



## The A-Z of writing

### H-i

From H to i. Next in the series revisiting John Simmons' book *The Invisible Grail*. Metaphors, and giving greater reign to your audience's thinking, is at the front of our minds this week. Follow the weekly series for a workout in writing agility that will influence and improve your words for work. Next week – I to j, published on Friday 5 June.

**H**ow do you make a thought more vivid? Metaphors are certainly one way to do it. Look up 'metaphor' in the dictionary and it will say something like 'figure of speech which points out a resemblance between things'. Dictionaries can sometimes just raise another question about meaning. This might be one of those times when the dictionary definition makes sense only when you see an example. Indeed, a metaphor might be needed.

The title 'The Invisible Grail', suggesting a journey or a quest, is a metaphor. The fact is, we all use metaphors all the time, almost without realising; we use them as crutches, as shafts of light, as pointers. And they are certainly not confined to the language of poets, though we can learn from poets because they use metaphors most vividly.

Sometimes we struggle to understand the meaning of poems because they use metaphors that are not literal or factual. That's OK – find the meaning that is deeper than a fact. How to read a poem? The American poet Billy Collins answered that question with these words of explanation to readers:

*'I want them to waterski  
across the surface of a poem  
waving at the author's name on the shore.  
But all they want to do  
is tie the poem to a chair with rope  
and torture a confession out of it.'*

Keep your mind and your senses open and receptive. The first line of Christopher Isherwood's novel *Goodbye to Berlin* seems to me a perfect metaphor for our times, when we all walk around with cameras in our pockets: "I am a camera with its shutter open."

Last week, running a Zoom seminar with a group of communicators in business and education, I got them to write metaphors about people they were missing at this time. That produced some powerful, emotional writing. I then asked them to write a one-line metaphor about a brand that they admired. Some interesting metaphors emerged:

*Zoom is the first flat white of the day in that Soho café  
Dunns (the baker) is my daily warm hug  
Netflix is a sixth form common room with beanbags for lolling  
Patagonia is a five-year-old discovering ice cream*

Our minds are surprisingly receptive to this allusive form of description. Plain words, factual descriptions, do not always communicate effectively because they failed to connect to the imagination. Surely there is a lesson here for everyone writing for any kind of organisation. If you want to be more effective in the way you communicate with people, you need to tune in to their imaginations. Free your mind, use more metaphors, give greater rein to your audience's thinking. Adopt the spirit of Billy Collins. Allow your brain to waterski.

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With a new chapter released weekly, look out for the next in the series, I-j, arriving with you on Friday 5 June. Follow us on [Linked In](#) or via our [Insights page](#) to find your weekly dose of writing inspiration.

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