

Interviewer: This is \*\*\* interviewing \*\*\* on April 3rd [...].

Interviewee: Great. Thank you.

Interviewer: [Laughter].

Interviewee: [Laughter].

Interviewer: How would you describe yourself as a writer?

Interviewee: I would definitely describe myself as an academic writer. I really enjoy writing argumentative essays, not so much in terms of poetry or creative writing. Really, my strength—‘cause I worked on the newspaper in high school, and I was very fact-driven, so when I approach the writing process, it’s really like what sort of argument—what’s my thesis statement, and I really enjoy—and I think I excel at that type of writing a little bit more.

Interviewer: All right. How would you describe yourself as a writer when you began at the University of Michigan?

Interviewee: Sure, so when I began, I started with this class called [Title of course], and on my first essay, I earned a solid 70 percent, so I didn’t begin as the strongest writer, per se, at the college level because I think what—at least college professors in [University of Michigan] have been looking for have been different than what my high school’s professors have been looking for.

I began, I think, with the skills necessary to write a good paper, but not really 100 percent sure what was expected at the college level of writing, so it took a little bit of time, but over time, I really saw that they wanted a lot more details and they wanted a lot more research, and I started incorporating that in my essays and was able to grow a lot.

Interviewer: All right, so you would say you’ve grown as a writer?

Interviewee: Yeah, definitely with learning how to incorporate different sources of research I think is where I’ve grown the most.

Interviewer: What do you attribute that growth to?

Interviewee: Probably my class selections. I took an argumentative writing class, which required a lot of research. I’m in an Arabic culture writing class which has required a lot of research, so really, probably the classes I’ve taken that’s required me to—not just take what was taught in lecture, but then go out to the library system and find other sources and develop some sort of thesis based on what I’ve seen.

Interviewer: Okay. What are your goals for yourself as a writer?

Interviewee: Probably to be proud of what I've written is probably the first goal—to do well in the classes—but then also—so I'm in the business program here, and one of my main goals before graduating from college is working on this case, [... If I can write a case where presents the company's history, goes into their challenges, and then that case can be used in that business club that I'm part of, that would be something I'd be really proud of, so that's one of my main goals, too.

Interviewer: That's cool. You have a specific—right [cross talk 02:54] sort of a general [laughter] goal.

Interviewee: Definitely.

Interviewer: Good, so thinking across your writing experiences at the university, what do you think it means to write well?

Interviewee: Sure. Well, I was always taught to write well, especially from my father, as to have nearly flawless grammar, good sentence structure, and that when you're writing, the reader should be able to read what you've written and [laughter] understand what you're trying to say in each paragraph, so having a very clear topic sentence and kind of assuming the reader doesn't really know much going into the essay, and if the reader can read your piece, be convinced of your thesis, and understand it, I think that's an excellent piece of writing.

Interviewer: All right, so I'm hearing some things about structure, some about style, and then some about efficacy or effectiveness at persuading or communicating.

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: All right. Which first-year writing requirement course did you take?

Interviewee: I actually took two that satisfied the first-year writing requirement. I took the [Title of course] my first semester which satisfied it.

Interviewer: Was that a [English course] or was that something else? Do you remember?

Interviewee: What do you mean a [English course]?

Interviewer: Like an [English course]?

Interviewee: Oh, no, no, no. It wasn't—

Interviewer: It just had that theme, or it—no—so it was its own?

Interviewee: It was its own. I was in the Slavic department. It did count towards the requirement, though, so I got it out of the way with that, and then I had a conversation with my parents, and they thought [laughter] that I should take another writing course

that was an [English course]. Even though I wasn't required, they thought I should, and so I took an [English course] course as well, so I had a double-dose of the first-year [laughter] requirement.

Interviewer: What were your experiences with those courses?

Interviewee: I enjoyed both of them. They were very different courses. The [Title of course] was nothing like the [English course] course. The [Title of course] was let's look at Slavic text and let's analyze them, and the [English course] course was kind of a wide variety of assignments. I had a great time in both classes. I had a great teacher in the [English course] course, so I took it again for my argumentative writing course, and he's really helped me a lot—grow, I think.

Interviewer: Can you say more about the differences? Do you think it was because of what you were assigned to read or what you were assigned to write or how the writing was evaluated?

Interviewee: Sure, so in the Slavic course, for example, the text that we would approach would be films, and they would be pieces about films and about Slavic and Yiddish literature, and so the scope would be very narrow. In the [English course] course, there was more room where I could personally connect the material, I think, so that was a big difference because this was material—in [English course], we had a debate about gun control, and I would read court opinions about gun control, and so that's a very relevant topic today, and so I could connect to it. I think that was one of the main differences.

Just—the Slavic course—all the material was a little bit older and a little bit harder for me to connect to. In the [English course], it was very current, and I could connect to almost all of it.

Interviewer: All right. Did you take [Writing course]?

Interviewee: No.

Interviewer: I'm guessing no. No. What is your concentration? I think you said—

Interviewee: Yeah, so I am in the business school, so I'm going to graduate with a bachelor's of business administration, then I'm the minor in writing.

Interviewer: Okay. Have you had an opportunity to do writing in your concentration?

Interviewee: I have. What's interesting is that—so in my marketing class, we had an essay that we had to write—a very long paper about a company. In my business statistics class, we're gonna have to do another paper.

It's funny, because in the business school, we always start off in the groups describing our strengths and weaknesses, and I'm normally [laughter] the one who ends up writing the papers, 'cause not everybody's as strong in those areas.

Then I took this business thought and action class where we write cases, and then we wrote responses to the cases, so there has definitely been a chance to write in the business school. I think writing is—doesn't get as much of an emphasis as in other majors, per se, but I've been able to write a lot.

Interviewer: Are those kinds of writing—do you think—substantially different from the other kinds of writing that you do?

Interviewee: Yeah. They're very short and to the point. There's really no messing around in the paper. There shouldn't be that much creativity. It's almost like a memo format sometimes. It's like—okay, so what am I trying to say in the paragraph, and how can I say it that's short and to the point?

Interviewer: All right. Let's see. Well, and it sounds like you feel very confident about that kind of writing in your concentration? Is that accurate, do you think? Are you still—

Interviewee: Yeah. No, I do. I've done very well in that type of writing in my concentration, and it took a little [laughter] bit of time getting used to learning that format, but yeah. I'm confident in it.

Interviewer: What effect do you think that's had on you as a writer?

Interviewee: It's made me think about what I wanna say a little bit more before writing it. It also means that [laughter] you need to make sure that your punch line or that the point you're making is 100 percent accurate, 'cause really, the only thing in your paper is—for example, if you're trying to write a memo about whether you should produce this product and how many units, so you're gonna say, "I think we should produce product A with this many units," and then the next few sentences have to be short and to the point, proving why that's right.

It's a unique challenge 'cause you have to take these mathematical proofs or these computer models that you've been doing and then find a way to explain that succinctly and put it in a memo, so it's a whole different type of writing, but it's something that's kinda cool.

Interviewer: It sounds a little like translating.

Interviewee: Yeah, a little bit.

Interviewer: [Laughter].

Interviewee: For sure.

Interviewer: Some. Okay, so what impact has the minor Gateway course, [Writing 200 level course], had overall on your writing?

Interviewee: In [Writing 200 level course], we were able to write about most anything that we wanted to. There was not as much direction, so it really forced me as a writer to think about what am I interested in, what can I write well about, and how can I kinda narrow down and choose a topic, so that's been really helpful.

Then the online aspect of it—so the blogging has been a different style of writing that I've learned, and then we're working towards this online portfolio, so using WordPress [content management system], for example, is something I haven't done before, and so that's been helpful as well. How can we put our work and showcase it online for other people to see?

Interviewer: Would you—has it had any influence on your process?

Interviewee: I would say not so much, because I was used to—in [English course]—being able to kinda choose my topic, so that part wasn't fun, but I guess it's influenced my process of how I wanna present my work for sure, because I'm not used to putting it online, so—I've written it, but then how can I present it in a way for people to see and wanna visit on the webpage, so that's been an entirely new process, I would say.

Interviewer: Okay. What impact has it had on your sense of yourself as a writer?

Interviewee: In terms of the writing minor or the Gateway course?

Interviewer: Yeah, the [Writing 200 level course].

Interviewee: Well, I would say it's made it so that—we get practice peer reviewing other people's work, so it's probably one of the only courses where I've extensively peer-reviewed other people's work and had people peer review my work, and so it's made me more cognizant of the fact of what other people think about my work, aside from the instructor, so my peers, for example, so I would say that would be the greatest impact that it's had on me as a writer.

