**Start writing plays**

*The editing process*

**Narrator:**
Editing is a fine art, especially when it comes to plays. You can be cutting the dialogue one minute, then thinking about the stage directions, then looking at the structure. Alan Ayckbourn.

**Alan Ayckbourn:**
If you if you have a scene in which a bookshelf is going to fall down, say as in Things We Do For Love, it's very useful if you've referred to the bookcase in advance. I'm always more pleased if I can have incorporated that. And people's brains register the audience at the beginning of the play – 'We've heard about that bookcase before, we've heard about the bookcase again in Act Two, you know.' And then they forget it, because nobody seems to mention the bookcase, and then, at a moment towards the end of the play the bookcase collapses at a tremendously dramatic moment, and there's a sort of eureka! from the audience – 'I'm glad I hung on to the bookcase at the back of my brain, because that's what it's there for.' Sometimes you retro-plot that, you have to say, 'Well, now I've got the bookcase, well actually I'd better build it in to the first few pages, so we know, come completely by surprise'. But the second draft is often very much more, just going back and re-voicing the characters. And I I will sometimes do what I think an actor would do when they're reading a script, I'll go through as one of the characters, and just follow her/his role through, in their voice. It's often pruning rather than adding, and sometimes reshaping, and saying 'No, no, no, that's much too forceful for her, she'd never say it that way, she would say it, she'd say the same thing but she'd be much more snide about it, much more furtive in making her views felt.'

**Narrator:**
Bryony Lavery.

**Bryony Lavery:**
Unless something's going very wrong, I don't usually do more than three drafts. There's the first draft which any writer's, I think, is the brave draft when you try and get everything out, even if you haven't got it quite in order, and that draft can sometimes look all over the place, except I try, I really try and get it as good as possible. But then, between the first draft and the second draft, that's when I go back to my favourite bit, which is making it. I call it elegant gardening, and elegant pruning, which is moving around what you've got, and writing it up, and getting it much, much better, and then usually I do one more draft which (to extend this rather tedious metaphor) is kind of getting one's garden ready for being judged as 'garden of the year', and you try and get it so it's absolutely wonderful.

**Narrator:**
David Edgar:

**David Edgar:**
All of my first drafts are far too long. I know that, I expect that, I kind of want that. The process is going to be boiling them down. I like to leave them for a bit if I can. The first draft is 'if in doubt, put it in', and then you end up with something which is big and baggy, and if you do have the luxury of being able to put it in a drawer for three or four weeks, and then come back to it, it's staggering how suddenly eloquent this script is, and how suddenly it's completely clear what needs to happen. And often it's a matter of choices that you've tried to do everything three times, and you just have to, you know, it's a bit crude really, it's saying 'Well, I tried to reflect the fact that this man doesn't understand women, and I've tried to do it this

way in that scene, and this way in the other scene, and that way in the third scene, and the one when they get cut, the car and she gets in the back and he gets in the front with the driver, is the one that does it in, you know, two seconds, and I don't need to bother with the other two.'

**Narrator:**
Of course, dramatic writing is different from all other forms of writing. It's eventually handed over to someone else to produce. The lines are read out by actors. This can have a big effect on the writing and the editing. Here's Helen Blakeman, Alan Ayckbourn, and David Edgar.

**Helen Blakeman:**
You do have to stand up for every word, every nuance, every choice that you have made within that play, and if you're not prepared to do this, then there isn't any point. In a rehearsal room, an actor will want to know why there character does that, or if it says a lighting change, or it goes dark or bright sunny day. You have to know the reason why, because everything needs a reason, it can't just happen it has to be a logical reason behind that.

**Alan Ayckbourn:**
Actors can do an awful lot with very few words, as long as they know what the words in between are, the spaces in between are. I mean, that's the art, of course is writing a few words which say an awful lot, and allow the actor, it's a phrase I sometimes use is, 'Leave the actor space to act.' Often though, they're so busy talking, and trying to get through the material, they don't actually have a chance.

**David Edgar:**
I think one thing is indisputably true, that there is a miracle happens when you hear things read out. I think a reading is great, and I think a reading as long as, you know, you accept that the Irish accent won't be too good and they probably won't get the sharp bit of dialogue and so on, they certainly won't do the overlaps right, but I think you know, almost getting together a group of people in your front room is worth doing. Because I think when you hear it, it just is very eloquent, and it tells you a huge amount that you don't know until you've heard it.