Interviewer: This is *** being interviewed by ***, and it is May 30th 2013. Okay, so how would you describe yourself as a writer?

Interviewee: Lazy. I'm a procrastinator, but also I don't know, somewhat of a perfectionist also. Those two don't mix.

Interviewer: Can you talk a little bit about why you're a perfectionist.

Interviewee: Well, it's just like you always want something to be good before you send it out, and I always like to tinker until the last minute. There's rarely been an occasion where I'll turn something in that wasn't right up against a deadline just because you want to be working on it as long as you can. I usually just don't give myself enough time to get it to be where I want it.

Interviewer: Okay, so how would you describe yourself as a writer when you began at the University of Michigan?

Interviewee: More or less the same. I'm smarter about what I can and can't do, and I know—I'm better at gauging my ability to take on a writing assignment and know how long it probably is gonna take me, in terms of like conception and actually writing it out. I'm also a lot more organized. I actually keep records of what I'm doing now, whereas before, it was just kind of like, oh, I'll find that quote later, or I'll look that thing up again. I'm a little more organized now.

Interviewer: Okay, great. Why do you think you've changed in that way—become more organized?

Interviewee: You just kind of have to, especially just the stuff that I've done, being a peer tutor, being a writing minor, doing a thesis, you just have to learn how to better organize yourself. Otherwise, like there were times when I was writing my thesis where things would just get out of control because I hadn't organized or written down like where certain things were that I needed to be finding. I'd have a quote that I'd pulled, but I couldn't remember why I was pulling it or where it was supposed to go. It was just like—I don't know, it was a matter of necessity for me.

Interviewer: Okay. Then as you've just graduated, what are your goals for yourself as a writer now?

Interviewee: I would like to be better about starting early and setting a timeline for myself and sticking to that timeline rather than pushing everything to as late as humanly possible. I'm going to grad school. That's just going to be a very—I think a necessary skill for me, like [inaudible 00:02:31] has been a pretty rough adjustment period for myself just because I have been so lax in my good habits that I'm gonna need to do a lot of catch-up, and I think that's one way I can start managing stress early.

Interviewer: Any other goals for yourself as a writer, besides time management?

Interviewee: Time management, just I don't know, you always want to be better, but like that always means something different I think any time you sit down. I'd like to—I don't know, it'd be cool to get published at some point, but like again, getting is like okay, there's a lot of improvement that needs to go there. I think the time thing will really help me because that'll give me time to work on other issues as they crop up that I might just not even be able to perceive right now. I guess that would be it.

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

Interviewee: That's a good question. To write well—I think when you're writing well you're thinking well. That's the thing, like and—I don't know, maybe it doesn't go the other way. If you're writing well, you're accurately representing what you actually think about whatever you're writing on, whatever—like you are accurately representing you on the page. Whatever that means, you can be very clear about what you mean, or it's just like it evokes—good writing produced by you evokes some sort of, I don't know, authenticity about the writer or something. I don't know if you can made just a hard and fast list of rules for good writing.

Interviewer: Okay, great. What do you—if you can't make a hard and fast list, so what do you think it depends on?

Interviewee: Good writing is different for every—like every person. I have my understanding of a standard of good writing. I think it's clear, but it's original. It's not—original, I guess, without being inaccessible or somehow like forced. That changes from person to person. You kind of have to define your own terms of like how you see your writing and what you see as good writing, and then just kind of work from there. I don't know. It's a weird goal—or it was a weird question I think.

Interviewer: Okay, so which upper level writing courses have you taken?

Interviewee: I took [English 300 level course], [Writing 300 level course], and [English 400 level courses]. They both were like-it was like a series of courses for the thesis. Those were the only ones I took.

Interviewer: Okay, and then what were your experiences in those courses? You can start with [English 300 level course] if you want to.

Interviewee: Three-twenty-five was great. That was probably the most important class I took at [University of Michigan] just because that really started me off as like an English major. I wasn't planning on doing English or anything with writing before then. That was really great. That's kind of where I started to learn more about my enjoyment of writing, and just what I thought writing was. It's not like just an artifact that you produce. It's like very much this process of looking in—looking inward, like taking outward and realizing that it's not like there are just like good writers, bad writers, etcetera. There's a lot of

development in between and that was really interesting to me seeing how people could develop and really make personal these—or make public rather, these personal experiences that they're writing about.

Interviewer: What is that class title?

Interviewee: It's [Title of course], so you're writing like creative personal narratives. Things got like—people were very heavily invested, I think, in their writing, just from details of the topic, but in the way that you saw them work through, just they were really interesting stories that they wanted to tell about themselves or people they knew was super fascinating. Even more fascinating than that, I think was like talking to them about how they were writing, which really got me started on the writing track.

Interviewer: Great, so talking to other writers about their process?

Interviewee: Yeah, absolutely, that's definitely—was probably the most important aspect of that class for me.

Interviewer: Was that like built into the class for you?

