

Interviewer: Abby McArthur-Self

Interviewee: Nina Thompson

NT: What I write depends on, kind of, the assignment and how I feel about it, so if I chose to write something on my own time, freely, it's going to be poetry or some kind of essay-article thing, like I have a lot of running documents on hercampus stuff and just stuff that I really enjoy talking about. I think academically, I write about -- based on the classes that I take -- mostly literature.

AMS: What's the first thing you do when you learn you need to write something for class or decide to write something on your own?

NT: The first thing I do is brainstorm a thesis -- just some kind of argument, and it takes a while for me to do that, I need to be able to think it and then see it on-screen or a piece of paper or something and be able to loosely construct a string of arguments where I'm excited about that thesis and where I have enough evidence to support that thesis. So I don't try and like overthink right away; I just want to figure out, what can I argue passionately about whatever this is? And if I'm not passionate about it, what can I say, that I can appear to be passionate about in what I'm writing. If I really am feeling stuck, I will write out topic sentences, but mostly, I just get a rough idea for what my supporting paragraphs will be for the thesis. Usually my thesis is the only thing that stays the same, once I start writing. Sometimes it will change, but most of the time, once I think of a thesis that I like, everything else is subject to change. I might end up changing a whole paragraph because I don't like the piece of evidence or I might end up doing an antithesis at the end. Everything happens organically -- or at least that's the way that I prefer for it to happen, but of course, I think being a writer is all about adapting to what you do and don't know about the subject and just working with what you have.

AMS: Once you start writing, what does that process look like?

NT: Once I start writing, I am typing on a computer. It just helps to get all my thoughts out quickly before they go away. I am very bad at paying attention and keeping, kind of, my thoughts in one place before they go away forever. (Laughs) So when I start, it's not even sentences or paragraphs or anything. I'm organizing my ideas by writing down whatever I'm thinking. And then, I usually go away for a little bit and come back and see what I think of my first initial thoughts, and then I'm able to shave it down, edit, revise, and all that stuff. But I think I can't really write well unless I let myself just vomit words all over a document first, cus it helps me get the bad ideas out of the way, or it helps me to realize things quicker. Rather than fixating on one idea at a time, I can just knock out whatever I'm thinking of. I think I revise it by reading it out loud first, or sometimes if I'm feeling brave, I'll have a friend read it, and maybe even have them read it out loud to me because it's a completely different perspective when you read something to yourself versus when you get to hear it. So I think the revision is probably the most important part because that helps me to realize, I need to get ot a point quicker, or I could say this in so many less words, or I could develop more on this thought, and I kind of put myself in a different seat, and I'm able to kind of give myself criticism that kind of stems from hearing my

own writing out loud. And then editing is sometimes a bit of a mystery. Sometimes I like to tell myself, oh yeah, I'm good at grammar, and I'm good at, like, capitalization and punctuation stuff. Ehhhhh... That, I think I'm still trying to figure out. It helps to write journalistically because the AP stylebook has all the... I mean, a lot of those rules apply to general writing. Well, there is no writing in general, but you know what I mean --

AMS: Yeah --

NT: Academic and free writing. So I know I have resources for editing, but I would say that revising is more about my thoughts and structure, and that is usually what needs the most work.

AMS: How do you decide when you're done?

NT: There's something about finishing a piece of writing where I feel that I have said all that I needed to say, or I have successfully shown what I know. And I think that that's always felt like the goal of writing -- is to just make something tangible out of your thoughts, make something that other people can understand, out of what I'm thinking. And so, I guess, for me, I'm done with a piece of writing when I feel like I can understand it and other people can understand it, maybe without having known much about the subject. I really appreciate that moment where you take that breath, and you're just like, I've spoken all my thoughts, and I've put them together, and I've been able to tie them up. Here's the final product.

AMS: What writing experiences have meant the most to you?

NT: I think, what was very memorable wasn't necessarily pleasant. But when I was in high school, I had an English teacher... gave me back an essay, and she was kind of fed up, and she said, "You have to get to the point quicker." And she gestured at the three other people sitting near me, and she was like, "One of these three people is very good at doing that." And they all sort of looked at each other, and we all were like, well who is it? And that was like a little shady, but I was also like, you know what, yeah. I can't be pretending anymore that my writing is some sort of gold standard, or that because I can write a long essay, that's a good essay, or because I can finish an essay in forty-five minutes that that means that it's all good. So I think it meant a lot to me because it taught me that we have a lot to learn from other students, not just teachers. We can learn from each other how to write better, rather than looking up to an adult or a professor who's kind of in that teaching authority position. Because we're kind of surrounded by good writers, and we have to be able to take suggestions and learn from each other.

AMS: And what would you like professors at DePauw to know about writing from a student perspective?

NT: I guess I would want them to know that writing is very personal, and I've always found writing to be an intimate thing. And so, if you take away the liberties of students to speak in their own voice and to express themselves on a thought, I think it's taking away their invitation to get closer to people. And I think that, as learners, maybe particularly so for younger students, that

that can be really kind of destructive for their self expression in... in the world, not just in writing. If you don't let people be vulnerable because you kind of force a certain structure or language onto them, it can be really hurtful to their character.

AMS: What would you like other students to know about writing?

NT: I think I want other people to stop saying that they're bad writers because people often think of bad writing like grammatical issues, and you know, like... oh, this paragraph is only like two sentences long and I don't know what else to say. Or maybe like, I realised half-way through the paper that my thesis is flawed. And every time somebody says that to me, I'm like, well then write about it. Like, if you notice something bad about your thesis, make a paragraph that could advocate for that, and then tie it all together somehow. Like you get to be creative. And just because you notice your own flaws, it doesn't make you a bad writer. It actually makes you a good writer. Cus you're not just turning something in that's words on a piece of paper, you're actually turning in something that you invested time thinking about and you've made it your own, and so I'm just sick and tired of people saying that because it's so much more than the technical aspect of writing.