

MRS AUDREY CAMPBELL-MOFFAT (2): MY COMPOSING PROCESS

What is the process that you go through to produce your best work?

I certainly make sure that I'm on my own. And I make sure... I like to work in my office or chambers. I always clear the desk. I will only have the papers for the case I'm doing on the desk. And even though it's this day and age, I start by writing by hand. So, what I'm looking to do is, firstly, skim through the papers, just to see roughly what I've got, make sure I've got everything I need, and I've got in my head already my instructions.

And what I tend to do is, I have a stack of rough paper and I scribble as I'm reading. And most of the time, I never read it again. It goes in the bin. But I'm scribbling and it's the process of just writing something down as I'm doing it, that sort of helps me start to clear things away, and I do almost never read it again. It will normally be cleared away, but then I'll have an idea of where I'm going. And again, to me, the issue is to clear away all of the irrelevancies and get right down to the core.

I'll do the legal research or the first blush legal research, and see how that fits with what I have now analyzed the case to be. Then, and only then, if I think I've got a fit, do I start to write the actual advice or opinion or submission that I'm going to write.

And to start with, I will put anything down that instinctively I feel is right because it breaks the barrier. People tend to want to be perfect and then write. You mustn't do that. Even if it's a load of rubbish, write anything down. That's not what your final product will be. Most probably, your final product will have nothing in that, but going to the computer and writing something and just breaking that hold that it has on you is really important. But once I've got what I think I want, I leave it alone completely and I leave it for at least a day. If I've got the time, I'll leave it longer. And I come back and read it and see if it makes any sense whatsoever. Then I may tweak it and I may tweak the style a bit, so that it's more palatable for whoever it's going to, the actual person, as opposed to the category of person it's going to.

What advice do you have for students about adopting a productive process?

Actually, I think the biggest tip I would give is this: make sure you have everything you want. It's often the case that you sit down and you haven't actually got all the information. You haven't got, perhaps, a book on contract at hand, and then the temptation is to sort of leap over that and carry on regardless without double-checking something. And the thought process in law is: there are so many ways you can go and so many tangents you can go off on that if you don't keep yourself focussed, you can cause yourself trouble and very many man hours of doing things you shouldn't need to do. We've all been there. We've all gone down a path that's taken us two or three days and realized that was a complete load of rubbish and we didn't need to be doing it. So, make sure you have access to everything you need, whether that's on the Internet or whether that's in chambers or at work that has everything available to you, and then you'll be productive. And you'll do it quickly and you won't be under pressure because when you're under pressure, that's when it all goes wrong.