

KAREN FOLEY: So Isabella Henman here we are again, in our final session about essay writing. Can you give us a quick recap of what we've covered so far?

ISABELLA: OK, so it started when we did the unpacking the question and finding the material. So it was-- what are we actually doing? What is your essay? What's the title-- making it into a question, or whatever.

And then we talked about how you'd start finding the information, drafting it, building on your structure, starting to get to the point where you've actually got some information down, and then.

KAREN FOLEY: So what is this session about, then?

ISABELLA: OK, so we've got this information. How do you actually get it into your story? How do you get it into your essay story?

KAREN FOLEY: Story-- I mean, are we talking about creative writing here?

ISABELLA: Well, in some ways, it almost is. I mean, we can all learn from creative writing, because that is engaging the reader. And whilst you're not actually necessarily doing a creative writing piece, you are still writing a story. Any essay's a story. It's giving some information.

It needs to hold the reader. They need to be interested. Obviously, depending on your topic and depending on your module, you might not be doing it in the same ways that I'm talking-- and it's got to be formal academic style-- but it is very much a story. It's telling you.

It's taking you through the roadmap of our plan, and it's saying-- this is what I'm doing. I know what I'm talking about. Here you go. I'm showing you, because this is my essay, and I'm showing you I know what I'm talking about.

KAREN FOLEY: So back to the title, then. This editing idea, then-- how can that help?

ISABELLA: The editing bit is the ruthless bit. And this is the bit that you have to learn, and I've learned my cost about this, because I'll go, oh, this is great, and I loved writing this! Oh, it wasn't related to the topic. I'm still going to leave it in. And then you lose marks. So you have to go, no. Learn to be ruthless.

This is where the editing bit is-- look at your word count. Keep going back to your title. Everything has to be related to your title. It has to be relevant. It doesn't matter how interesting it is. It doesn't matter how fascinating you think it is. If it's not related to your title, that's the editing bit.

Be ruthless. Get it out. Make sure it's actually a clear story and that it's not you jumping here, there, and everywhere. Because your reader's going to be going-- oh, what? Oh. I don't understand.

KAREN FOLEY: It sounds like a really painful process.

ISABELLA: It can be a bit painful being ruthless, because sometimes you've got to get down to the word count. Sometimes you've got to actually make sure that you've addressed every bit of the question. And that's the editing bit-- making sure that it's all a nice, overall coherent essay.

KAREN FOLEY: So then, if students have already started getting on with their work and they're in this level of detail, how are they going to collaborate, and why is it a good idea for them to be working together at this point?

ISABELLA: Well, actually, this is the stage where you can really benefit from other people. And if you get the other person to read it out-- whether they read it out loud-- because it makes such a difference. If you hear your words out loud, you realise what they actually say. And you'll go, oh. That's not what I meant.

In here-- I know what I mean in here, but what's on the page? And somebody else will read it and they'll just go-- I don't really understand. It's not about understanding the actual topic material. It's understanding the way you phrase it.

So this is where working with somebody else-- especially if you can get somebody from a different module-- they can say-- or not just a different module, different faculty, somewhere completely different-- different level, different topic, anything. And they can say, I don't really follow that. You seem to be jumping around.

I don't know what you're talking about, but I really don't know what you're talking about now. Or they could be saying, that's really good. I'm really interested in that. I'd love to find out more. That's the bit you want-- the getting the people interested in the end. That makes sense and follows.

KAREN FOLEY: And lastly, I mean, we have another word in this title-- which I know fills students with quite a lot of dread-- and this is referencing. So why is this important?

ISABELLA: It is. Referencing is a bug, but it's the source of so many questions. I get them on the phone, emails, whatever-- from students. And the best thing I can say is that referencing is there to show where you've got your information from.

It's to show that you've taken it from somewhere. We're not trying to trick. We're not trying to do anything. I'm not going to go into the details, because I don't want to put people off. But referencing is there-- it's an academic thing. And you are doing a course. You are doing an academic course, so you need to understand that.

And sometimes, actually, just spending a little bit of time working through referencing-- we'll talk about some of the main structures. And basically, we have to write why we do it. Because actually, if you think about why we're doing it, it actually makes a lot more sense. And it hopefully will make it a little bit less painful.

KAREN FOLEY: It sounds like the most useful of all of our sessions, definitely.

ISABELLA: Well, it's probably going to be quite a practical session. And I think this is where sharing ideas and actually giving facts would be-- but all of them are useful. They're going to be great.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely, because if you haven't planned and if you haven't structured, then by the time you start writing and referencing, a lot of that could be wasted.

ISABELLA: And if you didn't even know what the question was in the first place, you've lost that time. Remember, I'm saying putting a little bit of time in, doing the planning, doing it at stage-- it will really help.

KAREN FOLEY: Well, this all sounds great. Let's get going.

[MUSIC PLAYING]