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The Written Interview Assignment

The intent of the Dan and Mandy assignment was to get you thinking about the *kinds* of information that will be useful for you to generate in your self-assessment experience. This will be helpful to you as you begin the next assignment, the written interview.

When an individual begins career counseling, the usual first step is a lengthy, in-depth discussion about the person's background. This interview provides a context and typically generates rich data about topics important to consider in making career decisions.

Since we are unable to have this interview with you personally, we have designed a means to simulate the interview and to generate that data. We have constructed some questions that will lead you through a typical background career counseling interview. Writing your answers to the questions will take a good deal of time-how much will depend on you. If you write too much, you may feel overwhelmed in the analytic stage. How much is too little or too much? That's up to you. Our experience has been that somewhere between twenty-five and seventy-five handwritten pages is a useful amount. That may seem like a lot, but it will become apparent how easy it is to talk-or, in this case, write-about yourself.

If you would rather dictate your answers, feel free to do so, but we strongly encourage you to make arrangements to have a written or typed transcript

made. This written copy will be invaluable later on. You will need to be able to go back and read your answers.

If you decide to type your answers, don't worry about typographical errors or neatness. Going back to correct or to tidy up will tend to break the flow of your thoughts-and the natural flow is important.

There are eleven questions, one each on the eleven pages that follow. The point of using separate pages is that our dialogue is going to proceed in stages, as a good dialogue should. The natural development of your interview and the purity of your answers will be enhanced if you do *not* look ahead. Read the contents of each page only after you have responded completely to the previous question we, your interviewers, have posed. The point is not to spring any great surprises, but to facilitate an interview-like sequence in your ideas. To do that, we have to provide a series of cues, one at a time, so that the effect is one of question, then reply, then question, then reply.

Your replies will be much longer than the questions, of course. As is the case with any good data-generating interview, this one is going to consist of much more of *your* talk than of our talk. When you have finished what you have to say in response to each of our questions and are ready to go on, turn to the next page. We will get a few remarks of our own into the conversation, and then ask another question.

Do not feel that you have to complete the written interview in one sitting. In fact, after Question 4 we encourage you to leave it for a day or so. Feel free to leave your writing at *any* point and then to come back and resume.

Occasionally the questions may seem a bit redundant. That really depends on what you've said in response to the previous questions. If you come to a question you have already answered completely, then go on.

When you have set aside some time for your first

sitting and are ready to start this "interview," please turn the page to Question 1. Relax, and write as you "talk" in reply to the question.

NOTE:

DO NOT SKIP AHEAD IN THE INTERVIEW.
READ THE FOLLOWING PAGE FIRST, AND THEN ANSWER EACH
QUESTION SEQUENTIALLY.

Question 1

The goal you and we now share is to generate good data from which you can make valid inferences about your own career. In the end it is you who will make the inferences, so in one sense, all through this exercise or even all through this course, you will be talking to yourself. We are, however, going to listen in. Our presence may enable you to talk to yourself in a more useful way. We will try to steer your soliloquy away from running around in circles. Which direction its tangent should take is not, however, something we intend to dictate or direct. Our job is to show you how to generate good information about yourself, for yourself.

What you are going to need is an account of your life more structured than free association, more personal than a resume or vita. The level of discourse will be that of personal history-an overview of all those years' diaries that you didn't keep (or at least the parts suitable for public consumption).

Just let it flow. If you belatedly realize you've left something out, put it in when you think about it. This is a *rough* manuscript! Order and method come later.

How long should your story be? As long as it takes to tell. Although an autobiography is usually book length, you may be able to tell your story in the equivalent of a chapter or two.

Tell away!

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Question 2

How late did you start your story? Most people get themselves born and then jump to age twenty when they began their official "career." In a resume you would lump all the distant past into a few lines under "miscellany." But if you want to collect the facts you'll need later to analyze your own career path, you should fill in some of the things that happened before you were an adult.