Interviewee: Yeah, it was like—it was a workshop, and if you've ever had any sort of workshop in a class, you kind of know how this can go, and it can be very much like useless or just like pulling teeth to get people to actually talk. In that class, they were all really good. Everyone was giving really good feedback, and also asking good questions, I think, which was even more important.

Interviewer: Okay, and then after [English 300 level course], you did—

Interviewee: [Writing 300 level course] about a full year later.

Interviewer: Okay, and what is that class?

Interviewee: That's the tutoring—the training for peer tutors. That kind of continues the conversation I guess that I had—like [English 300 level course] just really helped me to develop skills as a conversationalist and learning how to talk to people about their writing. I really did—I went into that class thinking I was gonna learn a bunch of grammar, like what is good writing and how do we fix people's writing. I thought I was gonna be an editor. I found out that was not what the class was about at all. It was very focused on collaboration and helping writers to develop as writers, not just like make a perfect piece of writing that they can turn in for an A. That really got me thinking about just like—I don't know, the importance of dealing with people one-on-one, asking questions, really getting to know then, and recognize them as like unique individuals, rather than just people making things for classes for grades, which has kind of seeped into other areas of my life, which has been really fun.

Interviewer: Okay. Can you talk about that a little bit?

Interviewee: Yeah, it's just like, I don't know, [Writing 300 level course] is very formative. It changed my—I'm much more hesitant to just give like a hard and fast answer on anything, which might actually be really detrimental in some cases. I'm always considering like okay, this is how I'm seeing it, but there's got to be another way into it that I'm not seeing, or some—they way that I just wouldn't think of. I ask a lot more questions, instead of giving answers now. I'm much more willing to kind of like go with the flow and see what I can pull out of a conversation, rather than—like if I'm helping someone, be like, "No, do this, this and this."

Interviewer: You saw that seep into your other courses?

Interviewee: Courses, and just like approaches to other people. Yeah, I'm much more comfortable conversing with people now I think after that course in just about any context.

Interviewer: Okay, great. Then you said you had [Writing 400 level course]?

Interviewee: [English 400 level course] and [English 400 level course], which is the thesis course. It was like the two thesis courses for English.

Interviewer: Okay, so those are outside of the writing minor. Those are in your English major?

Interviewee: Yeah, uh-huh.

Interviewer: Okay. Can you talk about those courses?

Interviewee: Yeah, those were pretty standard thesis stuff, or I guess the standard thesis stuff. You research and write independently, but then you meet in classes to talk about larger issues that you all might be facing, do workshops, etcetera. Again, it was a good—I mean I'm glad I did it. It was less helpful, I think, than the previous two upper-level writings just because like—I felt the skills that I acquired in the other two were very helpful in helping me help others in that class because there was a lot of workshopping response.

You can just tell people who have been trained to respond to writing versus people who haven't—like when you see a workshop just marked up with track changes, grammar errors and stuff, versus people like, "I'm curious about what you're doing here. Can you talk to me a little more about that? I don't really understand this transition here. What were you going for?" You definitely see a difference, which was kind of cool.

Interviewer: Okay, but you felt like you didn't—you felt like those people in [English 400 level course]—in your [English 400 level course]—

Interviewee: [English 400 level course] and [English 400 level course].

Interviewer: - weren't trained to talk about—

Interviewee: Some of them were, some of them weren't. It's not just like black and white. I'm sure—we had a number of peer tutors in that class. You could definitely tell who they were pretty much right away. There were other people that were responding to the writing fine, but other people that you could tell, just like had no experience in actually responding to a writer's concerns, just kind of thinking—more like, [inaudible 00:11:26] about good writing, bad writing.

Interviewer: Yeah, okay. You feel like those two courses had less of an effect on your ability to help other writers?

Interviewee: Yeah, definitely. I definitely agree—as a writer myself, in that class, I got very good at reflecting on myself and becoming a good critic of myself, rather than just being too harsh or too lenient in any respect. Other than that, the other two courses were definitely much more helpful for me.

Interviewer: Okay. Do you still make use of what you learned in any of those courses now?

Interviewee: Oh, yeah, absolutely. I mean I'm still tutoring, and anytime someone asks me about writing, I just can't fix things for them. I have to talk to them about it, which they get very annoyed with, but I think it ends up better for them. I've helped friends with cover letters and resumes and stuff, and most times they ended up getting at least an interview, usually getting the job, which I don't think would have happened if I had just changed things. I don't know, it's cool because like I'm kind of a nag about it with my friends. You see them start to pick it up, too, and be like, "Okay, yeah, there maybe isn't a right or wrong answer to this approach. It's more like ask some questions, draw some stuff out, re-examine some stuff that I'd maybe thought before and see if I still feel it." I don't know, it's cool.

Interviewer: Yeah, and then you're also still tutoring here?

Interviewee: Still tutoring here.

[…]

Interviewer: Okay, so then what other writing courses have you taken?

Interviewee: I took a mini-course, [Writing 200 level course], on [Title of course]. How are we defining a writing course?

