



The A-Z of writing

Welcome to a new mini-series on the A-Z of writing. Follow it weekly for a workout in writing agility that will influence and improve your words for work.

The first chapter, A-b, will be published on Friday 10 April, with the remaining 24 chapters (B-c, C-d...) released each Friday thereafter. Here is the first posting from our co-founder [John Simmons](#), based on his book, *The Invisible Grail*.

Two decades ago I wrote a book called *The Invisible Grail*. It was about writing better stories in and for organisations, because stories matter, they connect. The title is now adopted by us, a company whose aim is to improve leadership and communication in higher education, helping people align what they say and do with the very best of what their institutions stand for.

But the basic principles apply to any sector and any individual. Perhaps they have extra resonance in days of 'self-isolation' and 'social distancing' – words that are about keeping us apart when I want to bring us together. *Only connect*.

“For writing to be effective
it needs to be human”

We all might have more need to write in the coming weeks. Perhaps without face-to-face office distractions, forced into remote working, we will all realise the emotional connections made possible by writing.

So I thought this was a good moment to revisit the chapter in *The Invisible Grail* where I had set out thoughts on effective writing. For writing to be effective it needs to be human, to connect us as humans. This is a time when we all need to be more aware of the potential of words – and to use them with greater joy.

Joy? Yes, we need more of that. More hope, thoughtfulness, compassion too. Words, used well, are containers of compassion. They represent the choices we make, second by second. We choose words for their emotional effect, for their power to persuade, inform, entertain. The words we choose reflect who we are.

Viktor Frankl, holocaust survivor and psychiatrist, remembered those who provided comfort in the camps. You can take away everything, he wrote, except “*the last of human freedoms – to choose our attitudes*”.

I choose generosity and I offer words in that spirit, rather than leaden, mean-spirited words that weigh down our humanity. Feel the freedom of noticing and using words. Offer them to others as gifts not as self-centred transmissions.

“I choose generosity and I offer words in that spirit”

So I will be revisiting *The Invisible Grail* chapter. I originally wrote it, because I believe in the creativity of constraints, by going from A to b, B to c, through the alphabet. And, at the time, while travelling on London Underground to work. The alphabetical constraint – start with a word beginning with the first letter, end with a word ending with the second – will still apply. Some sections will hardly change, perhaps a sign that the principle has stood the test of time. Others I will update. I hope you will find them useful.

We'll be releasing a new chapter every Friday, with the first chapter, A-b, published on Friday 10 April. Follow us on [Linked In](#) or via our [Insights page](#) to find your weekly dose of writing inspiration.