Not that we care if you fell in love with your rocking horse at the age of four. But if your story begins with "I graduated at Michigan," it probably leaves out some facts that are both public and pertinent. What do you remember about primary school or before? How about secondary school? What were your hobbies and avocations? What were the things you had to do but didn't like? What about . . . well, you tell us. This is your life.

What else, went on long ago?

Set aside your rambling account of your life from Question 1, and go ahead and write some more about the beginning of your life's story.

Unless you've already said all that need be said. If so, go on to the next question.

Question 3

Now, what about the unaccounted-for times? Perhaps there are none in your answers so far, but that would be unusual. Most people leave out little bits and pieces here and there. What went on during your summers? Was there a two-month gap between graduation and a first job? Did those four years at school include one spent abroad? Were there jobs that filled your evenings or weekends?

These odds and ends of living often teach lessons that matter. They often contain data you can use now even though you saw no relevance in the experience back then.

Set aside Question 2 and write some bits and pieces about the little odds and ends of living that got tucked in between the major activities you already have described.

Of course, if you have already covered everything, you won't have much work to do for this step in our conversation.

Question 4

What about the jobs you have had so far, both the full-time and the part-time ones? You may have mentioned most of them already. Think back and tell us what it was that you liked and disliked about those jobs. Was it the people? The location? The daily tasks? The pay? Or something else?

If you've already done that carefully, go on. Otherwise, take some time with this one. It can help later. When you've completed your answer to this question, take a break. Don't go on to the next one just yet. Let it all sit for a day, and then come back to Question 5.

Question 5

Hi again! Last time we asked you about your life and the jobs you've had to this point. Today we'd like to get a little more personal. Talk a little, if you already haven't, about the people in your life. At least the public facts. Who were you closest to, and why? Who used to bug you? What did each of your parents do? Tell us about other members of your family. Were there any major changes in your family structure? What about marriage? And your friends, who are they? What is it that draws you together? In other words, who are the people in your life, and how have you arranged your life around them?

We'll make good use of all these data later on. We ask no judgments of these people, only description. They were there in your life. They're a part of the picture. Tell us about them.

Question 6

Now, what about the future? Of course, that's the question we're working on in this course, so you may not have any clear answers. But sit back and try to imagine what your ideal future would be like and write it down. What's the happy ending?

Maybe there is more than just one dream. If so, tell us about them. Or if the future is too unclear, tell us about the uncertainties you see, the tradeoffs, the dilemmas.

Question 7

If we read back over the exchanges in your written interview, we can surely find a series of points when your situation changed. You left secondary school to go to college, college to go to graduate school. You may have entered one or another of the armed services from which you subsequently departed, presumably making a decision not to stay when your hitch was over. Perhaps during your college years you transferred, took a year elsewhere, or dropped out. Or simply changed major field. At the very least, you picked a summer job or school or vacation spot.

Before we go on with our written interview, please go back over your story and pick out these points of change. Make a list of them. Add some others that we haven't discussed if others now occur to you. This list will be the backbone of our discussion as we continue our written interview.

Question 8

You may have already said something about the turning points you've just listed, but there is much to be learned by talking at greater length and in a more systematic way about them. Please go back and tell us a couple of things about each turning point.

First, what were the other options? Even in situations in which you thought you had no choice at all, in all likelihood you did. Maybe you applied only to one college; even so, what others did you consider? Did you have more than one acceptance? One's major field is not usually the one and only possibility ever thought about. Tell us about these other paths you did not take.

Second, tell us about the pros and cons of each of these options. It would be useful to know what the criteria were, the formal ones, the ones other influential people in your life were citing, and the real ones that determined which way you went.

Third, tell us how you arrived at your decisions. Were they easy choices? Perhaps some were made in large part for you? How long did they take? Did you talk to lots of other people? Maybe none? As you look back now, how did you wind your way through each of those turning points to where you are now?

