

*Interviewer:* All right, this is \*\*\* here with \*\*\*. Last name \*\*\*.

*Interviewee:* Yeah.

*Interviewer:* It is April 25, Friday, 2014. The winter 2014 semester. We're here for the exit interview for the Sweetland Center for Writing Development study. My first question for you, \*\*\*, is how do you describe yourself as a writer?

*Interviewee:* I think I'm pretty above average. I hope I am, since I'm planning on being a writer in my career [laughter]. I'd like to think I'm pretty good. I think I have a strong voice and—keep it succinct [laughter].

*Interviewer:* Sure. Let's see, so you said you want to be a writer for your career. What career is that?

*Interviewee:* I'm planning on being a journalist.

*Interviewer:* Oh, wow.

*Interviewee:* That's my goal [laughter].

*Interviewer:* Great.

*Interviewee:* We'll see how it turns out for me [laughter].

*Interviewer:* Uh-huh. How long have you been writing? Or tell me about your story of how you came to want to be a journalist?

*Interviewee:* I've always loved writing. I used to produce my own magazine when I was a kid, just for fun. Yeah, and more professionally, I started about two years ago just freelance writing, internships, things like that.

*Interviewer:* Sure.

*Interviewee:* Now I'm looking for a job [laughter]

*Interviewer:* Yeah. How would you describe yourself as a writer when you began here at Michigan versus now? How have your experiences here changed or grown your sense of yourself as a writer or your writing itself?

*Interviewee:* I mean, I think I was pretty good when I first came in. Obviously not perfect. I definitely think I fine-tuned a lot of things. A lot of small things like word choice or syntax. Small things. I mean, I never had any major problems with organization. Yeah, I think definitely after four years, definitely took it to the next level.

*Interviewer:* Mm-hmm. Great. Anything else about how your writing has changed or?

*Interviewee:* I think I'm probably more articulate. Less wordy, which is always really important. Yeah, I think that's probably the [*cross talk 02:08*].

*Interviewer:* Great. To what would you attribute this growth?

*Interviewee:* I think probably the biggest thing that helped me, actually, was my upper level writing class. I, in particular, had this amazing teacher who took the upper level writing requirements super seriously. He would make videos for us of him reading our paper to us. After every ten minutes, he'd be like, "Okay, you used that word too much. You need to change this."

*Interviewer:* Whoa.

*Interviewee:* Which, it was super intense. I mean, that's what you need at this level. That was awesome.

*Interviewer:* What class was that?

*Interviewee:* It was actually Polish Literature.

*Interviewer:* Huh.

*Interviewee:* I really just took it cuz he sounded like a good teacher and I needed upper level writing. How's that [*laughter*]?

*Interviewer:* Interesting. Is that in the English department, or?

*Interviewee:* I know it's definitely in the Polish department, and I think it's cross-listed in English as well.

*Interviewer:* Got it. I did not know we had a Polish department.

*Interviewee:* Yeah. We do [*laughter*].

*Interviewer:* As you graduate, what are your goals for yourself as a writer?

*Interviewee:* Pursue my writing career. In particular, definitely want to be on a track—eventually be a columnist for a magazine or for a website is my goal [*laughter*].

*Interviewer:* Mm-hmm. Great. Yeah. Thinking across your writing experiences at UM [University of Michigan], what do you think it means to write well?

*Interviewee:* Wow, that's a really hard question. Well, you have to be really well organized. You have to have a plan of attack. You have to say, "I am going to argue XYZ." Then you have to argue it. Support your arguments. Really clear. Really concise. Yeah. All of those things.

*Interviewer:* Mm-hmm. Anything else about what you think it means to write well?

*Interviewee:* You have to have your own specific voice, I would say. Not just be regurgitating what you hear other people say [*laughter*].

*Interviewer:* Sure. Sure.

*Interviewee:* You wanna be a great writer. If you're just okay, then I guess that's fine.

*Interviewer:* How would you describe your voice?

*Interviewee:* I mean, it depends on which circumstance. I definitely use a different writing voice when I'm writing for online than I'm writing an academic paper. I mean, online I've been things from witty to sometimes a little snarky. I admit it. To more fun and upbeat. I mean, I recently completed an internship at—I don't know if you've heard of this magazine. [*Title of magazine*]? [...].

*Interviewer:* Mm-hmm. Sure. Great. What other upper level writing courses have you taken? You mentioned the Polish literature courses. What else have you taken?

