



The A-Z of writing

F-g

From F to g. 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 – G to h, published on Friday 22 May.

F*** business.' At least Boris Johnson was clear when he uttered those words last year. More recently he's been pilloried for his lack of clarity, particularly by Matt Lucas's version of the PM's speech that, appropriately, 'went viral' a few days ago. It went viral because it was funny and true. These were the words spoken by Matt Lucas:

"So we are saying don't go to work go to work don't take public transport go to work don't go to work stay indoors if you can work from home go to work don't go to work go outside don't go outside and then we will or we won't... something or other."

In 20 seconds it summed up the confusion created by unclear language.

In times like these there is a first requirement to aim for clarity. "I hope I've made myself clear" has become another recognisable mantra associated with politicians who have failed to live up to their own hopes. During a time of anxiety, clarity provides certainty and calm. But clarity is always tough to achieve.

'Stay alert', replacing 'Stay at home', was not clear. I suspect the government

was not striving for clarity but using a touch of ambiguity to signal a shift in its strategy. That shift is from the clear command tone of 'Stay at home', a government instruction, to the passing of responsibility to the audience of 'Stay alert'. The first uses authority, the second passes the buck, almost bringing us back to the first word of this piece with an accidental rhyme.

The political dividing line these days is not so much along class lines as the choice between community and individual responsibility. As ever our words betray our attitudes, inside or outside, whether you're staying at home or alert.

“our words
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Language is a reflection and expression of changing social, cultural and moral debates, and all around us, through everyday language, we can see and hear those debates evolving.

With a new chapter released weekly, look out for the next in the series, G-h, arriving with you on Friday 22 May. Follow us on [LinkedIn](#) or via our [Insights page](#) to find your weekly dose of writing inspiration.

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