

- KAREN FOLEY:** Isabella Henman, our first online session is about unpacking the question and considering the material. But students find essay writing quite daunting, don't they? So why is that?
- ISABELLA HENMAN:** Well, I get calls all the time from students that just basically say, I don't understand how to start. What am I doing? What does it mean? I can't write all of this.
- So I'll just go, OK, well, calm down for starters, because that's always a really good thing. Don't panic.
- KAREN FOLEY:** Yeah.
- ISABELLA HENMAN:** So well, what are you being asked to do? What do the words actually say? Read the question. What's it actually asking you about in the first place, because that's always a great place to start.
- KAREN FOLEY:** So are you really talking, then, about our level one students here.
- ISABELLA HENMAN:** Yeah. I mean, it is. It is the level one, the "I haven't written an essay. I might have done something at school. But I don't know what I'm doing." But it's not just level one. Level two and level three-- obviously, they might know more about their subject, but they've still got to actually work out what they're writing, because doing the essays is actually quite important, regardless of what level they are at.
- KAREN FOLEY:** Now, this unpacking the question part of our title-- why is that so important?
- ISABELLA HENMAN:** Because often, people don't see it as a question. They just see a bunch of text and go, I don't know what's the important bit. So I'll say, OK, read it out to me. Read it. Or actually, make it into a question. So if, for instance, our title is unpacking-- I can't remember. What was our title?
- KAREN FOLEY:** Unpacking the Question and Considering the Material. But a common thing that happens with students--
- ISABELLA HENMAN:** --is you forget. You don't actually read the correct thing. So unpacking-- OK, so make that into a question. How do we unpack it? How to do that? How do we find the material? And then actually, you've got a question to answer. OK. You might not be actually putting a question and

writing it like that, is it? I am going to do this question in my essay. But actually, that's essentially what you're doing to start with.

KAREN FOLEY: But this whole thing, isn't it just complicating things? I mean, for one, we don't want students to necessarily rewrite the question, because they might inadvertently answer with something quite different. But what you're saying here is that it's about reconsidering what the question is asking. But isn't that overcomplicating things? And might that not be a waste of time?

ISABELLA
HENMAN: I can see what you mean, yeah. It does sound like it could be more complex. But actually making sure you are answering what you're supposed to be answering saves time in the long run, because it saves actually having written your essay on a completely different topic, and then going, oh, well, I've just done that. And I spent all that time on it. And I didn't get the marks.

So actually reading it through, breaking it down, unpacking the question, saying, this is what it's saying. I'm not going to get into the idea of these process words. We're going to be talking about that, actually, in the session. But that's what we're looking for-- actually, what is it asking you? Not what you want it to ask you-- what is it asking you?

KAREN FOLEY: Because you can write a brilliant essay, but if it's not about the set question, you're not going to get the brilliant marks that accompany it, are you?

ISABELLA
HENMAN: Been there, done that. Gone, oh, I can't believe I've done that. I've done it. So I know it happens. And I've seen it happen so many times. So that's what we want to try and avoid.

KAREN FOLEY: So the Student Hub Live-- I mean, one of our goals is to make things collaborative. It's about working together. But there are students here from any discipline with any essay all in the one room together. So how is that going to work?

ISABELLA
HENMAN: So basically, what we're going to do is we're going to help students, our students, to unpack the question, to know what we mean. And we're going to be talking about this thing, these process words that I said I wasn't going to talk about, but I just dropped it in again-- and the idea of this is how it's going to be, and how you go about that. And then we're going to get them working with each other, because we are about the students working together.

It's not just about us telling them things, because that's not really going to help eventually. What's going to be the best thing is use the tools that we've given you, use the information that we've given you, and then work with others, discuss with other people. What does it mean to

you? How and what have you found out from this?

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah.

ISABELLA It's going to be different from what I found from it.

HENMAN:

KAREN FOLEY: So it's not about what they know. They're almost using each other as a sounding board, then, to bounce ideas off each other.

ISABELLA Yeah, absolutely, because one person reads something in a totally different way to somebody
HENMAN: else. Obviously, we don't want to be doing the wrong way. We want to get away from that, but actually saying, well, I read it like this. How did you read it?

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah.

ISABELLA Oh, I never thought about that. Well, I got this word. I thought this bit was most important. Ah,
HENMAN: OK. Is it? And that's where you probably might ask for more help if you've come up with all the people that you're asking have come up with something totally different.

KAREN FOLEY: And sometimes, it's almost better to talk to somebody who knows nothing about the subject so that you can really say, does this make sense?

ISABELLA Totally, because if you can explain to somebody who doesn't know the topic, then it means
HENMAN: you understand. I remember going back years, and I would say to somebody, if I can explain it to somebody else-- if you can explain it, then you know it. If you're going, don't really know, then it means you probably don't understand it well enough.

KAREN FOLEY: Excellent. Well, I'm really looking forward to the session.

ISABELLA Great, so am I.

HENMAN: