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Learning Confidence: Final Experiential Learning Report

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Learning Confidence: Final Experiential Learning Report

For my experiential-learning credit, I completed two internships: a copywriting internship at Osborne Holdings and an editorial internship at 845 Press and the Temz Review. As my second major alongside the School for Advanced Studies in the Arts and Humanities (SASAH), I am completing an Honours Specialization in English Language and Literature and Creative Writing. I have long aspired to work in the field of writing, first wanting to be an author at the age of twelve and then aspiring to work as an editor in the publishing industry from the age of eighteen and through my undergraduate studies. As such, I chose these two internships specifically to learn more about both these career paths, editing and writing, and if they are something I should pursue upon graduation. I learned a lot from both of these internships, but I found that the primary takeaway to be successful in my future career is to be confident in my abilities, which was a significant learning curve through both experiences.

The most valuable takeaway from my time as a copywriting intern at Osborne Holdings was learning how to be more adaptable with my work, which helped me become more comfortable and confident with new and unfamiliar tasks. I took on this internship in my second year. During this time, I was still fairly new to university and in the process of figuring out my workstyle and academic voice. Then, when I began interning at Osborne Holdings, everything I thought I knew about writing was turned on its head. I was tasked with attempting forms of writing I had never encountered before, such as press releases and ghostwriting. I had to learn

how to use new platforms such as Loom, Otter.AI, and LinkedIn. I not only attended interviews but was also assigned to lead a couple throughout the internship. These experiences challenged me because they were far outside my comfort zone, as a writer and student, and I had to adjust to them within tight turnaround periods. In teaching me how to work with these challenges, my internship at Osborne Holdings prepared me to be a more adaptable and confident worker, be it as a student or in the workforce.

As I mentioned, the internship was built with many tight turnaround periods that I had to learn how to manage right away. Every week ran on the same schedule, with the kick-off call on Monday where my supervisor, Oliver Osborne, set out the expectations for the week with all the interns. Coming out of this call, I would know exactly what the week would entail and what I needed to accomplish for the final objective. There would then be a one-on-one check-in call with Oliver on Thursday morning, by which time I was tasked with having a rough draft or outline of the final deliverable, and then on Sunday I would turn in the final product. During the weeks that entailed interviews, these would happen on Tuesday or Wednesday, depending on participant availability for the week. As a university student, I was used to being given an assignment weeks, sometimes months, ahead of time. Particularly in my second year, I struggled a lot with procrastinating and leaving my assignments to be completed only a few days before. However, with this internship, I was required to start on the assignment for the week immediately. I needed material for the interview, then the check-in meeting, and the final copy a few days later. It suited my habits, to an extent, because the tight turnaround periods meant that I was working only in the days before something was due, but being on top of the assignment and producing multiple steps along the way was very new to me. This process taught me how to develop strategies to alter my usual work style to fit different schedules and expectations, which

is beneficial because this challenge will likely reproduce itself in any future professional engagements.

The weeks with interviews were particularly tight, presenting the challenge of managing my internship alongside other engagements. With progress reports due on Thursday, there was very little time between meetings to get the work done, especially when I still had a full course load on top of the work for Osborne Holdings. If the interview occurred on Tuesday, for example, there would be less than twenty-four hours between the kick-off call and interview to prepare the necessary material, such as scheduling and questions. Meanwhile, if the interview was conducted on Wednesday, there was then less than twenty-four hours to prepare the progress report for the check-in call. Even as I got better at being able to work with the tight turnaround periods, they remained challenging because I was managing the fifteen hours of work at the same time as having a full course load of university classes. With the later weeks in particular, I struggled with burnout between the additional meetings and assignments this internship added to my schedule. To manage this, I ended up choosing Fridays, when I had no classes or meetings, to take off. I learned that it was important to give myself that day where I could take some rest to ensure that I could work productively for the next week. Previously, I was nervous to take any time off at all because there was so much work to do, but I learned that being an effective worker means that I need to take care of myself so that I can work to the best of my abilities. This helped me become more confident because I now better understand my basic needs and how to say no when something becomes too much. This has been a strategy that I have implemented in the final two years of my undergraduate degree because I am overloading on courses, working a part-time job, and leading the Undergraduate English Society at the university. With all these engagements, there were weeks where I had twelve-hour days, every single day. After my