Probably—I think my classmates see my work, and having that discussion with my classmates about what they like and what they don't like.

Interviewer: That's related to my next question, which is what have your experiences of working with other writers [laughter] in the course been? It sounds like—

Interviewee: [Laughter].

Interviewer: - lot—peer review, workshops?

Interviewee: Yeah. They've been mixed, actually. [Laughter]. Sometimes, I think with our own work, we are very set with what we want to accomplish with the paper, and some of these papers—topics that we've chosen—have been controversial ones, [...] so it's hard, I think, when maybe people have a different opinion than what you're writing in the paper, but in a way, that's a good challenge because obviously not everybody's gonna agree with your thesis or your argument, so you need to kinda try to persuade those people as well.

I think maybe there's a little bit too much of an emphasis on peer review. I think it's helpful, for sure, but I think it's also really important to maybe focus a little bit more on just reviewing your own work critically, 'cause you're not always gonna have that community of people to always peer review your work, sometimes. In the job, I'm guessing, it's really just gonna be you, so I think it's helpful to a certain extent, but maybe more of an emphasis on self-reviewing the work would be more helpful.

Interviewer: Okay. The minor Gateway course emphasized reflective writing in various forms. How would you describe your experience of this kind of reflection?

Interviewee: The first essay was, I think, the "Why We Write" essay or the "Why I Write" essay. That was a tough one, actually. That was probably the hardest essay of the course, and it was actually the shortest, too, which I think threw me and a lot of my classmates off guard, because you never really think about why we write. You could come up with the simple answer, "Well, we write to do the assignment," but it's obviously a lot more deep than that.

That was really powerful, because I really sat down. It took the longest to write, and I didn't just think about it myself, but I talked to people. I talked to people. I talked to my family members. I asked them what they thought about why I write. I looked at the works that I had previously written and tried to find a trend, so that was really a cool assignment.

Interviewer: All right. Do you still use reflective writing in either your academic or your non-academic extra-curricular maybe—

Interviewee: I would say in this [culture class] I'm taking, it's reflective in the sense that when I'm making an argument, I think about the way I view the argument, too, before I start writing, if I'm trying to—if it's an argumentative piece, for example, so I think that is reflective in and of itself.

Then also, in this club that I'm in—this [school club]—we write proposals that we think the club should adopt, so there needs to be a process where I think about what proposals would be good to adopt. This just goes also back to thinking about what you wanna write before you write it, but there is a level of reflection, certainly.

Interviewer: Okay. How would you describe your experiences using new media writing, like blogs or converting something you've written in text to a presentation style in [Writing 200 level course]?

Interviewee: Certainly unique—something I haven't had much experience doing before. For example, I wrote this paper, then I tried to do a voice-over, and so it's something that kinda forces you to take what you've written and then modify it, because people's attention spans, I think—when you think of the reader, for example, the attention span of the reader, when reading an essay, is gonna be at such a level, but then if it were gonna be a video or an audio file, the amount of time that you have to kinda say that argument is very different. Also maybe rely more on auditory and visual clues.

It's something I'd never done before, something I was glad to do, and something I still think I should continue working on, 'cause I don't think I've reached the level of definitely being an expert in that at all, so it's something I think—it's gonna take more practice.

Interviewer: All right, so these next couple of questions are about your Gateway portfolio, [...].

[...]

Interviewee: Yep, so there we go. We just—

Interviewer: Can you tell me about the most memorable aspect of your experience with the portfolio?

Interviewee: [...]. Yeah, sure. [Laughter]. We had the spying 18:15 element, so if you look at my portfolio, you can see the different essays I've written for the course, [...].

One of the most memorable aspects, I would say, was a blog I wrote—I'll show it to you—about finance, so—I was in finance at the time, and there was this company [...].

I know—their share price was trading at basically a 10/1000 of one cent or so, but it went up by 300 percent after this news report came out, and so it's really a testament to how news in finance matters so very much. You can see the [laughter] after they figured out it was false, it fell right back down. It's probably the fact that when this news report came out, somebody did it on purpose to try to profit off this, and you can get this huge profit of a 300 percent increase in a single—and this was over the span of a half an hour.