*Interviewee:* I'm trying to think if I took an upper level writing in Poli-Sci [Political Science]. I don't know if anything that was officially called upper level writing, to be honest. I feel like I did, but I can't remember it now, sorry [*laughter*]. That's a terrible answer.

*Interviewer:* You don't remember at all if you took any courses in the English department for writing?

*Interviewee:* For upper level writing?

*Interviewer:* Yeah.

*Interviewee:* Oh, no. I didn't take any English classes. I only took freshman English.

*Interviewer:* Got it. Okay. Got it. For your concentration, did you take any other upper level writing courses?

*Interviewee:* I know I started out in one, and then I switched out, to be honest. I don't think I was taking that whole writing requirement very seriously [*laughter*].

*Interviewer:* Okay. I see.

*Interviewee:* That worked out well for me. I didn't. I don't think so. I could check my schedule and email you later if you want [*laughter*].

*Interviewer:* That's okay. What other writing courses have you taken?

*Interviewee:* At Michigan?

*Interviewer:* Yeah.

*Interviewee:* I mean, I had to a lot of writing for some of my regular classes, even if they weren't writing-specific.

*Interviewer:* Even specific writing courses, like your freshman writing course?

*Interviewee:* Oh, yeah. I took [English course].

*Interviewer:* Okay. How did that affect your writing?

*Interviewee:* I really hated that class. I'm not gonna lie to you. How did it affect my writing?

*Interviewer:* Mm-hmm.

*Interviewee:* He gave me a new way of writing a thesis. That was good. That was nice.

*Interviewer:* What was the new way?

*Interviewee:* I mean, it was new to me. He would say for literature, which—I mean, I never write about anymore, but you could say—trying to think how to word it. I'm much better at writing than speaking. You could say, "Although most people think that the rose in this story represents this, if you look at this theme or this pattern, then it actually means this."

*Interviewer:* Oh, I see. I see.

*Interviewee:* Yeah.

*Interviewer:* Okay.

*Interviewee:* I never word my thesis like that. That was interesting.

*Interviewer:* Okay. Why didn't you like the course?

*Interviewee:* Oh. I don't think it was good chemistry with the teacher. Other people like him. I don't think he was a bad teacher. Just sometimes not a good match up.

*Interviewer:* Sure. Makes sense. Let's see. Could you talk more about—even just the Polish literature course and how that affected your writing? What did you learn from that very thorough and rigorous critique that your professor was giving you?

*Interviewee:* Yeah, I think it was just helpful because he was just so specific. If I was using a word too much, he'd be like, "Okay, you've already used this word four times. By this point, you have to change it." Which at this point—like I said, I don't have trouble with my organization, with my structure of an essay. That's not an issue. When other people grade my pieces—I don't know. They don't go after small things. To hear him say it was really helpful, and to hear what I'm doing well was helpful. Yeah, it was good.

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

*Interviewee:* I think I feel pretty confident. Certainly more confident than when I came in, I would say.

*Interviewer:* Mm-hmm. Sure. What's led to that change?

*Interviewee:* Probably the first Poli-Sci class I took, which was [Political Science course]. I had never written in the poli-sci field ever before, because we don't have that in high school [*laughter*]. I had no idea what to do. My GSI really pointed out to me that this is not how you write in political science [*laughter*]. This is how you write in English and you gotta change it up. Yeah. After that, I just worked on and developed it. I've had another teacher who also really gave me good criticism.

*Interviewer:* Your major is Poli-Sci?

*Interviewee:* Yes.

*Interviewer:* Okay, and so you're hoping to go into journalism?

*Interviewee:* Not about politics.

*Interviewer:* Not about politics?

*Interviewee:* No. Not at all. Poli-Sci has nothing to with my life after I graduate [laughter].

*Interviewer:* Okay. What does writing in poli-sci demand that's different that you were talking about from writing in English?

*Interviewee:* Poli-sci you have to be really removed, I would say, in general. I mean, cuz in English you can—I don't wanna say flowery writing, but you can be really descriptive, and poli-sci—none of that. You get right to the point. You get to the argument. You just say it. It's actually not too different from science writing, cuz it's really pretty—I would say scientific. Pretty just exact and precise. Yeah, I think that's different.

*Interviewer:* Interesting. Okay. How often have you used skills or strategies learned in one of the writing classes you've taken in your other classes?

*Interviewee:* Yeah, I'd say fairly often. I mean, poli-sci is pretty demanding writing-wise. I have to write a lot of papers. Yeah, I think it's—yeah. Come in handy.

