

**This is an excerpt of an interview project that I completed for one of my Professional Writing classes. I had to interview a Professional Writer in the workplace and analyze the interview. This is one of the pieces I submitted that resulted in my winning the Crouse Scholarship of \$5,000 this spring.**

### **Nature of Report**

In order to gain insight into the different opportunities available for students pursuing a career in writing, the students of English 306 were instructed to interview an individual within the field of Professional Writing. There were no stipulation about the medium used for the interview or the types of questions that needed to be asked. Students were permitted to select their own respondent in hopes that they would be able to interview someone involved in a career path that the student found interesting. The report is directed toward fellow classmates, as well as future students in English 306. The report aims to inform students about the medium of screenplay writing. Additionally, the report will explore the connections between screenplay writing and professional writing within the framework of class lectures and concepts that have been discussed throughout the semester.

### **Respondent's Background**

The respondent I conducted an interview with a Purdue graduate student named Travis Dorsch. Mr. Dorsch is in the midst of completing a degree in sports psychology. Recently he wrote and produced a screenplay for a film called "Thick as Thieves," which was screened locally in West Lafayette.

His partners are Ben Todd and Lloyd Tate, two other Purdue University students. Mr. Todd and Mr. Tate had collectively formed a production company called "Brigand Pictures" and released their first film in 2006. The film was titled "Last Chance" and it centered around a group of rogue assassins. Mr. Dorsch happened to be the in audience for one of the screenings of "Last Chance." Afterwards he met with Mr. Tate and Mr. Todd and expressed his interest in being a part of their production company.

Mr. Dorsch was given a brief outline of ideas that were being explored for a sequel to "Last Chance." Using those notes, he created the screenplay for their newest film "Thick as Thieves." In October, "Thick as Thieves" was screened at Fowler Hall on Purdue University's campus. Currently, Mr. Dorsch is at work creating the screenplay for the third, and final installment in what will be called the "Last Chance" trilogy. As of now, he has not decided whether he wants to pursue screenwriting as a full time career, but he indicated that it is a possibility.

### **Why this Respondent was Chosen**

I found an article about Mr. Dorsch in the *Purdue Exponent* the day after "Thick as Thieves" was screened at Purdue. Since most screenplay writers live on either the West or East coast of the country, I was very excited to find one at Purdue. I chose to interview Mr. Dorsch because I am very interested in the field of screenwriting. I think it is a very interesting career path because it blends creativity and professional writing.

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## **Goals for the Interview**

I had several specific goals in mind when I approached this interview. First of all, I wanted to learn more about the processes that go into making a screenplay. As previously mentioned, I think screenplay writing is an interesting career path and I wanted to develop a deeper understanding of the mechanics that go into creating this type of document. Additionally, I wanted to expose my classmates to another form of professional writing that has never been discussed in our textbooks.

## **Narrative of the Interview**

For this interview, the questions were sent via email. I sent him ten questions on Tuesday, November 4. He sent a reply on November 6. After analyzing the answers, I sent 5 follow up questions on November 10, which he responded to the following day.

At first, I was concerned that he might be too busy with his graduate study work to have time for my interview. Luckily, this was not the case. He answered my questions very promptly, which was a relief. Since the interview was done through email, we did not have much interaction aside from a few emails that established contact and described the project. I was sure to send emails thanking him for his time after I received his answers.

## **Impression of the Interview**

My impression from this interview was very positive. Not only did he answer my questions in a timely manner, but his answers were also witty, insightful and fun to read. He wrote in a very conversational tone, which made his answers easy to read and relatable. Email interviews can be difficult because the interviewer is unable to get a strong read on the person they are interviewing. Despite establishing contact with my respondent, I have never met him face to face or even heard his voice before. However, I do have a verbatim transcript of his answers to my questions, which is very helpful in another sense. All in all, I was pleased with the outcome of the interview.

## **Impact on My View of Professional Writers**

Going into this interview, I was expecting Mr. Dorsch to be an English graduate student, but he is actually is sports psychology. I found it very interesting that someone with a social science background would be writing screenplays in their free time. I think that this is very telling regarding the backgrounds of professional writers. Their degrees can be from a wide variety of fields and not limited to an English or Communication departmental degree.