Interviewer: That's great, [Writing 200 level course], [Title of course], any course that—yeah.

Interviewee: Okay, any course that there was a significant amount of writing or the focus—

Interviewer: No, that like fulfilled a writing requirement or had writing as the theme.

Interviewee: Okay. I guess the only other one is like really focused on writing, except for [English course], like the first year writing.

Interviewer: Yeah, how was your experience in first-year writing?

Interviewee: It was good. I like it. I can't remember much about it at this point. I remember I was nominated to be a peer tutor in that class.

Interviewer: Oh, great. Do you think your experiences in first year writing affected your writing specifically in some way, so kind of got you on track to be a peer tutor and a writing minor?

Interviewee: Yeah, it did, but it—I didn't take the nomination right away, and then I was nominated again a year later in a poly-sci [political science] course of mine, which is when I actually started to seriously consider it. That first year, I don't know, it was fine. I don't feel like I learned too much in it though, that I wouldn't have been able to pick up on my own more, just kind of like figure out on the way. We did workshops and stuff, but again, they weren't like super helpful. We had like very much like [inaudible 00:14:36] level responses. I think it would have helped better like if the professor maybe had been more encouraging of like peer-to-peer, or like collaboration between people—not that she was discouraging it by any means. It just was never talked about that much. That might be a function of it being like a [English course] versus a [English 100 level course], which is like a literature focus, where the other one is like actually just focused on writing and rhetoric, so who knows.

Interviewer: Okay. Then you said [Writing 200 level course]?

Interviewee: Yeah, just a mini-course. That was a mini-course that looked at video games. We played a couple of online games, write articles and stuff. It was kind of just like a crash course in the rhetoric of games and how rules create like implications for certain things. I'm trying to think of a good example. It really just looked a lot at rules because that's all a game is, is just a collection of rules, and like what those rules mean, and how we interpret them. […].

Then if you change the context of that game, […] that changes the rhetoric of what that game is significantly. That was a really cool – that was the first time I really started thinking I guess about rhetoric and how certain implications can be wrapped in things that are very—perhaps not super obvious. I'm not sure I would take that—I know I would take that course again. The work was a lot, but it was a really, really cool one.

Interviewer: How do you think that course, [Writing 200 level course], affected your writing?

Interviewee: We didn't do a lot of writing in the course, honestly. The big project was make a video game, but we did have one major—a couple major writing assignments overall. I don't know if it helped—it helped me think about my writing more and think about other things, like the choices I was making, think about what does this imply or what are the different ways this can be interpreted? Am I actually coming across the way I want to—in much the same way that we had to look at the rules of games and what they were meaning. I guess in that way, I became much more actively conscious of what I was writing. I wasn't just writing. It was like okay, what does this actually mean?

Interviewer: Do you feel like you had any other courses that affected your writing?

Interviewee: Not explicitly. Each course has helped here and there a little bit. I guess my first big—like upper level English course I took, I got a C+ on the first paper, and that was a big wakeup call, like okay, I need to try harder. Other than that, no, it's just some little things here and there, just that you learn along the way.

Interviewer: Now that you've graduated, how confident do you feel about writing in your concentration? You're an English major, right?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: How confident do you feel?

Interviewee: I feel pretty good about it. There's always that moment when you're turning in a paper, you're like I don't know about this. I feel pretty stupid right now. In general, I feel comfortable writing a paper that I know, like you get the assignment and the text I'm supposed to be using, I can do what I'm supposed to do with that assignment. It's a matter of giving myself a time, and making sure that I'm working at the level that I feel like I should be producing. I feel really confident about it, yeah.

Interviewer: Do you have any other majors or minors?

Interviewee: No.

Interviewer: Okay, so how often do you feel like you've used skills or strategies you learned in one of your classes in writing—in your writing?

Interviewee: Pretty often actually, especially more recently. [Writing 300 level course] opened us up to a lot of strategies that I'd just never heard of before, like free writing, reverse outlining,

Interviewer: Can you give an example of a time you used free writing?

Interviewee: Yeah, in this last—the thesis that I wrote, there were so many times where I'd get stuck, especially in the later stages. It was like it would get really frustrating and the pressure would kind of create sort of a block, I think or just like I don't know what I'm saying. Just taking the time to take a pen out and write everything that you're thinking about the topic without stopping, without any sort of editing going on, really helped me open up and pick out the ideas that I was actually working with, and fit the logic of what I was saying together much better.

Interviewer: You learned that strategy in [Writing 300 level course]?

Interviewee: Yeah, I mean it's like I think I'd probably known about it before, but just had never knew it had a name, or really what it was. I learned about that in [Writing 300 level course]. The introduction to the minor, I really thought self-reflective comments were really stupid and kind of a time waster. At the end of the day, I've been like now I need to just self-annotate all the time, thinking like I was thinking this here and I don't know if it's coming across. Asking questions is always a big one, and those self-reflective comments.

Interviewer: What kind of writing do you use the self-reflective comments for now?

