



## The A-Z of writing

### N-o

From N to o. Next in the series revisiting John Simmons' book *The Invisible Grail*. Are your words clear? Are they truthful? Honesty in what we say and what we write is the theme this week.

Follow our weekly series for a workout in writing agility that will influence and improve your words for work. Next week – O to p, published on Friday 17 July.

**N**othing will come of nothing, as we know from *King Lear*. By this Lear meant that his daughter Cordelia would get no part of the inheritance if she refused to say what she believed would be false words. Of course, we're all on Cordelia's side. Her arguments are perfectly reasonable – how could she insist that her father was the sole focus of her love when she was about to marry a husband with a father's blessing? She was right to avoid bluster and bombast to cover insincerity. *Fake news*.

“We do language. That is how civilisations heal.”

Toni Morrison

Straight talking can get you into all sorts of problems. All Cordelia needed to do was flatter her father, use a few fine phrases as her sisters had already done and, with a click, the biggest part of the kingdom would be hers. But she balked at using the expected words because she would not really mean them. It's an important choice.

With issues of historic truth, justice and equality coming to the fore, the words of Toni Morrison have resonated with other writers: “We do language. That is how civilisations heal.” It might cost us, but honesty is the best policy. People

imagine that brand consultants are unconcerned with the truth. Far from it. Our job is to find the truth, then present it as honestly as possible. But the truth can be uncomfortable as well as liberating.

When writing for a brand, straight talking pays dividends most of the time. Think hard about the words you use. Are they clear? Are they honest? Do they represent the real you? Straight talking does not mean being rude or arrogant, but writing in a way that connects to people. Use the techniques I've been writing about in [these chapters](#) to tell the truth well.

But it's not just about writing style: it's also about questioning the fundamental editorial principles behind the brand's writing. Don't hide behind the legal protection of disclaimers that force you towards innocuousness. After reading one bank's customer magazine, I noticed the small print that said:

*This magazine is published as a customer service. The views expressed are those of individual contributors. Contributions published in this magazine are not intended to, and do not represent, professional advice on the subject matter dealt with. Where appropriate and necessary professional advice should be sought.*

Which seems to be saying: 'Don't trust what you read here.' Too many of our corporate words are, to use one of the words of the moment, 'sanitised'. Wouldn't it be a better, bolder, more interesting magazine if it restated its editorial policy as:

*This magazine is published for our customers. We ask individuals to write and we value their individuality. They have something to say – something that matters to them and to you – but they are always personal views not bank policy dictated from above. We believe this liberates them to write about subjects that interest them in ways that will really interest our customers.*

Should the bank have changed its editorial policy? Yes. Too few risks are taken in business and with words. Did the bank change? **No**.

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With a new chapter released weekly, look out for the next in the series, O-p, arriving with you on Friday 17 July. Follow us on [Linked In](#) or via our [Insights page](#) to find your weekly dose of writing inspiration.

 Invisible-grail

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