As previously mentioned, this interview made me realize that writing skills can be translated into multiple different career fields. Mr. Dorsch writes using a different style for his graduate psychology classes than the screenplay format. Yet, in both cases his ability to write in a clear, concise manner culminates in a well written document. It seems that the

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most important thing to learn when approaching these fields is the idea of "normative discourse." This term, discussed in the Faigley article, refers to the different conventions that a document must adhere to in order to be taken seriously within a given field. Faigley writes "Within a language community, people acquire specialized types of discourse competence that enable them to participate in specialized groups" (52). Screenwriting and psychology have very different conventions that need to be followed in order to be considered credible, yet Mr. Dorsch is able to craft adept documents for both mediums. Thus, to be a talented professional writer, it appears imperative that students have the ability to recognize and make use of normative discourse.

I hope that my interview has exposed my classmates to a different form of professional writing. When I describe professional writing to my friends or family members they inevitably think of either journalism or technical writing. I wanted to show with my interview that professional writing can be used in creative outlets as well. Screenplays are very technical documents. They function as an technical outline for the action that is about to be captured on screen, since they contain information for the actors, the directors and the entire production crew. The document itself has a large number of conventions as well right down to the proper type of font and the exact measurements needed for each type of direction. I think that they are an interesting blend of technical and creative writing, which is why I was drawn to interview Mr. Dorsch in the first place.

The respondent's final words of advice were "Be open to anything." This is excellent advice for professional writers, because there are so many avenues that can be explored with writing. Even though the job prospects do not look particularly strong right now, I am confident that graduating with a Professional Writing degree will lead to many job offers. This is because I would be willing to work in a variety of different work environments and fields.

## **Information that is Still Needed**

I wish that I had been able to get more information about the production company in the interview and the process of making the film. He was not very descriptive on either of those topics, even when I sent follow up questions specifying those answers. I found what I could online and in the *Exponent* archives, but I think it would have been helpful to have a little bit more information.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, I think the interview was very successful. I learned more about a career path that I am interested in, and I was able to explore broader possibilities in the field of professional writing. I found a great deal of commonalties between the field of professional writing the art of screenplay writing, including rhetorical principals, connections to class readings and

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lectures. I hope my research enlightened my classmates on a career path that they had not considered before, in addition to providing them with more information about professional writing careers in general.

## Appendix A- Original Interview Questions

1. What are you studying as a graduate student?
2. How will your graduate studies influence your future career?
3. When did you first become interested in screenplay writing?
4. How much experience with screenplay writing do you have?
5. What kind of process do you use to write the screenplays?
6. How is screenplay writing different from other types of writing?
7. What kinds of projects are you currently working on?
8. Do you see yourself as more of a screenplay writer or a producer?
9. What advice do you have for aspiring screenplay writers?
10. What are some of your goals for the future?

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## Appendix B- Transcript of Interview Questions

### **1. What are you studying as a graduate student?**

I am pursuing my PhD in Sport Psychology.

### **2. How will your graduate studies influence your future career?**

I am on track to work in academia ... probably as a professor at a research institute like Purdue (as opposed to a teaching college).

### **3. When did you first become interested in screenplay writing?**

Well, I guess when the co-founders of a production company come to you and ask you to write their next screenplay, you get interested in a hurry. No, seriously, I never thought this was something I'd be doing. It just kind of happened and I was excited, so I rolled with it!

### **4. How much experience with screenplay writing do you have?**

None really. Although I've always done creative writing on the side (e.g., short stories, poems, pieces for magazines and newsletters), "Thick as Thieves" was my first foray into the medium of screenplay writing.

### **5. What kind of process do you use to write the screenplays?**

The most important thing in any piece of writing is clarity. Everything always makes sense in your head, but it needs to make sense in the consumers head. Whether it's a newspaper article, a book, or a movie, you are ultimately judged by the consumer, so you need to write to them. Secondly, it needs to tell a story. Even scientific/scholarly writing, like I do at Purdue, needs to tell a story ... a story about the data in an experiment or a phenomenon in nature, whatever. A screenplay is the same way, I'm just telling the story about characters. The way to hook the reader or viewer is to make that story accessible to them. In other words, create characters that they can relate to. "Thick as Thieves" is about assassins who are on a mission to take out their boss's enemy, so most people probably can't relate, right ... therefore, it was my job as a screenwriter to create layered characters so folks could relate to other aspects of them apart from their profession.