experience at Osborne Holdings, as my first exposure to managing a heavier workload, I was able to prioritize taking time for myself at the end of those weeks, despite more work coming, because I learned that it was a crucial step to avoiding burnout.

Every week at Osborne Holdings was designed to target different forms of writing that a copywriter would experience in their career, this made me more confident because I developed versatility with my written abilities. Much of my undergraduate career up until that point was founded mostly on essays, with the occasional narrative-fiction assignment for a writing class. Though writing articles and emails were not completely foreign to me, they were in a professional capacity and learning how to adjust to these new writing styles has proven essential to the success of my undergraduate career. In my upper years, these different kinds of writing became common for my assignments in classes for both SASAH and my creative-writing classes. I have had to write cover letters, articles, blog posts, and more since I finished this internship, and the preparation Osborne Holdings gave me for being able to change my written tone and structure helped my success in these future assignments. Undoubtedly, this application will continue into the workforce because, whether I pursue a career in writing, editing, or anything else, being able to write good emails, letters, and new forms of writing will help me tackle these tasks with confidence.

The first three weeks of the internship were designed well because they were each familiar forms of writing, but with additional challenges, which helped me grow more confident in enhancing my existing abilities. In week one, Oliver tasked me with writing three emails, each with the same purpose, but fluctuating in tone. Though I far from mastered this ability, the foundation in experimenting with this tonal difference has greatly helped me in my university career as I have been able to expand upon the skill and use it to be more precise and intentional

with my tone when writing assignments. The second week was writing a feature article about Decarb.Earth, which required an interview with the founder of the company. Oliver took the lead in this interview to help ease us into the experience but allowed our team to compile the questions and gave us the chance to ask any ourselves at the end. Typically, I struggle with speaking up in groups, so I was grateful for this slow introduction where I could work on building my comfort in an interview situation. This was important too because in the third week, the interns became the interviewers as we were tasked with writing an article about Oliver's new company Main Street Arts Club (MSAC) and writing another long-form article about it. That week, I witnessed a development of my abilities from the previous two weeks. My written abilities had already begun to improve, as my prose was more hard-hitting and succinct, while the structure was better laid out. This improvement helped me build my confidence, as I was rather unsatisfied with the quality of my work from the first two weeks as I struggled with the tasks I was assigned, but seeing that development brought me faith in my writing abilities.

Week four brought a significant challenge for me, as I am a writer who likes to follow the rules a lot, but I could not do that when writing the press release. I had never before written or even read a press release, so I relied heavily on the template that Oliver provided. However, when I simply went about the product by filling in the blanks with the necessary information, the release was very awkward and did not convey the proper information. During our check-in meeting, Oliver encouraged me to break the rules of the template and restructure the release to better fit my needs. This was a significant learning curve for me because I am a very formula-driven student. I prioritize adhering to conventions above making more unique choices in my writing. However, after I reworked the structure according to what I thought would work best for the piece, it turned out much better than my initial draft. The most important takeaway from this

experience was that I need to trust in myself more. Now, in my assignments for other classes, I have been able to take more risks with my writing and I have seen a significant growth in my marks after gaining this confidence.

