



Start writing essays

How to improve your writing

Jane Van Hool:

How can you improve your writing? Brian Walden.

Brian Walden:

I think much the most important thing for writing reasonably well is to read a lot. People concentrate so strongly on writing technique, that they tend to forget, at least I think they tend to forget, that the way to familiarise yourself with good sentences and good paragraphs, and effective writing, is to read a lot. If you read great authors, almost unconsciously, it's a little bit like chess, great moves, great players in chess tell us come into their heads, because it reminds them of something that they've seen before. Now, I think the same is true in writing, that if you have read a lot, into your head comes certain ways of putting things that are effective in your own writing.

Jane Van Hool:

Jane Dorner.

Jane Dorner:

Think about what works, why you're enjoying a book, what, what is it that's nice about good writing? Is it, is it in the sentence structure, is it in the choice of language? Why is that writer appealing to you? Can they tell stories? Is it the enjoyment of the way it's written that you are enjoying? And I think that if you read with questions in your mind about not just 'what's the end of the story?', but how is it getting there, that that will have, by itself will have an effect on one's own writing, inevitably.

Jane Van Hool:

Peter White, journalist and radio presenter.

Peter White:

I think the most important thing to do is to write. I mean, write whether you are completely happy with it or not. I think quite a good idea is to set some kind of target for yourself, if you're trying to improve your writing skills. You know, writing so much a day, and I mean, nothing is too boring to write about, it's how you write about it that's important. So, I mean, the thing is to write about things that you do actually care about. The trick is to make other people care. I mean, it's the same with talking in a way. I mean, a man came in once to do a piece about lug worms for me, and I thought 'Hang on, what on earth is there to know about lug worms?' and for ten minutes he was absolutely fascinating on the subject of lug worms. There is nothing better than an enthusiast about their subject, however bizarre it might be. So I think write about what *you* care about. Your job is to convince other people that it matters.

Jane Van Hool:

Matthew Kelly.

Matthew Kelly:

Get help at every opportunity, at whatever form that takes. You can't look foolish. You can get things wrong, but there's nothing foolish about that. And you have to remember the satisfaction, the fulfilment, and self-expression that you're going to get out of it.

Jane Van Hool:

John Pilger.

John Pilger:

Be very confident about what you want to say. Don't be hesitant in thinking that how you see something, how you want to write something, is not good enough. Be very confident that it is good enough. But when you actually write it, strip away, write down a sentence, then take out every cliché, most adjectives, and see what you've got left. Most adjectives aren't worth a candle, the good ones stand out, they're brilliant. I was very fortunate when I began as a young journalist, I was on a newspaper in Australia that was almost unique I think in its training. We weren't allowed to use the passive voice, our paragraphs had to be only sixteen words long, and most adjectives were, were banned. In fact, to use an adjective, you had to get special dispensation. Now, many of us thought this was plainly absurd, but I realised, well, I certainly realised soon afterwards, that it actually gave me a discipline of simple writing and, from that base, I could then expand and begin to use the stylistic adornments of writing. But that what was most important, was that simple means of communication.

Jane Van Hool:

Helena Kennedy.

Helena Kennedy:

Try to be precise, try not to have too many clauses and too many ideas in one sentence or in one paragraph. Try not to repeat the same words too often and to find other ways of expressing something.

Jane Van Hool:

Martin Amis.

Martin Amis:

I would say, you know, scour your sentences. A lot of the, the shine of prose comes not from what's there but from what isn't there. Avoiding repetitions of words and half repetitions. Like, if you've got 'confuse' in a sentence don't have 'use' in a sentence. These are little things that have the effect on the reader of stub toe, where you pause and wonder if there's any significance in the repetition, and then you find there isn't, and then you go on. But that little pause is what takes the shine off prose. Kingsley used to say that you, you, and you can't get them all out, these little repetitions, prose is a sort of imperfect instrument. But I still think it's a good sort of disciplining thing when you're writing. Don't have these clunking (Int in bg) little chimes and assonances that, that, that aren't deliberate. You know, writing should be as deliberate as, as it is possible to be, I think. So make sure, you know, don't start your sentences with the same construction or even word. Be conscious of, of the prose around it as well as the prose of what you're actually, that particular sentence. This won't, sort of, make your prose great but it is, it'll, you know, it'll add that little mystery that comes from what isn't there. That's what gives it the, the burnish.

**Jenny Bardwell:
(interviewer)****Martin Amis:**

You use 'The War Against Cliché' as the title of the collection of your articles, what's wrong with the cliché in writing and why wage war against it? Well, what's wrong with it is that all writing is about renewal. Originality, seeing things, making it new, you know, not, not making it old, making it dead. And anyone who uses a lot of phrases like 'It all went pear-shaped' and 'Read my lips', which are the sort of junk clichés that last six months, you know, and then are gone. These are dead just in the way as, you know, bitterly cold is dead, it's an inherited formulation, it's an unexamined formulation. It's not made fresh, new, it's just ballast, it's like an alp(?)weight on you, it's suppressing your freedom.