Interviewee: Mostly in academic writing just because I feel it lends itself to that very well, if you're trying to make an argument, and you pick it apart, think okay, I know this is making sense, but just talking yourself through the steps and those comments really helps piece it together. Then seeing like also, if you're—it might make sense, but it might need more development, like here, here or here.

Interviewer: You feel like you use that in your other courses, not just in the—

Interviewee: Yeah, I definitely took that outside the course that I learned it in.

Interviewer: Good. Then you said reverse outline?

Interviewee: Yeah, reverse outline, kind of the same thing as a self-reflective comment. It's like instead of you write the paper or whatever you're writing—do you know about it?

Interviewer: Yeah, you can describe it. It's useful.

Interviewee: Cool. Then you just kind of like on one side of the paper—or like you compare what you wanted to say against what you actually said in this paragraph, and if there's any disconnect, you have to just kind of figure out how you get from A to B. That's again, really helpful with the self-reflective comments, I think in conjunction that—just to really help organize and make it clear.

Interviewer: Where did you learn reverse outlining?

Interviewee: That's was also in [Writing 300 level course].

Interviewer: Okay, great. Okay, so we're gonna talk about the capstone course. What impact has the minor capstone course had overall on your writing?

Interviewee: It's hard to say. I haven't written a lot since the capstone course. It was just a month ago that it ended. I learned a lot about my habits, and that's I think where it made me really realize I need to shape up because I—the capstone course was scheduled around—or kind of structured around that big term project. I had a really great idea for—or what I thought was a really great idea. I was really excited to work on it, but there were no hard deadlines in the course, so all my other deadlines kind of took precedence, and it pushed the project off to the end. It totally shows. It does not look good, and it is not good. I think I was very lucky that I passed somehow, but that was like a huge wake-up call, and just like I need to be much more responsible about my writing.

Interviewer: It's definitely influenced your process.

Interviewee: Yeah, like if it hasn't influenced the writing itself, it's helped me understand myself as a writer and really pinpoint some of my weaknesses and helped me realize I need to work on those a lot.

Interviewer: Those time management process kinds of weaknesses?

Interviewee: Yeah, time management process, and just like—just getting—doing things. Stop procrastinating and just do stuff. That's where—even if it's not good stuff, you just need to be writing, to figure out like okay, this is bad. I need to write to figure out why it's bad, so I can make it good.

Interviewer: Can you say a little bit more about how that course has had an impact on your sense of yourself as a writer?

Interviewee: Yeah, it just—that was the biggest part of it to me was figuring out where my really big flaws or weaknesses in my approach to writing—it helped me out. I guess I also learned—I don't know, I'm very fond of abstract concepts and ideas and stuff like that, which can be—it's fun to think about when it comes to writing those—about those things. It can be difficult to distill down what exactly you're talking about. I've learned that I like a lot of things that are fairly inaccessible, so that might be another thing for me to work on.

Interviewer: Can you just give an example?

Interviewee: Yeah, like my project was on horror, and particularly on these—in this particular kind of horror, […]. There's short form horror stories that circulate around the internet through various modes. There are like a lot of technical or very—a jargon that's kind of specific to that. I just throw terms around like everyone knows what I'm talking about. There are so many times the discussion was like, "You need to slow down and

define three terms for us, so we can follow you." I just like—really cognizant of—I'm very conscious of a specific audience for the thing I'm writing for, but being sensitive to a broader audience is a big issue for me to work on, I think.

Interviewer: Why did you choose that project that you chose?

Interviewee: My thesis was on horror, and so I already had a foundation on—

Interviewer: Your thesis in your English major?

Interviewee: Yeah, it was on horror […]. I thought I could use the foundations of that research to kind of help alleviate some of the workload because with this big project and then the thesis on top of each other, plus I'm trying to get into grad school, I was pretty like—I just need to take as many shortcuts as I can. In one of my classes, we talked about the trend in current contemporary fiction to kind of stop looking at the present mode and either look forward in terms of like alternative histories and futures, or also look into the past, writing historical fiction and more alternative histories. I was just wondering like well, what can—how is technology sort of influencing this, and what can it do to help writers create new things and help readers read in a new way, and just create opportunities that fiction hasn't had before that are afforded through this technology. […].

Interviewer: What experience has that capstone had on you as a writer—influence, sorry. What influence has that experience had on you?

Interviewee: Again, it comes back to like just do more faster, but also I guess, there come—it's influenced me in that like I've kind of realized you can only think through things so much before you have to like do them and then come back and think about them again. That was a big thing for me, like two months I spent conceptualizing an idea and—it was very easy to get stuck somewhere and be like, oh, I'm just not gonna think about this now; I'll do it later. It would have been so much better for me just to try something that I was thinking about, and then come back and think about what happened there. That really is the biggest impact I think it has had on me, just the—helping me understand that I needed to kind of hit the ground running sometimes.

Interviewer: Then come back to it with like reflection or revision?

