



Start writing essays

Different approaches to drafting and revising:

Jane Van Hool:

John Pilger talks about drafting.

John Pilger:

I'm certainly very pedantic. I'm, at the moment, as we speak, going through the fourth proof from my regular column in the *New Statesman*, and I think one of the reasons I write for the *New Statesman* is they tolerate me. They send me proofs through the fax, and I keep changing them, I keep adjusting them. I change them back, I keep refining it. I've always done that. When I started out on the road as a correspondent, it was amazing in those days when you, when you think I was meant to be writing something that had a certain urgency about it, I would spend several days crafting it, and I would worry that I was very slow, but, in fact, I'm not slow I'm very fast, but I do spend a lot of time polishing the words. That's, I think that's part of the fun of writing really.

Jane Van Hool:

Anna Davin, historian and author.

Anna Davin:

I love revising. The hardest thing for me is, is the first draft. Once I've got something down, the bones of what I'm doing, then I love to play with it and enlarge it and revise. I'll often start my work each day if I'm in a writing phase, by reading what I wrote the day before, and I may completely rewrite it, but it'll take less time to rewrite than it took me to write in the first place, so then I've got time to go on again, and gradually the chapter will build itself up in that way. But I really enjoy revising and trying to cut out anything that's, that's fuzzy or unnecessary to get it reading as clearly and sharply as possible, without wasted words, without ambiguities, with lots of examples and, so that it, it leaps off the page for the reader.

Jane Van Hool:

John Humphrys.

John Humphrys:

I'm constantly not so much redrafting as rethinking. Scarcely a sentence survives. I almost I, I write in the case of the *Sunday Times* about fifteen hundred words, and most of my sentences are fairly short so that's a lot of sentences in one column. And I doubt that more than half a dozen of them survive the writing process. I re-write almost every sentence, one way or another, either as I'm going along because I re-read a great deal, I go back over what I've read all the time. Or in, in the final re-read, as it were, and then an awful lot gets changed. And I edit constantly as I'm going along. It has to be - in my case - about fourteen hundred and fifty words, and that's that. And if it's much more or much less you have to do something about it. So there is a constant editing process going on as well as the redrafting process.

Jane Van Hool:

Richard Dawkins.

Richard Dawkins:

Always, every time you read through what you're writing, try to anticipate what could be misunderstood here? Who could get this wrong, what, what kind of mistake, could a reader make at this point? And have I put it in such a way that, Oh my God, he could have thought I meant so and so, when actually I meant so and so. I've got to change those words round to make it no, no longer possible for that misunderstanding to be made.