



The A-Z of writing

M-n

From M to n. Next in the series revisiting John Simmons' book *The Invisible Grail*. We are all messengers for our organisations, and we are all part of, and share, its tone of voice. Follow the weekly series for a workout in writing agility that will influence and improve your words for work. Next week – N to o, published on Friday 10 July.

Messages are communicated through the words that we write. That message can be a simple instruction or a complex argument or, increasingly it seems, as 'key messages', meaning 'what I really want you to hear'. But as well as the message's intended meaning, we are sending other messages through the way we write: signals about who we are, what we are like, about our attitude and personality. This represents the writer's tone of voice.

Literary critics often comment about writers having 'a distinctive voice' or 'needing to find their own voice'. Writing for brands needs to be closer to speaking in our own voice than in an assumed, formal way of writing: we expect authenticity. Each of us has a way of speaking that is distinctive. We recognise familiar voices instantly on the telephone, for example. There are certain words or phrases that we use or avoid, others that we fall back on for ease; there are personal patterns to our speech, we place emphasis on certain words or syllables, accents shape the way we say things. This distinctiveness comes from the combination of influences that make us individual: our parents, schools, friends, the media, where we live, what we do, 'where we are from'. Above all, what we believe as people, the values that underlie our behaviour.

It's no different for companies, institutions or universities – 'brands' for short – except that we are talking about a collection of individuals rather than one person. But a brand, like an individual, has parentage, it lives in the context of ethical, educational, social influences. A brand's tone of voice springs out of its values. If these values are shared by the individuals who represent the brand – if not, what are you doing there? – then the individuals should share a tone of voice. That does not mean that everyone needs to write or speak the same, but there should be a common framework shaped by the brand's values. Within this framework individuals can write in ways that express their own individuality. If they do so, the writing will be more engaging and more effective because it will connect better with its readers. The communication works better than if people try to put on a 'posh telephone voice' – a personality and style that is alien.

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With a new chapter released weekly, look out for the next in the series, N-o, arriving with you on Friday 10 July. Follow us on [Linked In](#) or via our [Insights page](#) to find your weekly dose of writing inspiration.

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