Interviewee: Yeah, uh-huh, can't just do it all in one big go.

Interviewer: Okay, great. Now we're gonna talk about your capstone portfolio, the e-portfolio. […].

[…]

Interviewer: Yep, okay, so can you tell me about the most memorable aspect of your experience with the e-portfolio?

Interviewee: I think coming up with the idea for it, like in the first gateway portfolio, I was kind of just like really lost about what I wanted—I knew I wanted it to be approachable or like communicate to me that I was approachable, or like I just wanted to have fun with my writing. There was no underlying unity between anything else, right. It was just like a bunch of writing up on a website. When I came up with more of a theme to help guide the pieces that I was picking, and the way I was writing about them, that was like a really nice aha moment.

Interviewer: Okay, so picking your theme was memorable?

Interviewee: Yeah, and just like understanding—well, it was memorable because it helped me do this, but it also helped me realize that there are definitely themes that come out in my work that are related to each other over and over again. It happens in different ways, but there were just like three big themes that I saw that kind of came together really nicely, in conceiving of this idea.

Interviewer: What—can you talk about those themes?

Interviewee: [Theme of portfolio] is like a big part of it, but so is like the power of language. It seems cheesy to say like love. I don't mean it I guess in like a romantic sort of rom-com [romantic comedy] 00:29:25 way, but just like love is this sort of—this struggle that almost springs out of fear, and is more about vulnerability and allowing oneself to be vulnerable in order to grow.

Interviewer: All those different themes, you felt like had been popping up in your work before now too?

Interviewee: Yeah, well like they'd been there, but I wasn't conscious of that until I had to think of some way to unify these writings. And it's not like—I don't think I imposed that structure on them. I think I pulled those things out of the writing, which was a really eye-opening experience for me.

Interviewer: Okay, great, so then what were your aims for the e-portfolio?

Interviewee: I wanted it to look better than the last one. My last one looked all right, but I just—I wanted it to look better and I wanted it to not be as stressful because the last time I hand coded the thing and that was a huge pain in the ass. I started pretty much from the get-go. I was gonna use like Wordpress [content management system] or something like it, just so it would kind of alleviate some of the technical burden. Then beyond just the mere aesthetics of it, I wanted it to represent the writing that I was including on it very accurately, so I didn't really look at—I didn't look at all at the writing that I was including in it. I didn't revise it or polish it up or anything, which I did for the last portfolio.

That's kind of how it was conceived and it needed to be good; people need to think I'm a good writer. He had this whole part—part of whole thing as like it's okay to show where

the flaws are, even though it's kind of a scary thing sometimes. That's what helps us grow. I knew going into it that I didn't want to mess with how some of the artifacts had been produced originally, so I could reflect on them really honestly, and hopefully get to a—some interesting analysis about what had happened in the spots that were maybe not perfect.

Interviewer: Do you feel like this addresses those aims?

Interviewee: It does, I think. I really wish I would have mentioned something about that because I didn't. That was something in my responses that I got from reviewers. They were like—

Interviewer: Mentioning something about not polishing the writing purposefully?

Interviewee: Yeah, because they're like—a lot of times they're like, "I would have liked to give you a better score here, but the writing was kind of like there were just so many mechanical errors or just weird things happening." I was like, "Oh, okay, yeah, I really should have told people that's what I was going for." In terms of getting to that analysis that I wanted to do, I was happy with it.

Interviewer: Good, okay. Do you feel like it looks better? Did you reach that aim?

Interviewee: Yeah, it looks better. It's simpler, but it looks much nicer now.

Interviewer: Okay, great. Did you design the e-portfolio to create a particular reader experience?

Interviewee: Not in the way that some people did, like some people have a very much like start here, go through it this way, and end up this way. I kind of wanted—I gave, I guess, the user more freedom in that like I can add these little tabs up here that open down and guide them through anything. Most pages are—I think all pages are linked to any other—you can get anywhere from anywhere on the site.

[…]

Interviewer: Oh, yeah, the top menu is always still there.

Interviewee: Yeah ,or if I just like click here, I have like the bulk of my writing, but I can still get to places. I don't know, I worked for—I worked as a web designer for a couple years at home. That was like a big thing, like accessibility, so that was just kind of my default. I don't know, I think the aesthetic in the way that I had it hopefully set up, where you've got like these landing pages that preface the pieces with the reflective writing, did create kind of a—I don't know, like a sort of an implication that these are why they're here. This is—and just the structure of the menu, too. I feel like if you're looking at something, you typically go left to right, which is why I felt like these were a good

building of the themes, I think, starting with the smallest and ending up with something maybe unexpected, but more—perhaps most significant about the portfolio.

Interviewer: Not so directive, but using landing pages in the top menu for some structure.

Interviewee: Yeah, a little bit. I probably could have thought it through a little more deeply because I think it was—the most successful portfolio that I did see had designed a very specific user experience. I just didn't have—I had a little bit of it, but I think I could have thought it through a little more.