*Interviewer:* Specifically, what skills have transferred over to those other classes?

*Interviewee:* I think word usage. That was a big one for me. Sometimes I get repetitive with my word choice. That was a big change. Which I know that sounds small, but it really does make a difference. That one. I did use a thesis from freshman year once in a poli-sci class. That was super exciting. I was like, "Oh. Get to use it." That's that [laughter].

*Interviewer:* How did you fit that into a poli-sci format?

*Interviewee:* Was it for poli-sci? I feel like it must have been. Must have been for a research paper. I can't remember now, but I remember thinking that I was using it.

*Interviewer:* Okay. Got it. All right. Let's see. Thinking back over the last two year, what experiences in and out of classroom have had the greatest effect on your writing? Or have had any effect at all on your writing?

*Interviewee:* I mean, I think just the combined of writing a ton for my major, writing a ton for these outside sources like my other jobs and stuff, think just writing all the time gets you into such a good habit. It just makes you a better writer. The more you write, the better you are. Yeah.

*Interviewer:* Better—you mean more of the word choice and voice, or I guess—

*Interviewee:* Yeah, and it just flows out of you easier and you don't have to think so hard about what you want to say. You can just—

*Interviewer:* I see.

*Interviewee:* Yeah.

*Interviewer:* Faster.

*Interviewee:* Yeah.

*Interviewer:* Okay. Got it. How has your writing process changed as a result of these experiences?

*Interviewee:* I'd say academically, it's changed more. My outlines have gotten way more intense. Every year it just gets really out of control. I just wrote a 20-page paper and my outline was 15 pages.

*Interviewer:* Wow.

*Interviewee:* Handwritten, I mean. Because the more intense I work on my outline, the easier the paper is, cuz all right there. Now in my outline, I have full sentences, so I'll have—it just—it's so easy now [*laughter*]. Yeah, I think my outlines just continue more heavy on that process.

*Interviewer:* Great. If I used the term reflective writing, what does that mean to you?

*Interviewee:* Oh. I never really did that in academic sense. I guess it's personal. More personal writing. You use I, and you're talking about yourself. Or I guess you're reflecting back on your writing. I don't really know [*laughter*]. I don't know. I've never really done that [*laughter*].

*Interviewer:* Taking both of those definitions that you proposed, how have you done that recently in your own writing process, whether assigned or voluntary? Either writing about yourself or writing about writing?

*Interviewee:* I mean, I reread everything a lot. Edit a little bit. I don't know [*laughter*]. I'm not a very reflective writer, to be honest. Cuz, I don't know. To be honest, I do—this is gonna sound weird, but I do 90 percent of my thinking before I even write it. Sometimes I'll write it completely in my head, so that by the time I've written it, it's not like I need to go back and change a bunch of stuff. It's already been written. It's already been revised in my head. The reflective process afterwards doesn't really come into play. Yeah.

*Interviewer:* Interesting.

*Interviewee:* I don't know if that makes sense or not [laughter].

*Interviewer:* Yeah, I understand that. Yeah.

*Interviewee:* Yeah. I'll have a whole paragraph, or I'll have a whole article written in my head before I put it down on paper. I don't like just staring at the computer. That's terrible. Yeah.

*Interviewer:* How do you do that? How do you write in your head?

*Interviewee:* I don't know how to explain it [laughter]. It's like I'm memorizing a script or something. I just plan it all out, and then it's just there. I don't know. It's bizarre, I guess [laughter]. Yeah, that's how I wrote half my cover letters. I'm not gonna lie [laughter].

*Interviewer:* Interesting. What have your experiences been of working with other writers in your courses or in other contexts?

*Interviewee:* To be honest, working with other writers—I mean, some of my friends have asked me to help them with their papers and help them with their essays, and they're not good [laughter]. Not like—

*Interviewer:* Could you say that louder for the recorder?

*Interviewee:* I'm sorry. They're not good [laughter]. They're not good writers, particularly their organization is really bad, which I feel like is a fundamental skill that you should've learned in high school. I don't know how they got past high school without this. They're really smart people. They're really, really bright, smart people with great, interesting thoughts. They're just organizing it terribly. I'm like, "How did you get to this point? No one has pointed this out to you." It's really sad [laughter]. It's really sad. God, I sound condescending [laughter]. I'm sorry. I don't mean to sound condescending. They're really great people.

