



The A-Z of writing

A-b

From A to b. First in the series revisiting John Simmons' book *The Invisible Grail*. Follow it weekly for a workout in writing agility that will influence and improve your words for work. Next – B to c, published on Friday 17 April.

Any writer knows that it's not always easy to get started. Sometimes the world seems to be divided into writers and people who want to be writers. All of them might be struggling to get their first words down on the screen.

Part of the problem is that oh-so-familiar phrase 'begin at the beginning'. I hate the phrase. Whoever first said it was probably a fundamentalist, but how did God begin? Was he struck by light or by the need for light?

With any story, with any piece of writing, where is the real beginning? Realising the logical absurdity of that question, Laurence Sterne began his wonderfully absurd novel *Tristram Shandy* with the moment of his own conception:

“With any story, with any piece of writing, where is the real beginning?”

*“Pray my dear, quoth my mother, have you forgot to wind up the clock? Good G**! cried my father, making an exclamation, but taking care to moderate his voice at the same time, - Did ever woman, since the creation of the world, interrupt a man with such a silly question! Pray, what was your father saying?
- Nothing.”*

Begin at the beginning is impossible guidance. Sterne's joke is that his beginning was interrupted in the middle. My advice is 'begin in the middle'.

“My advice is ‘being in the middle’.”

Notice how different writers start their work. Learn from great writers. Apply what you learn to the words you use for work, whether you're writing a proposal, an email, a blog or a report. Plunging your reader into the middle of things is the surest way to seize attention.

But care for your readers too. Having plunged them into deep water throw them the lifeline of words that will take them forward to meaning, to understand exactly where you and they are. There's a limit to the amount of surprise your reader can absorb.

With a new chapter released weekly, look out for the next in the series, B-c, arriving with you on Friday 17 April. Follow us on [Linked In](#) or via our [Insights page](#) to find your weekly dose of writing inspiration.

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