Question 9

Your life changed in some ways after each of these turning points. After the turning point, what new things had importance? How was living different than it had been before? What new things stood out for you?

External circumstances presumably differed in obvious ways. A dormitory is not the same as your own home. But the point is, what changed *for you*? Was there in some ways a new you? More subtly, was there a new texture of living? How did you react to it?

As a part of your response, you might also want to reflect on which parts of your previous life are still with you, which have withered away, and which are locked up in a "wait until later" mode. Maybe electronics was a high school diversion, or skiing, or drama. Is it still? What effect did these turning points have on those interests?

Question 10

Again thinking about the turning points, what disillusionments did you suffer? Can you recall your expectations about college, or the army, or a job, and how these expectations contrasted with the event? Perhaps you were utterly realistic in advance-if so, that is a datum about you well worth recording.

Try to recall what you thought each situation was going to be like before you confronted it and then how it in fact turned out. Perhaps your expectations were dead wrong, perhaps they were right on target. Probably there were aspects of the new situation that would never have occurred to you even in your wildest imaginings!

At any rate, please try a little retrospection on the before-and-after view of each listed event. Perhaps even a table is indicated-As Seen Before and After-but a little narrative will serve too.

The emphasis here is on cognitive awareness, not on values. Did you know the facts?

Question 11

By now you must be aware of some repetition in what you've been saying. There probably are themes. What patterns do *you* see? In the past you have been basing your actions on certain kinds of considerations. Do they still hold true? Were the same criteria used in several decisions? Were your choices derived from similar processes? Can you see trends over time?

If you want to be systematic, you can make some tables showing the plus and minus factors, and perhaps also their weight, in each decision. What factors recur? Can you conceptualize a common factor that underlies apparently distinct events? If you arrange the decisions chronologically, do the choices evolve with time?

This last point is of special interest, since being able to observe yourself acting as if you held consistent values and beliefs is one thing and deciding to base your next decision on these same considerations is quite another. There are two sides to a career: where it has been and where it is going.

Can the array of ins and outs of your actions in the past reveal to you something of the direction of time's arrow?

When you have completed this reply, you are done with the interview. Put your replies together here in your notebook. It's been an exhausting experience, but we hope a very interesting one so far. We've enjoyed helping you generate this rather detailed and lengthy account of your life.

We'll both be referring to this written interview over and over again as the course progresses, so before you put it in your notebook, please go back and number each paragraph sequentially. You may have as much as sixty or seventy pages, with four or five paragraphs per page. That's over three hundred paragraphs. It will take a few minutes to do this, but it will really help later on. When you've numbered the paragraphs, you've completed your written interview.

We appreciate the time and effort it has taken to write it and trust that it will serve you well.

Upon Finishing the Written Interview

Now that you have completed your written interview, you probably are a little tired of it-even though it has no doubt generated a lot of fond (and maybe not so fond) memories and feelings. In order to get some distance from the written interview and to let your emotions settle a little, we ask you to set it aside for a while. We will go on with other parts of the self-assessment process and then come back to the written interview data.

Before we leave it, however, we would like to have you begin your Feelings Record. This will be a journal of your experiencing of the self-assessment process that will help you think more clearly-now and later-about what you are doing. It will also provide some valuable data later on.

Take a few minutes and write down on the follow-

ing page your reactions to the written interview. Did you enjoy it? Why or why not? How did you feel while you were writing it? How do you feel now?

Along the way, we will remind you to make note of your reactions to each instrument, but we encourage you to make notes of your feelings at any point in the process. Feel free to expand upon our reminders as much as you like.

We also encourage you to collect your entries in one place in order to make them easier to use later on. If you are using a three-ring binder, we suggest you make a separate index tab for the Feelings Record.

When you're done making your Feelings Record entry and have set aside an hour or so, turn the page and begin working on our next data -generating device, Sorting Life and Career Values.

Feelings Record-Written Interview