

Interviewer: Junior. Thinking back a couple of years to when you first came to the University of Michigan, how would you describe yourself as a writer in that first semester, first year?

Interviewee: I took the Michigan English 125 or 124, whatever they have you take. I came in with a lot of confidence because coming out of high school, I wrote for a newspaper and I did kind of a sports journalism thing. I was also told, "[Student], you're a good writer. Keep pursuing writing," or "keep working hard." My mom's a teacher so I just kind of grew up around words and I really liked words. I came into Michigan thinking, "Oh, I got this. I just need to do what I've been doing and be able to grow with whatever help I can get." But I had no idea what I was doing.

I came in and my class was—my first English class, I guess, was focused around literature of New York. We read a lot and we did a lot of reflective writing, which was new to me, which I really liked at the time. But I needed to break down writing into simpler parts when I first came in. I needed to kind of go back to the nuts and bolts, I guess, because I think I got to a point before I came to Michigan where I was told I was good at writing or, "[Student], you need to keep writing." I got real fluffy and I got real—it just wasn't as effective.

It wasn't saying what I wanted to say, but I was guided. I was told in high school that this is good, but it wasn't good. I don't think it was good. Looking back, I don't think it was good at all. I think that first year, there was lots of road bumps, and I didn't—my confidence was knocked a little bit, but in a good way. I needed to go back to the core of what writing was going to be for me.

Interviewer: That's interesting. What would you attribute—what factors would you attribute, I guess, for your growth as a writer, development in the couple of years that have passed?

Interviewee: I think that I would say I think the faculty at Michigan call you out on things, and they say, "What are you trying to say?" or "What does this mean? This doesn't mean anything to me. You have to make this mean something to me. You know what you're talking about but ..." I think the faculty and the classes I've taken, whether it be in the English Department—I took a couple of English classes my freshman year or I took a bunch of Sweetland classes or my Comm class. I think they push you to be more definitive in what you're writing. I think that was a big thing.

I also think that just listening to people smarter than you is a big thing. I think I learned to take a step back and listen to what other people are writing and read what they are writing and realize that that was good writing in its own way. I could learn from that, I guess. I think that, depending on where you come from, you—yeah, I came from a really small school. There wasn't a lot of cultural things around me to learn from and to listen to and to be able to grow from. I think that was a huge factor for me.