

Sample Interview Essay

(701 words—I'd like you to shoot for 600 minimum):

As a prerequisite to writing my university discourse paper, I interviewed Professor Bob Weisberg, who's a professor of political science at OSU. My "humanities" discipline is law, and although Weisberg doesn't teach in law school, he has a law degree, used to work as a lawyer, and has taught law-related courses in the past, so it seemed like he'd have a good understanding of writing in the legal profession. As it turned out, he'd written legal briefs in several different lawsuits on behalf of his clients, and I also found out that he published a law review article in the UCLA Law Review in 1998.

Weisberg started the interview by asking what type of law I was writing about; this took me aback, because I was just planning to write about law in general, since I figured it would be similar across various legal fields. I told him this and he said that there *were* many commonalities across the different types of law—criminal, environmental, civil rights, etc., but that the differences were significant as well. I indicated that I was primarily interested in the overarching characteristics, and he said this was fine.

Throughout the interview, Weisberg kept stopping to consult different legal books, and this was the part of the interview I found most surprising. Weisberg said that the vocabulary used in law is so specialized that even lawyers have to look it up all the time. I mentioned I thought this was what people learned in law school, and Weisberg said law school is more about learning legal *concepts*, and that the main trick with the vocabulary is having the resources to find the vocabulary you need.

According to Weisberg, the crux of solid legal writing is the ability to be straightforward while also being passionate. He said this is a difficult balance to attain, because people often get vague when they try to state a point meaningfully. One example he gave me was that if a person was writing a legal brief to a judge, he or she might write, "The only reasonable interpretation of the evidence is in favor of my client. In order to be consistent with prior court rulings, you must rule in favor of my client." This is good because it is being persuasive and logical. A person would *not* want to write, "In the interest of justice, my client must be freed! If you do not do so, it will fly in the face of law and justice across America." For law, this is considered "over the top" because it relies more on emotion than on logical reasoning. However, Weisberg asserted that unlike science and engineering writing, legal writing *does* place value on persuasive rhetoric and emotional appeals; it's just that they need to be grounded more heavily in logical reasoning than emotion.

I asked Weisberg about point of view specifically, because I know the Supreme Court writes its opinions in first person. He said that judges do this when they hand down an opinion, but that regular attorneys almost never do. For instance, when giving a brief to a judge, a person should not write, "I think Miranda v. Arizona relates directly to this case;" he or she should delete the "I think."

One other aspect of the interview I wanted to note was that throughout the entire thing, Weisberg kept reiterating that legal writing isn't "half as difficult as people think it is." He said that in a way, it's like learning a foreign language—but an easy one, and that if students are interested in doing legal research or going to law school, that they should not be intimidated by the language. "Lawyers aren't half as smart as people think," he told me at one point.

Overall, I expect that this interview will really help me write my paper, specifically in the areas of style, tone, and use of specialized vocabulary. Moreover, Weisberg was able to point me towards other resources I will be able to use to research my paper, namely Black's Law Dictionary, Emanuel Legal Briefs, and Legal Writing in a Nutshell, two of which I have found at Valley Library already.

General Topics You May Want to Address in Your Write-up:

- Why you interviewed this person (if they seem an unusual choice)
- This person's experience writing in the discipline
- Most surprising thing you learned from the interview
- Most interesting thing you learned from the interview
- Something your interviewee told you that you already knew
- Significant quotes from the interview and what they mean in the context of your paper
- Any other specific information from the interview that you'd like to relate
- How this helps your paper—what you think you'll be able to apply

Remember—you can do an additional interview write-up for extra credit!