



The A-Z of writing

D-e

From D to e. Next 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 week – E to f, published on Friday 8 May.

Do this, don't do that. Deadlines demand timely headlines. Alliteration and rhyme, the techniques of poetry, do we use them or abuse them? There has been much more awareness of poetry's relevance to our lives and language since I originally drew attention to poetry in *The Invisible Grail* twenty years ago. If the coronavirus crisis has taught us anything so far, it is that poetry is a valuable source of emotional support in difficult times. And the absence of poetic awareness, not to mention common sense, has become more noticeable as world leaders have struggled to pitch their language at an empathetic level. Perhaps the nadir came when President Trump wondered on television to his medical advisers whether an injection of detergent might clean out the lungs of the afflicted.

“Poetry is an invaluable source of emotional support in difficult times”

Let's stay with American presidents. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, George W Bush – perhaps the least poetic president in US history until Donald Trump set that bar even lower – discovered the pitfalls and benefits of striving for uplifting language. 'We're gonna get these folks,' his immediate response to that crisis, was homespun but lacking in gravitas. So, perhaps stung by criticism, he plunged into longer words and deeper trouble. He emerged with 'crusade' and 'infinite justice', more rousing but deeply offensive to Islam.

The president's speech to Congress (apparently written by his aide Michael Gerson) managed to reach a higher level. For example:

**Our nation,
this generation,
will lift the dark threat of violence
from our people and our future.
We will rally the world to this cause
by our efforts, by our courage.
We will not tire.
We will not falter.
And we will not fail.**

I have split the text into lines to emphasise the influence of poetry and rhetoric. A beautiful simplicity of language, and repetition, the deliberate use of repetition. Look at the last two lines where the alliteration in the double 'f' of 'falter' and 'fail' is accentuated by the half-rhyme contained in those two words. The echo of the first syllable of 'falter' allows the president, whether literally or metaphorically, to thump the podium on the last phrase.

With a new chapter released weekly, look out for the next in the series, E-f, arriving with you on Friday 8 May. Follow us on [Linked In](#) or via our [Insights page](#) to find your weekly dose of writing inspiration.

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