Interviewer: Okay. Do you have any other specific examples of design choices that you made?

Interviewee: Not really. I wish I would have included more images or something to break up what I see as very large walls of text. At the same time, I couldn't find a way—couldn't think of images to relate to the stuff that I was saying appropriately. I felt like I would mostly just be throwing picture—throw them in there, which rubbed me the wrong way. Other decisions that I had –I don't know. I tried to—obviously theme is [theme]

[…]. There were times when I'd include yeah, kind of like a goofy picture. The reflective writing that I use is—it's very, very informal, my voice. It's very much like writing as if I were having a conversation with someone reading it. I didn't want this to be like a piece of horror itself. I definitely wanted it to be kind of like a more—maybe I guess sort of slightly dark, but not all together frightening.

Interviewer: Okay, great. Did you notice any relationships among your artifacts as you created the portfolio?

Interviewee: While I was creating, it not so much. Really, the biggest relationship came out—excuse me—was coming up with a theme. That's what I realized these are all sort of related in certain ways, so I grouped them as best as I could. I kind of wanted to keep—

Interviewer: You said your themes were [themes of portfolio]?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: [Theme of portfolio] particularly, like focusing on language, but in particular how powerful it can be and how it can be definitely this sort of thing that people approach, a lot of anxiety or fear and for what reasons that happens. It was hard sometimes though because a lot of them deal with multiple—more than one of those themes was like, where do I put it?

Interviewer: Yeah, a lot of your pieces of writing, a lot of your artifacts?

Interviewee: Yeah, a lot of the ones that I pulled, it was just they could have gone at least one other area, so that was difficult to like kind of decide which piece is which. I felt that it was important to have that structure of themes, rather than just kind of like throw everything in one spot and say like, “Hey, here’s some stuff.”

Interviewer: Okay, so what relationships did you really want your readers to notice?

Interviewee: I think the sequencing of the themes that you go through, at least in the menu, was what I really wanted to pull out. Language and fear, […] they’re often related and they’re related because it stresses us out, they make us think that we’re not good enough writers or we’re bad writers, that there’s this really awful fear of it because writing is just this huge struggle all the time. It’s back and forth, but then we get to this aspect of—or this theme of love and growth that kind of, I don’t know, takes a different view of that struggling; looks at it in kind of more of a positive lens. We can’t have growth without allowing ourselves that fear of vulnerability, and understanding it and just letting ourselves kind of be open for a little bit.

Interviewer: You wanted the readers to notice that kind of progression there?

Interviewee: Yeah because I think those were really more—[…] [theme of portfolio] were like the biggest most powerful themes, but I never got to those if I wasn’t talking about language in some respect, I don't think.

Interviewer: Great. How do you think creating the e-portfolio has had an effect on your writing?

Interviewee: It’s helped me appreciate reflection even more because like a lot of things—you know, you can test the self-reflective comments and stuff—reflective writing, especially in that first portfolio is just something I did because I had to do it. It definitely started out this way—the same way in this one, but the more I did it, it was like this was actually becoming probably the most successful piece in my portfolio. I really enjoyed it by the end of it, and it was high stakes but it wasn’t because I could kind of just do whatever I wanted with it.

Interviewer: This is your reflective piece here?

Interviewee: No, that’s like—that’s actually one of the pieces, but the reflective writing is here on the landing pages. I just really, really enjoyed writing that. It helped me understand a lot about what was happening in a lot of these pieces that I hadn’t seen in a long time because I had to read through all these pieces. I was like, “Okay, what was in the process here, blah, blah, blah,” and then justify why I was putting it in these particular sections. It was—I don’t know, it was—it helped—I don’t—that’s the practice I’ll definitely take away from this, and I see myself using pretty often is just taking a moment to step back and write about writing and how I wrote something to understand it a lot better.

Interviewer: You saw a big difference between that in the gateway course and the capstone course?

Interviewee: Yeah, even in the gateway course, I did it, but I was kind like I just did it to do it. I think emphasizing it as strongly as [Instructor] 00:40:33 did in the capstone course was probably what got me to do that. If I had only had to do a little bit of it, I probably would have just half-assed it again, just really sort of not cared. Since it needed to be a focal point of this portfolio, I got—I did more of it, and in doing that, I got really into it.

Interviewer: Can you give an example of another time you used reflective writing?

Interviewee: This is the first major time that I've done it, like a big piece of reflective writing. Yeah, I mean I haven't done much writing, or really any since this was finished, so I can't really say. Again, this is the first time that I've actually valued it. Other times it's like just comments in a Word document or something, but nothing big.

Interviewer: Okay. I think we're done.

Interviewee: Okay.

Interviewer: Yeah. Oh, you know what, let me—we're not done. Here we go, so what could people interested in writing development, including program administrators like the ones here, learn about writing development from your capstone e-portfolio?

Interviewee: From—in particular from what I've said about it?

