



Start writing essays

Giving both sides of the argument

Jane Van Hool:

When you're arguing a case in the main body of your essay, how important is it to put the other side? John Humphrys.

John Humphrys:

You've got to understand the other arguments. I mean, if you're saying .. that piece I wrote recently that got quite a big response, if you're saying there are too many examinations in school now from the age of, of, of seven a child will take X number of exams until the time the child leaves school after A levels. If you're trying to mount a case like that you have to understand and deal with the arguments in favour of education otherwise the audience is, is cheated.

Jane Van Hool:

Matthew Kelly.

Matthew Kelly: Convincing yourself is, is one of the best things, and being a, a highly opinionated person, quite often, you know, you can shock yourself. I think there's arguments in everything and, and, I think it has to be thrashed out and, and I think it's always good to start off with a premise, you know. And see if you can talk yourself out of it, you know. In fact, very often, I've found that I've set off with one set of beliefs, and I've finished up with something else. So then you, you either change your intro, or you change your conclusion to accommodate what you've arrived at.

Jane Van Hool:

Brian Walden.

Brian Walden:

One of the things that, of course, is very effective is to say something unexpected. People are following your argument, hopefully, one trusts that they're following what you are saying, and their head, their brain is already running ahead to what your conclusion is going to be. If you suddenly say something that they haven't anticipated that you were going to say at all, that can be very effective.

Jane Van Hool:

As a barrister, how does Helena Kennedy go about presenting a case?

Helena Kennedy:

When I'm making a speech to the jury, I always try to have to find a peg, to find a way into the argument, so that I don't start at the obvious point of beginning. So sometimes it will be by something anecdotal, something, a story or picking up on something historical, something that makes people sit up and listen. After you've got that and, and engaged people's attention, I think it's useful at an early stage to put your position, and if you want a mnemonic for this, a useful mnemonic is prep, which is, put your position, give your reasons, give examples or an example, depending on how much time you've got, and then go back to your position, in the finale. Now, once you become comfortable with that as a simple way forward, you can elaborate on that and make it much more interesting and go down certain alleyways along the sides...

Jane Van Hool:

What about fairness and objectivity?

Helena Kennedy:

You've got to remember I'm an advocate, and an advocate takes up a side, and so, on the whole, I'm not expected to be too distant, because I'm putting the position of, from one perspective. But even so, I think that you become more persuasive if you don't sound as though you're too engaged, so that you've lost your judgement. So it's important that you can sound passionate about something, or that you're putting your argument with force, erm without it sounding as though you've lost good sense, and that you've lost your touch with reality. So you, so that's why it's important to support your arguments with reasoning and I think that sometimes people forget to do that adequately.

So, I think that it's very important, to make sure that you become disciplined in giving an argument, which may not be the one that you emotionally immediately identify with. And so I would, I would advise some of your students to actually test themselves by presenting an argument which might not be the one that they really find very seductive.

Jane Van Hool:

Richard Dawkins.

Richard Dawkins: Whereas a lawyer is trained to take on a case, either for or against, and almost not care whether they believe it or not, and put the best possible case they can for or against, no scientist should ever do that, and I never would ever dream of making a case for something I didn't believe in. But, when I do believe in something, it is true that I use all the wiles at my command to make a strong case, and this usually consists, at least in part, of looking at the opposite case and, trying to demolish it. But any scientist ought to, in a sense, welcome counter-evidence, welcome evidence against the case he's trying to make, and, if necessary, change his mind.