



## The A-Z of writing

### L-m

From L to m. Next in the series revisiting John Simmons' book *The Invisible Grail*. How we listen to (and feel) words is this week's theme through L to m. Follow the weekly series for a workout in writing agility that will influence and improve your words for work. Next week – M to n, published on Friday 3 July.

**L**et's linger a while with the beguiling sounds of words. Words are vessels containing meaning – ping the outside of the vessel and it suggests what might be inside. The first sentence above stretches out like a lazy afternoon with time to spare, gliding from one 'l' sound to another and softly sliding into 's' and 'w' sounds. The very word 'gliding' almost glistens with oil as it slips into the sentence, just as 'sliding' gently follows after. Perhaps they both need the sentence to end with a plop.

“Let's linger a while with the beguiling sounds of words.”

There are these words, of course, and 'plop' is one of them, which imitate sounds. Sometimes they come in compounds to indicate a musical aspect of sound, as used in many a pop song. *Splish-splash, I was taking a bath*, while listening to the *pitter-patter of the falling rain*. We use such words to help us with descriptions. I remember watching a TV interview with the novelist Geoff Ryman who was asked about a particular sentence he'd written in his book *Lust*. The sentence was: 'Barefoot, his wet feet made scrunching noises on the wet sand.' The interviewer asked him: 'Is the word 'scrunching' important?' Ryman replied: 'Oh yes, if it was just noises you wouldn't hear it.'

But although it's important to think of what we want readers to be hearing as well as seeing when we tell a story, I'm more interested in using the sounds of words to suggest meaning more subliminally. It's all a matter of listening. Hard sounds – 'b', 't', 'p' – are good for making hard, insistent points, not necessarily at the start of each word. *Black lives matter*. Softer sounds – 's', 'z', 'l', 'w' – insinuate themselves more subtly into our senses, although 's' can also hiss with passionate sibilance. Clustering a collection of 'c' and 'k' sounds can make a staccato start to kick open a conversation. But 'm' can be sensual – think how we use 'mmm' to indicate a coming tasty moment.

We need to learn to love listening, and listen to the inner meaning of words – meanings lodged in the sounds that make them.

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With a new chapter released weekly, look out for the next in the series, M-n, arriving with you on Friday 3 July. Follow us on [Linked In](#) or via our [Insights page](#) to find your weekly dose of writing inspiration.

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