The fifth week entailed ghostwriting an article for the founder of Decarb.Earth, which required me to reflect upon the previous skills I had acquired throughout the internship. It was intimidating because I had never written a piece that was meant to be anything but in my own words. I had to call on the skills of changing my tone from the first week, writing articles from the third week, and trusting my abilities from the third week. I revisited the interview we conducted in the second week and reviewed it a few times to try and get the tone of the founder down. I was very disappointed in the work that I produced that week because no matter how much time I put into the final product, it was not the quality of work I strive to produce. This, however, was an important lesson to learn: not everything I do is going to be the best quality, especially when the concept is brand new to me. Since then, I have been able to more confidently turn in projects with the outcome of which I may not be perfectly happy with but accept that they were done to the best of my abilities.

The next three weeks followed that same pattern, building upon those same skills the internship had been designed to teach. In week six, I wrote a pitch deck where the primary challenge was writing succinctly. In week seven, I wrote another ghostwritten article and just as in week five, it required pulling from the experiences of previous weeks. Finally, in week eight, Oliver ran an employability session where we worked on cover letters and LinkedIn profiles. These three weeks were where I saw the most application and growth of my abilities, particularly with my second experience with ghostwriting. The piece I produced that week was much better

than that of week five, which proved to me that some things just take practice. I became more confident because I could see that these skills and the experience as a whole were paying off.

What I appreciate most about this internship is that Oliver Osborne, my supervisor, was very intentional in the way he designed the internship, founded on growth and exposure. The schedule itself speaks to that, as the weeks involving different forms of writing target numerous skills an employee would need to be successful as a copywriter and the tight turnaround periods showcase expectations that will inevitably be mirrored in any future career. Oliver was extremely helpful every week, especially in the one-on-one check-in meetings. What he complimented most often was my outlines. When I first turned in an outline instead of a full rough draft for the progress report on Thursday, I was worried that it would reflect poorly on me that I had not finished a full rough draft. Instead, the outline made it even easier for me to communicate my ideas and for Oliver to advise me on my work going forward. Since then, outlines have become a crucial part of my writing process, as they have helped me tackle my assignments in university with more precision. It was with this encouragement that Oliver brought throughout the internship that I was able to build such confidence in my abilities.

The outlines also highlighted my interest in process and revision, which is what primarily draws my interest to a career as an editor. Though Oliver was extremely supportive, I think what I learned from this internship is that copywriting is not a career where I will be entirely satisfied. I had wanted to be a writer since I was young, but it was too draining for me in this internship. Despite this, I would recommend this internship to any student interested in writing, even if they are uncertain about copywriting. This internship taught me about not only writing but also conducting myself in a professional environment. The preparation I now have for entering the workforce is so helpful, even though I completed this internship over a year ago. Ultimately, the

skills that I developed during this internship are invaluable and have made me a stronger student and writer.

My experience as an editorial intern at 845 Press and the Temz Review helped me grow more confident as well because it challenged me to become more decisive, provide feedback in a professional capacity, and work with manuscripts outside my comfort zone. This internship was unique because it did not exist last year: Professor Aaron Schneider and I developed it here at Western University as an opportunity where I could have some hands-on editorial experience. Doing an internship in the field of publishing has been a goal of mine since the beginning of my undergraduate studies, as becoming an editor has long been an aspiration of mine. My degree had been refined to focus on these editorial aspirations, in that I have used many of my assignments to try and refine my written abilities as much as I can. However, this internship brought insights into what working as an editor would be like on a professional scale, something which I could not have otherwise gained from my studies.

The most significant change going from Osborne Holdings to 845 Press was the schedule format, which for my editorial internship was much more self-regulated, and this required me to be more confident and decisive. While Osborne Holdings had small assignments delivered each week with frequent meetings, this internship was structured around two comprehensive manuscripts which I worked on for the full sixteen weeks with infrequent progress meetings throughout. As a detail-oriented and independent person, I found the latter structure plays well to these strengths. For both manuscripts, I had the time to get a good feel for them and take the time I needed to ensure the feedback I delivered was effective and nuanced. However, the trouble with a self-regulated format is that it required me to be individually decisive and confident in the choices I made, which is something I struggled with a lot. I did numerous read-throughs of both

