Start writing essays
A student's approach to drafting and revising

Jane Van Hool:
Tim Baugh, Leslie Hoose and Beth Lewis talk about the drafting process.

Tim Baugh:
Beth, tell us how you go about writing your first draft?

Beth Lewis:
Well, quite often, once I've input all these quotes and references and ideas that might have come up, I then print them out, so they're very clear to read, because I can't always read my own hand writing terribly well and it's a lot easier to, to refer to a selection of printed quotes than it is to scrawls and scribbles. But then I nearly always write the first draft out in longhand, which I then input again in the computer, so then I can then read it again much more clearly, and, and obviously mess it about and pull it about and try and pull it into shape much more clearly.

Tim Baugh:
So you use longhand, for the initial process, and then you type it out?

Beth Lewis:
Yes, I do.

Tim Baugh:
Right, right, is that because you feel more comfortable writing by hand at that stage?

Beth Lewis:
I think that, I think that I have a different style somehow, I, I think I'm less wordy when I write longhand than I am when I'm using a computer. So that, I think perhaps I think more clearly and carefully about what I'm about to write, if I write it in longhand.

Leslie Hoose:
Do you find that working from longhand you can, you, it's easier to compare sheets, than it is on a single screen?

Beth Lewis:
Definitely, well, that's why I print stuff out from the computer in order to compare it, because it is hard to flick between screens and around screens, and remember quite what you've got where.
(General Chat overlapping agreeing)

Tim Baugh:
So, you've got your first draft, you've written it out by hand and you've typed it, and you've now printed it out and you're looking at it. What prompts you to revise things that you've done, thinking now about the second draft, what sorts of things do you do when you're editing and, re-editing your own work?

Beth Lewis:
Well, I often find that I've repeated myself, or I've said very similar things in different ways with different evidence, which I'll pull together and then decide which bits of evidence, or which particular way of saying it is, was the better way or, combined things and …

Tim Baugh:
That sounds great because you're allowing yourself the free flow of your thoughts in your first draft, you're not worrying too much about repetition and stuff like that, because you know you can put that right at a later date, so you can afford to be more relaxed. Yeah, that sounds really useful.

Beth Lewis:
I think one of the problems that I have is that I, I get so far with an essay, and I spend so much time on it, and it's still not finished, and it's still way over the word count, and it's, it's just that drive that's, that's needed to actually put the brakes on and say no, right you really have just got to put a black line through this bit and not worry about it any more, and that's always very hard to do.

Tim Baugh:
Even then, even if I've cut it out, sometimes I just can't let it go, and I'll just stack up another file full of bits and pieces which I've thrown out, but I still can't quite delete completely, just in case they might come in useful. I know you made this point before, because you were saying that you sometimes have far too much, and you have some, say, points or lines of argument, that you'd really rather keep. And, and I, I think it's a shame if people think that, in, when they've edited them out of their essay, because you've got to, because your essay's only say fifteen hundred words and, and you can't fit it all in, that it's somehow lost or wasted, and what I suggest is that people keep a record of those lines of arguments or points in their notes, because they're often going to be very useful to them in terms of examination revision.