*Interviewer:* Uh-huh. Has workshopping—or not workshopping, but editing your friends' essays taught you anything other than just being able to put—notice about poor organization—have you learned anything about—

*Interviewee:* I mean, I guess I'm probably more conscious about my own writing. I mean, it's definitely—my friend took a class that I had taken previously and I helped her with a paper that I already had gone through. It was good that I was able to use what I had learned then to work with her and then perfect it. Yeah, I think it probably helped me a little bit.

*Interviewer:* How 'bout in the context of the classroom? Have you done any peer review or workshopping?



*Interviewee:* Not recently. I haven't done that since junior year. Sophomore year. I mean, I don't know. I haven't done it all this year, for sure.

*Interviewer:* Okay, so even back in junior or senior year—or I'm sorry. Junior or sophomore year. What was that like?

*Interviewee:* I don't know. To be honest, half the time when people come in with drafts, myself included, no one really took it seriously cuz no one was grading it. That wasn't helpful. Or other times, people would try to be too nice. They don't want to be harsh, so that's not really helpful. I don't know. I haven't really found peer review to be helpful. Yeah.

*Interviewer:* Okay. Can you talk about specific—was that true of every class, or were some classes slightly more helpful than others? Or were some—

*Interviewee:* I would say probably the only class where peer review was taken seriously was my freshman [English course]. People really took that seriously. People came in with serious writing drafts. People gave good comments. For that class, we did it so every week or every paper—everyone in the class would edit your paper once in the class. Then you had 18 edits, so between all those 18 edits, you actually did have some good suggestions.

*Interviewer:* Okay. Got it. 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 would say they should really get themselves organized and situated before they even start writing. Really make an outline. Already have what example—if you're an English major, have examples from the text you're already going to use. Or have examples from whatever. Know what you're saying before you—just don't start writing. I do know a lot of people who would just be like, "I'm just gonna start. Going along. See what happens." It just makes it so much easier, and it's organized better. Yeah. Works out better.

*Interviewer:* Okay. That's fair. Have you had any experiences with new media writing, such as writing for blogs or websites, making an electronic portfolio, an mPortfolio, or digital portfolio?

*Interviewee:* I've never made a digital portfolio, but most of my work—most of my outside UM work is blogging online.

*Interviewer:* Okay.

*Interviewee:* For websites.

*Interviewer:* Interesting. Okay. What effect has that blogging had on you?

*Interviewee:* I guess it's increased my confidence as a writer. I mean, it's always nice to see people responding positively to your work. Especially, it's so instantaneous. People comment right away or like it on facebook. I don't know, whatever. Yeah, definitely. It gives me an opportunity to take chances. I know one of the websites that I write for—when I first started, it was a startup website. I knew no one was reading it. I could try out different writing styles. Try out different techniques. Yeah. It was good.

*Interviewer:* Great. Okay. How have those experiences affected your sense of your writing?

*Interviewee:* I don't really know what that means [*laughter*].

*Interviewer:* Sorry. Maybe your perception of your—maybe your writing identity?

*Interviewee:* I don't know. I mean, I'm pretty confident about my writing identity. I've always been pretty confident.

*Interviewer:* Yeah. Yeah.

*Interviewee:* I guess it increased. Yeah.

*Interviewer:* I think you talked about it with—taking a risk—maybe the question was—

*Interviewee:* Okay.

*Interviewer:* Have you ever done an electronic portfolio at all?

*Interviewee:* No.

*Interviewer:* Okay. Now, lately you have been uploading pieces of writing to the study archive on ctools. How has that process been going for you?

*Interviewee:* It was fine. I mean, I chose a thing I wrote once [*laughter*]. The semester that I uploaded it [*laughter*].

*Interviewer:* Mm-hmm. Why did you choose the pieces that you did choose to upload?

*Interviewee:* Oh, well this semester it was the only paper I wrote, so that was my only choice.

*Interviewer:* Okay. Got it.

*Interviewee:* Last semester it was the paper I most enjoyed writing. It was for my bio class, cuz I'm a bio minor. I felt really good about it. The other ones—I just uploaded ones that I—I don't know. I just at that time was like, "Oh, I remember I need to upload something." I picked something.

*Interviewer:* Sure. How did you pick the other ones that you just picked?

*Interviewee:* I don't know.

*Interviewer:* Was it randomly selected, or?

*Interviewee:* I don't know. Whichever popped in my head. I mean, I guess I probably chose something that I thought was—I had put some effort into. Wanna present myself in some good light [*laughter*].