manuscripts because I was very nervous to make a comment without fully ensuring that I understood the intentions of the author. For “Swing, Swing” in particular, I did seven rounds of revision. I did one to get a feel for the author’s style and intentions, another to make notes on a separate document, one to add comments, one for line edits, and then three more to ensure that all of my comments were effective and beneficial. These numerous read-throughs were partly because I wanted to make sure I was being very attentive to detail, but largely because I doubted my judgement. Furthermore, I doubted my authority as well, because as an undergraduate student with no prior experience, I felt as if I had no place commenting on professional manuscripts. As I gained more experience, I was able to be more decisive with the second manuscript, “Civilian of Dirt,” but I still did many revisions to triple-check my work. Though I was not able to fully overcome my indecision, the processes of this internship helped me develop strategies to become more confident in my decisions, such as doing additional revisions and reaching out to peers to get a second opinion.

The first manuscript I worked on, “Swing, Swing,” was my first exposure to editing on a more professional level and this transition was a significant struggle for me. Though I have previously edited essays, creative writing pieces, and short stories for my peers in both academic and personal settings, the experience was entirely different within the professional sphere. With my peers, I have a direct relationship with them which helps me gauge some of the feedback I give them and how direct I am about it. Usually, I focus on having an even balance of constructive and positive comments, which was easier to do when I had a personal connection to the writer. However, with these manuscripts, I never had any direct communication with the writer: all I had to determine their style and purpose was the material in front of me. The process began when Professor Schneider sent me the manuscript, with the instruction to make comments

on my own as I saw fit. As mentioned above, I did seven rounds of revision before I could be confident with the comments I made. This differs from my experience with my peers because, with them, I can more decisively be honest and write my first thoughts down. The comments I made on “Swing, Swing” were more veiled in that I would begin by complimenting one part of a decision they made and then suggest a way that they could change it. For example, I complimented the unique titles that were used but suggested that they should be made more consistent to match better. Through meeting with Professor Schneider, however, I refined my thoughts more and was direct in the suggestions I wrote in the three-hundred-word edit summary which was forwarded to the author. This process helped me learn to be more objective in my editing. When my only experience had been editing the work of my peers or myself, I always took into account the subjectivity of writing, because it is a very personal form of art. However, I was able to find a balance in which I could respect the work of the writer but make comments which I believed, on an objective level, benefitted the quality of the work as a whole. This process helped me become more decisive, which I learned is imperative to success in an editorial career, both in terms of being able to work efficiently and being confident in my abilities.

The second step for the manuscripts was putting them into Microsoft Publisher, and through this process, I became more adaptable and prepared to work with new technologies in the future. Because I was unfamiliar with Microsoft Publisher, I was learning how to not only format a manuscript but also operate the program. I ran into more difficulty than I expected, particularly when certain passages would paste into the program with odd formatting and line spacing. Fortunately, I figured everything out fairly quickly because of the help of Professor Schneider and my ability to look up any needed solutions on the internet. I found that Google was most effective for smaller needs, such as how to change a font or the line spacing, whereas

any bigger questions, such as how I could get the program to insert horizontal lines, were more easily solved by reaching out to Professor Schneider. However, even after understanding how to use the program, I struggled with all the possible options for formatting that Microsoft Publisher provided. Professor Schneider provided me with a template and an example to use when working with “Swing, Swing,” but there were so many options to go through in terms of font, line breaks, and how to format the text messages which appeared in certain stories. Similar to the process of revisions, I discussed the edits I made in Microsoft Publisher with Professor Schneider over the course of three meetings and with his advice and knowledge of the program, I was able to refine my decisions. In playing around with the program and learning the most effective ways to get familiar with new technologies, I built a crucial skillset which will benefit my future career, as I will undoubtedly have to use different programs and processes with every new job I accept.