### **6. How is screenplay writing different from other types of writing?**

I guess I sort of answered that above. Stylistically, though, I would say it is less bound than the scholarly writing I do. Which, I guess, is why I'm drawn to it. It all comes from within, rather than reporting on something you've done or observed. This is very cathartic and allows the creative juices to

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flow. So, while scientific writing can sometimes seem like "work", crafting screenplays seems more like an artful expression.

### **7. What kinds of projects are you currently working on?**

"Blue Falcon" will be the final installment of Brigand Pictures' Last Chance trilogy ... it is in outline stage right now, so I'll be hammering on it over the next few months.

### **8. Do you see yourself as more of a screenplay writer or a producer?**

Screenwriter for sure. Not that I wouldn't want to produce in the future, but that is a full time gig.

### **9. What advice do you have for aspiring screenplay writers?**

Write. Write. Write. Don't discriminate ... write letters to the editor, poems, short stories, whatever. And also read a lot so you can see what you like and don't like in other authors' works. Just like anything else, no one lives long enough to make all the mistakes themselves ... so you've got to learn from others' mistakes if you're ever going to get anywhere!

### **10. What are some of your goals for the future?**

Finish my PhD ... Get a job ... and see what the wind blows my way. I've always found in life that whenever you make plans, the big guy upstairs always has a different idea. Like I said, I never expected to be doing this, but it fell into my lap and I have loved every minute of it! So, be open to anything and everything and do it the best you can!

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## Appendix C- Follow Up Questions

1. What exactly does sports psychology entail? Is this what you studied as an undergraduate? What kind of work are you doing as a graduate student?
2. Could you tell the story of how you became involved with screenplay writing?
3. Along the same lines, could you possibly give me a little bit more background on your screenwriting projects? You mentioned that you are working on the third installment of your trilogy featuring assassins. Can you outline what they have been about?
4. Would you say that screenwriting will be something that you will do as a side project as opposed to a full time career?
5. What is the most important thing you have learned from your screenwriting experience?

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## Appendix D- Transcript of Follow Up Questions

### **1. What exactly does sports psychology entail? Is this what you studied as an undergraduate? What kind of work are you doing as a graduate student?**

I study the same principles a psychologist might, except I study them in athletes. Many sport psychologists are interested in applied work, but I am more interested in the research side of the field. Specifically, I study the phenomenon of youth sport parenting and how and why parents change as a result of their child's youth sport participation (think Little League Dads and Hockey moms).

### **2. Could you tell the story of how you became involved with screenplay writing?**

Like I said, I was really impressed with the boys at Brigand Pictures (Ben Todd and Lloyd Tate) when I screened their first film in 2006 ("Last Chance"). I told them I could relate to their drive and singular passion in chasing their dream and that I'd like to help any way I could ... the rest is history. The opportunity kind of fell into my lap when they gave me the synopsis for the "Thick as Thieves" story and I ran with it, creating the entire screenplay from their two pages of notes!

### **3. Along the same lines, could you possibly give me a little bit more background on your screenwriting projects? You mentioned that you are working on the third installment of your trilogy featuring assassins. Can you outline what they have been about?**

The third installment ("Blue Falcon") will tie the first two together and conclude the trilogy. Without giving too much away, we want the characters to come full circle and confront one another in a final epic battle on the slopes of the European Alps.

### **4. Would you say that screenwriting will be something that you will do as a side project as opposed to a full time career?**

As I said last time, I'm not limiting myself at all. My PhD will set me up nicely in academia, but this could also turn into a cool gig if Brigand Pictures hits it big. One never does know!

### **5. What is the most important thing you have learned from your screenwriting experience?**

Don't put walls on what you think you can accomplish ... get out of your comfort zone and learn to love it when people question whether or not you can do something. There's nothing better in the world than proving people wrong!