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

*Interviewee:* I mean, most of the time I did it as it was happening each semester. It wasn't so reflective. I guess I looked up my freshman one a couple years later. I guess yeah, I definitely improved, I would say. I mean, I didn't spend a lot of time rereading it, but yeah.

*Interviewer:* How so did you think it improved?

*Interviewee:* I just sound more—not scholarly, that's not—I don't want to use scholarly, but I sound—just better [*laughter*]. Sorry, that's a terrible word. Yeah. I don't know. I just sound like I know what I want to say. I know how I want to say it, and I'm arguing better. More persuasively.

*Interviewer:* Okay. What specifically were the pieces that you uploaded?

*Interviewee:* All of them?

*Interviewer:* Yeah. We can pull it up if you forgot.

*Interviewee:* Okay. I think I remember. This semester I did the 20 page paper from my poli-sci class about political parties. That was the only one I wrote. Last semester I uploaded my bio research paper about plant-animal interactions, specifically about mutualism, which I really liked that paper [*laughter*]. Before that, I uploaded my classroom Polish literature. The upper level writing about just one of the books we had read, which I didn't read but I wrote a paper on it. Before that I uploaded a paper from my poli-sci class about civil rights throughout

history or something. Civil rights court cases. Then I just uploaded my freshman one. I think that's when I started. Yeah.

*Interviewer:* Wow. Those are really different genres.

*Interviewee:* [Laughter]

*Interviewer:* Did you notice anything as you were looking at those different pieces about your writing, or how it's different or similar or?

*Interviewee:* How it's different across the different genres?

*Interviewer:* Sure.

*Interviewee:* [Laughter] I don't really know what you're asking me.

*Interviewer:* I mean, I'm just trying to probe for asking you more about your own thoughts as you were looking at your old pieces.

*Interviewee:* I don't know. To be honest, I uploaded them as they happened. It wasn't like I just uploaded all of them yesterday. I uploaded them in the moment.

*Interviewer:* Yeah, yeah, yeah. I see.

*Interviewee:* It wasn't very reflective. I'm sorry.

*Interviewer:* Okay. That's fair. Last question is what do you think instructors should know about teaching writing at the undergraduate level?

*Interviewee:* About teaching writing. Well, I mean I guess it would depend if they were a freshman teacher or if they were—

*Interviewer:* Okay.

*Interviewee:* You want me to go with that? If they were a freshman teacher?

*Interviewer:* No. I mean, you could start with that and then clarify how maybe a different—an upper division writing course would be run differently, if you want.

*Interviewee:* They should know about teaching writing.

*Interviewer:* Teaching writing? If you were to give advice to instructors about this is what I find most useful in a writing course, what would she say?

*Interviewee:* Oh. I'm sorry. I'm blanking. What would she say that would be most helpful?

*Interviewer:* What would you say?

*Interviewee:* Oh, what would I say?

*Interviewer:* Yeah. If you were to give advice to *[laughter]*—

*Interviewee:* *[Laughter]* I'm sorry. I understand the question. I'm giving advice to a teacher so that she can teach other students. The future students.

*Interviewer:* Exactly. Yeah.

*Interviewee:* Okay. I would tell her that she should definitely be aware that not everybody got the same writing education in high school, even though we were all accepted. I mean, obviously everyone had different teachers in high school and different experiences. That she should really be—I don't know. After she gets the first set of papers—I'm assuming that there are gonna be multiple papers in this class. If she's seeing that people are struggling over word choice, if people are struggling over structure, then she should address that. I've had teachers, not writing teachers, but just teachers in general where they'll be like, "Oh, well 50 percent of the class got this, so I'm not gonna go over it." That's ridiculous. Only 50 percent of the class got it. That's a terrible percentage. Definitely freshman—you need to go back to the basics even still. Even though you're 18. It never hurts to really drill it in. Yeah.

*Interviewer:* All right.

*Interviewee:* Sorry.

*Interviewer:* No, that's fair. That's fair. Anything else about what advice you would give to instructors of writing?

*Interviewee:* Take it seriously. Even if you're not going into a writing field. Even writing emails. Writing professional emails. It's really important skill. Even for engineers, I'm sure that they need writing a cover letter, writing a resume. Make sure—I don't know. I don't know. Yeah.

*Interviewer:* That's great. All right. Any other comments about your experiences here as a writer?

*Interviewee:* No *[laughter]*.

*Interviewer:* All right, thanks \*\*\*.

*Interviewee:* We're good?

*[End of Audio]*