Interviewer: From the e-portfolio we'll start with, and then—

Interviewee: That's a great question. I don't know. I have a hard time thinking of what they could learn in any way that's useful—I would be—so like 00:42:21 to extrapolate beyond what they can learn about Josh and Josh's writing.

Interviewer: What about just writing development in general? What can we learn?

Interviewee: I guess it does reinforce the idea of self-reflection. I guess not even self-reflection, just like being very honest and open about your writing with other people is very, very important. So often, writing is thought of as like this thing that you do at a desk with a cup of coffee, locked away from the world. Some people do that, most people don't. At least, most people can't I think. It's really, really important to talk to people and just communicate about writing at any stage. It's like if you're at the end kind of just polishing up something.

If you're at the beginning, like can't think of what to write about—because so often, a reflection is just—writing is a reflection of the writer, which I think is why people are so

scared of it a lot of times, but understand that that honesty and openness and vulnerability is really what's gonna help them develop.

Interviewer: Okay, and you think that idea of the importance of communicating with other people while you're writing is on your e-portfolio?

Interviewee: Maybe not—maybe that's extrapolating a little bit beyond what is—

Interviewer: That was your experience while writing.

Interviewee: Yeah, writing anything, and particularly the e-portfolio.

Interviewer: Okay. Can you talk about that a little bit?

Interviewee: Workshops were really helpful Talking to friends when we were working on stuff really helped me figure out what was going on. The communication part, it doesn't make it so—it doesn't make it into the portfolio explicitly because I don't think I was thinking about that so much at the time. I think there's an implication there, in between just the fact that it deal with language, openness, fear of being open. It's not obviously though.

Interviewer: It was d definitely a part of your experience.

Interviewee: Yeah, yeah, definitely.

Interviewer: Now we're gonna talk a little bit about the gateway. How did you experience in the capstone course compare to your experience in the gateway course?

Interviewee: Capstone was a lot more stressful, which is interesting because there was both less and more to do. It was just the one project, but there were no really assignments like built into that. There were no deadlines, which made it difficult. I felt that even though in the gateway the syllabus was kind of living and fluid and things changed daily, having certain assignments and knowing that those were due at some points, and getting feedback on those assignments was very, very useful.

It made the class seem a lot easier—not even just easier, but manageable or enjoyable. It got to a point before where I was just so stressed about me being stupid and not doing anything, but also not really understanding where I was supposed to be at a given time because being completely autonomous for a project like this is something I've never really done before. Even in the thesis, we had structure, so it was just like a really scary kind of like someone had pulled the safety net out from under me experience.

Interviewer: Okay. You already talked about the difference in the reflective writing in the two.

Interviewee: Uh-huh, yeah.

Interviewer: Anything else you can compare between the two courses?

Interviewee: It's hard to figure when you say based on the course because I think the instructors have just very different approaches. I think even in the two capstone courses that happened last semester. There were really different approaches going on. In my experience, there always seemed to be a goal or an agenda that was very transparent in [Writing 200 level course]. That was never—not the case in [Writing 400 level course]. We'd start out very foggy and eventually it would be revealed to what we were kind of supposed to be doing. It was like after 70 minutes or something, like, "Oh, okay, I understand now." I don't know which approach is better, but those were definitely differences.

Interviewer: What have your experiences been of working with other writers throughout the minor in those two courses?

Interviewee: It really depends on the other people that you're working with I think. In general, I love working with other writers, talking about writing. It shows that I'm a huge nerd for that stuff, but—I don't know, some people are just not excited to be there, or they feel like they've started the minor or gotten into the minor under—not really understanding what it was about. I remember in [Writing 200 level course], a lot of people are upset about it because they heard like a minor in writing and thought like, we're gonna learn how to write everything. It was not that, it was really more studying what writing is. I don't know, for the most part, it's been very enjoyable.

Interviewer: Okay. What would you say are the differences between the gateway and the capstone e-portfolio?

Interviewee: The capstone, well, it felt scarier to—well, not even scarier. It was more high stakes, definitely, because it has to go for that review and you don't pass the minor if it doesn't pass the review and blah, blah, blah. It really is supposed to be like a more sophisticated version of everything you've done with your writing since college started. Somehow, the gateway was still scarier I think because I didn't know exactly what to expect as much. I'd never made a portfolio before. I didn't really know what that meant.

I think it's a lot more stressful honestly, to make that first portfolio because you just really don't know—I didn't know, at least. That seemed to be the trend with other people, they just didn't know what was—they were even supposed to be doing. You can look at a million examples, but if you don't know—if you haven't done it once to know, again, what—where the hard—like the tricky spots are and where you can maybe put in a little extra work to do better, it are 00:48:41—it's just a really scary intimidating assignment.

Interviewer: Okay, so you felt like the process was more familiar in the capstone?

Interviewee: Uh-huh.

Interviewer: Okay. Okay, so we've talked about this a lot, but I'll just ask again if you have anything to add. Can you describe your experience with this kind of reflective writing in the gateway and the capstone?