It was something that was great because—this is a side from the finance class about the reaction to good news in the stock market.

Interviewer: [Laughter].

Interviewee: It was something that was awesome because here was a real-world example of something I learned in the finance class, and I was able to put it up here on the blog and think critically about it, so that was probably one of my proudest moments.

Interviewer: All right, so what were your aims for the portfolio, and how do you feel that the portfolio addresses those aims?

Interviewee: I do like poetry, so I put on a couple poems that I wrote. I wanted to make it attractive to visits, so it's a nice, clean layout, but then also it showcases things that I care about, [...].

I did a voice-over explaining this pamphlet that I made about [Law]. It was also in new media form, so it's really—if somebody were to read my portfolio, I hope that they would take away that I have an interest in business, and then they would read these essays that I care about—[Law], an essay about [an event] [...] and then why I decided to write.

These are three main, big, argumentative pieces that I think would be really interesting, and it's something that I care about, so it's kinda showcasing me as a very microscopic view, maybe.

Interviewer: Okay. Do you think creating the portfolio has had an effect on your writing, and how so?

Interviewee: The online portfolio?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: Yeah. I guess, like I said a little bit earlier, it forces me to present my writing in a way for the world to see. I remember [laughter] for the [essay]—there were a lot of arguments that I put in here that people may not agree with. You have to be cognizant of that when you put it online, and it's a powerful piece, so that's one thing.

Then also, it really—for example, when you're putting something on an online forum—like for the finance article—you're representing yourself right on this online portfolio, so—I always check my work a few times, but when you're putting it on this online portfolio, you have to check it 20 times, 'cause you really need to make sure that it's absolutely right, and so it makes you kind of almost be more careful and be much more skeptical of what you're writing and kind of go over it again and again and again and again. At least, it does for me.

Interviewer: All right, so what about the reflective writing in the writing portfolio? Do you think that's—has it—has there been any impact from your reflective writing in the portfolio?



Interviewee: The “Why I Write” piece was really the reflective piece. I talk about—in this piece—the fact that writing has the power to change people’s minds and opinions. I think I bring in, “The pen is mightier than the sword,” and kinda describe why that—why I believe that it’s true. That reflects back to this experience I had in high school dealing with censorship in the newspaper, so yeah.

I think—it was the only time I was ever—well, the only—one of two times I can remember when I was ever really asked to reflect about why I write and bring in an example of high school, and actually think critically through it and ask myself, “How can I take my experience and make an argument about why I find it important to write that’s relevant to somebody who didn’t go through that same experience that I went through?” Yeah.

Interviewer: All right. Any other comments you wanna make about writing or your writing experiences or your writing process here at the university?

Interviewee: Yeah. I don’t always know—I think writing is definitely incredibly important. It’s relevant in almost everything. I think that something in general that may be the university—not just [University of Michigan], but my high school, for sure. I know a lot of other high schools can maybe do a little bit of a better job with is teaching just grammar.

I used to be an atrocious grammatical writer in high school, and then my father started to look over my essays, and I learned grammar from my dad. He just drilled me in it every single night, and that really helped, but if he didn’t do that, the only way I would’ve picked that up would’ve been through comments on papers, which I think is not the best way to learn. I think it’s better to learn it in the beginning rather than just reacting—to be proactive about it—to learn grammar before you just get it wrong on a paper.

In all the classes I’ve taken, we’ve either skimmed over grammar or haven’t really covered it, or you just see marked-up things on your essays. I was really lucky my father drilled that in my head, but if he didn’t, I would’ve been at a big disadvantage, and when I see other people’s works, for example, the arguments are good, and the ideas are there, but when I peer review it, I spend almost my entire time peer reviewing just correcting the grammar.

It’s such like—it’s supposed to be one of the easier parts, so that’s—the hardest part is writing an argument and doing a good job on that, but if you write a paper where the grammar is just all over the place, nobody’s gonna take it seriously, ‘cause it’s gonna look like you didn’t put in any time. It’s not these students’ faults, and it wasn’t my fault. It’s the fact that we’re not really taught it, so I think that is, by far, the biggest flaw in [University of Michigan]’s writing program, and then my high school’s, and I know just from seeing other people’s work, probably their high schools, too, so that’s—for what it’s worth.

Interviewer: All right. Well, thank you very much.

Interviewee: Yep. Thank you.

[End of audio]