The second manuscript, “Civilian of Dirt,” was a challenge for me because I am not nearly as familiar with poetry as I am prose, but with this new territory, I learned how to work with projects which are outside my usual genre. In comparison to my experience editing “Swing, Swing,” “Civilian of Dirt” was much smoother in that I needed fewer meetings with Professor Schneider and could work a bit more confidently on my own since I was more familiar with the processes. Between the two chapbooks, the most significant differences were the genre and that with poetry, it was crucial to maintain the structure of the pieces as set out by the author. I found it sometimes difficult to maintain the structure because the author used a unique system of indents both between stanzas and within lines, which meant I had to get creative when transferring the writing from Microsoft Word to Publisher. In this sense, the formatting was more technical, which was easier than when formatting “Swing, Swing,” as I did not have to make as many decisions. Editing “Civilian of Dirt” was the most difficult task. However, with some research

and reaching out to some of my peers who are more accustomed to poetry, I did fairly well in my comments for the poetry manuscript. Editing outside of my genre is crucial to any future career because I will have a greater range in my abilities and be able to more easily approach tasks outside of my typical experience.

The most influential aspect of this internship in developing my confidence as an editor was the feedback that I received from both my supervisor, Professor Schneider, and the authors. As mentioned, many of the decisions I made could be done decisively after receiving the support of Professor Schneider and running my ideas past him. This feedback reassured me that I should trust my judgement more. It also taught me that if I am ever unsure about anything, all I have to do is reach out and ask for a second opinion. Asking for help is something that I struggle with a lot, as I like being fully self-reliant and I worry that the questions are bothersome or make me seem less qualified. This internship taught me that this is not the case. When it came to the authors, I never had any direct contact with them, but their reactions to my feedback helped me build confidence in my abilities as an editor. Professor Schneider forwarded me a comment from the author of “Civilian of Dirt” in which they said that “a lot of [the edits] really resonated” with them. I appreciated hearing that the comments “resonated” with the author, as I felt as if the effort that I put into finding a balance of constructive but respectful comments was successful. Though I did not hear back from the author of “Swing, Swing,” I was able to see how my suggestions influenced the author when working on the revised manuscript. They did not incorporate all the edits, but they did accept many of them. The author cut and rearranged pieces as per my advice, specifically in varying the different perspectives more evenly throughout the collection and moving a specific piece to the end as I recommended. Seeing so much of my advice incorporated assured me that, as an editor, my input is valuable enough to make

substantial improvements to these manuscripts. With the feedback I received from both authors and Professor Schenider being primarily positive, I have grown more confident in my editorial abilities and from there, I hope to be more decisive in future editorial endeavours.

The professional experience I gained from this experience is invaluable not only to building my qualifications for job applications but also becoming more efficient and decisive. I was glad to learn that this internship will be continued for more SASAH students, as I would highly recommend it to any student considering a similar career path. The difference between editing on a personal and professional level is a lot more different than I anticipated, and having that experience, while also promoting the publication of local writers' work, was crucial to my development as an editor. This internship assured me that being an editor is a career that I would enjoy but that, since it is a largely self-regulated experience, I will have to be self-confident and decisive: two skills that I will continue to work on as I enter the workforce.

Ultimately, both of these internships promoted my interior growth through developing skills of technological adaptability, written diversity, schedule flexibility, decisiveness, and editorial objectivity. Altogether, these skills helped me become more confident in myself and my abilities. It was particularly interesting to see this growth from my internship at Osborne Holdings because of how long ago it happened. As I looked back at myself as a second-year student when putting together my presentation for the Learning from Experience event, I realized just how much of a profound impact these internships had on my growth as a student. My writing has become more precise and intentional, and I am able to take more pride in the work I complete as a SASAH student. Not only from my own experience but also hearing how experiential learning affected my peers at the Learning from Experience event, I better understand how important internships and community-based learning are to the growth of a

student. Throughout this report, I mentioned how crucial my learnings were to my future career paths and they have done so much to prepare me for the workforce. However, these internships also made me a stronger student and person in general because of the confidence they helped me build.