



Start writing essays

Getting another perspective

Jane Van Hool:

You might find it useful to get a different perspective on your work. Jane Dorner.

Jane Dorner:

I think that, by a gradual honing process you start to get nearer to the point you're trying to make. But you can go off the boil and not see the fact that it's not making sense because you've got so close to it that you can't do any more yourself. And I think that it's at that point that you need an editor. Also, if somebody reads your own work and is able to comment on it in a constructive way, I think that can be terrifically helpful.

Jane Van Hool:

If you don't live near a friendly editor, you could try Richard Dawkins' approach.

Richard Dawkins: Almost automatically, when I settle down to, to work on a chapter, I will read through what I've done on that chapter first, and, without thinking about it, I will have in mind, as a reader, perhaps somebody I've just had a letter from, somebody I've just been speaking to on the phone, somebody I've just read about in the newspaper, somehow that person is in my consciousness. And so, I imagine it being her or him, who's doing the reading, and immediately I spot things that they wouldn't understand or, or wouldn't like or would, would object to, or would need putting in a different way. and so every time I read through it, it gets kind of filtered through this imaginary mind, I use real minds as well, of course, and, and send it off, off to other people to read, which is, of course, helpful. But, this thing of using your own imagination to pretend you're somebody else, I think is, is a very, very helpful technique.

Jane Van Hool:

Another technique is to address your own critical ear, by reading what you have written out loud. John Humphrys.

John Humphrys:

When I write my broadcast stuff I read aloud all the time. I've had some very strange looks on aeroplanes in the past when I've been a foreign correspondent and I've been writing a, a piece on the plane and, and talking to myself, reading aloud, people thinking 'Poor chap, wonder what his problem is?' But it's essential, unless you read it aloud, you don't know whether the sentence is sayable, and you'll often find that some words - and this applies to the written piece as well - you'll often find that you've repeated something and, and you're not conscious of it when you see it on the page, but when you say it, then you're, then it suddenly leaps out at you, so reading aloud is a very good habit to get into.

Jane Van Hool:

Richard Dawkins.

Richard Dawkins: You don't want to have all short sentences. I mean, you want to have it varied in a, in a way that only a good ear can pick up. Sort of cadences that Either very long sentences are bad, or a whole string of short sentences are, are bad, and it's no, no good saying alternate long and short, it's not like that, it's something where you've simply got to have, have an, an ear, and read it through to yourself, and say does this, does this flow? And, my wife, Lalla Ward, who is a professional actress, is a beautiful reader, and she'll sometimes read my stuff to me, so that I can hear how it might sound through another voice, and that also is helpful.