating some kind of electronic portfolio?

Interviewee: I mean, pretty much none.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: I have a Twitter account, and I basically just interact with friends on it. At no point do I see it as a portfolio or managing anything. It's just random stuff I think of and stuff I say to friends.

Interviewer: Sort of social media kind of thing.

Interviewee: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: That makes sense to me. No digital portfolios or e-Portfolios or some people call them —wait, I have it written down, MPortfolios.

Interviewee: I did a summer program, and I was supposed to make an MPortfolio for that I think about experiences in a class I was taking. I think I did the first two posts that I had to do and then stopped, just cuz it was a pain.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. That wasn't something that you were particularly invested in or found interesting or anything like that.

Interviewee: No, I was just a hassle. *[Laughter]*

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. Did you keep a blog when you were over in [country], like just for family or anything?

Interviewee: No.

Interviewer: Okay. My next question is about the archive that you've been putting your writing into. The first question is just, how has that process been going? Is it working okay? Does it make sense to you? Any problems getting pieces in there?

Interviewee: When I uploaded something this past week, I had one technical issue with it where—you name your own title, and that title said something something, winter. In the actual options, when you're uploading it, it didn't have a winter.

Interviewer: Yeah. Somebody else told me about that, too. I'll make sure that they're aware of that—

Interviewee: Okay.

Interviewer: - and that they find it correctly.

Interviewee: Yeah. Aside from that, it is really easy to use and—

Interviewer: Great.

Interviewee: - once I uploaded something, I didn't really give it a second thought.

Interviewer: Good, good-good-good. How did you choose the pieces that you put in that archive?

Interviewee: It was mainly just what classes I had that semester where I was writing something.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: Usually that would be a non-business class. I think there's some business class stuff in it, but that was just what I was studying. Most of my business classes were finance, so there's wasn't a ton of writing.

Interviewer: Okay, okay. Did you ever go back and look over your old writing before you posted it? Were you posting pieces that you had written previously?

Interviewee: Usually it would be something like a paper for the end of the semester or a big assignment. It was recent enough that I didn't go back and think about it.

Interviewer: Yeah. Did the process of uploading things into the archive make you think about your writing differently in any way?

Interviewee: Not really.

Interviewer: Okay. Okay. My last question is, what do you think that instructors should know about teaching writing at the undergraduate level?

Interviewee: I guess they should be aware of how much actual writing-related teaching the student had in high school cuz I think people start at very different points in college and some of them—for instance, I had a really good high school teacher in a class that was just about writing. Some people may not have had that and might have to learn some of those things later. I think, especially at the first-year level, there's got to be a lot of sensitivity to where students are at.

Interviewer: That makes a lot of sense to me. Do you have any other comments or questions or things you thought we might talk about, but we didn't, things you wanted to say?

Interviewee: That's about all I got.

Interviewer: Okay. Thank you so much for chatting with me.

Interviewee: Good luck.

[...]

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