Interviewee: It was much—like I said, much more sophisticated in the capstone. It started a little bit in the gateway with like, again, the self-reflective comments, like learning how to annotate your drafts. It just—it never became immediately obvious to me about why we were doing this or why it was important. Anytime I did it, I was very much doing it kind of like faking my way through it to get the assignment done. I think that's because it wasn't ever focused so much on particular pieces of writing. It was always very much like, "Reflect on your writing process, or the writing you've done in this course as a whole." It's really easy to kind of—just kind of—I don't really know how to describe it, but when it's rooted in something very specific, it's much easier I think to see why you're reflecting on what you are.

Interviewer: You felt it was more rooted in a specific writing assignment or a specific—

Interviewee: In the capstone.

Interviewer: In the capstone, okay.

Interviewee: Yeah, because it was—not necessarily that way, but like it felt that way because I think—at least my professor made it very clear he wanted reflective writing on each piece, at least in some form.

Interviewer: Okay, and then are you still using reflection in your current writing?

Interviewee: Again, it's really hard for me to say because I just don't write right now.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: I'm sure I will though. I can't see me not—just I don't think I've written anything other than a grocery list, since the capstone.

Interviewer: Okay. What about while you were writing and reflecting on the capstone, where you writing—were you doing other writing assignments in your other courses?

Interviewee: Yeah, and actually I did—like not major reflections, but like I'd stop halfway through and like, "Okay, what am I doing here?" I'd write out a little note, maybe do some free writing to figure out where I was going with stuff, just because it was—I don't know, same problems as always, not enough time. It really helped me figure out, especially the thesis at the end there I think.

Interviewer: Your thesis for your English major?

Interviewee: Yeah, that's where it started and then I had one paper at the very end of the term, just writing notes out and talking myself through what my idea was and why I thought I could get away with that, or why I thought I had an argument to make for it.

Interviewer: Was that for one of your other English courses?

Interviewee: Yeah, it was.

Interviewer: Okay, great. Has this reflection given you new ways to talk about your writing—new terms or concepts to talk about your writing?

Interviewee: I think so. I've always had the vocabulary, it's a matter of seeing that I can put the vocabulary together in these different ways to be more useful to me.

Interviewer: Okay. What vocabulary do you think you're putting together?

Interviewee: A couple of—there were some words that came up all the time, and there were just writing terms like voice and I have a much clearer understand of what I typically want my voice to be like, depending on audience or how to approach something, and what level of detail based on scope or—again, audience. I don't know, scope, voice and audience come up a lot

Interviewer: Okay. You use those a lot in your reflective writing?

Interviewee: I think so, at least voice and audience a lot.

Interviewer: Okay, great. Are there any suggestions you would have for instructors or administrators for the writing in minor program—minor in writing?

Interviewee: I know this probably is antithetical to what they want to do for the capstone, but really having some structure set in where like I know we don't want to emphasize grades or anything like that, but just having some sort of stakes other than if you don't do the project, you can't pass the course. People will do the project, they'll just do it horribly like I did. Having some sort of risk-reward benefit, or like mechanism built into the class, in the capstone, would be very useful I think. This is unfortunate because it creates more work for all the students and the teacher, but at the end of the day, I think it really helps keep the course on track because at the end, it was a mad dash for a number of people to just get something together.

I had another thing. Also, I don't know, this might be true for others, but I would have liked to know just what the scope of the capstone course was before I started it because having that together with a thesis to finish was a nightmare. The first day even of the capstone course, it felt like we were being assigned like a small thesis project, which we kind of are. Knowing that in advance, and maybe not discouraging people to do that, but letting them know, so they can plan around it somehow or at least prepare for it, would be really, really helpful.

Interviewer: Knowing like when you signed up for the minor, that that's what the final course—

Interviewee: Yes, knowing for the minor, and having maybe a reminder before they suspected that you would be taking the capstone, so like, "Hey this is what you're gonna be doing. Start thinking about a project now. Maybe meet with an advisor to flesh out a strategy for at least just brainstorming a topic." That was a big part of it was coming up with the topic took a long time, and then seeing how much work you had to do with it, that was a long time. Then doing the work was also a significant investment of time.

Interviewer: Okay. Then more generally, what do you think professors should know about teaching writing at the undergraduate level?

Interviewee: It's not about—to teach writing, you can't look at writing. I mean you can't look at their writing. It really is much—it has to be focused on the writer, which is hard in large classes or any sort of class. I don't know, focusing on things like style and grammar, like your style just get too much focus. I don't know, I would ask more questions, give less answers.

Interviewer: Ask more questions of the writers?

Interviewee: Uh-huh, yeah, like why are you—not like why are you doing this, but like I'm curious why you made this choice here. Make it very clear that writing is about making choices to students, and then also question them about why they're making the choices they're making, to understand better where they're coming from and which will help you kind of help them, I guess.

Interviewer: Okay, great. Do you have any other comments you want to add?

Interviewee: No, I don't think so.

Interviewer: Okay, great. Thank you so much.

[End of Audio]