



The A-Z of writing

S-t

From S to t. The case for using words that challenge and surprise, 'like a slice of ginger in boiled rice'. Next in the series revisiting John Simmons' book *The Invisible Grail*. Follow our weekly series for a workout in writing agility that will influence and improve your words for work. Next week – T to u, published on Friday 21 August.

Short simple words are the demands of the modern chief executive. Short words suit swift actions. Simple words fit clear decisions. But it can be a boring, monotonous diet for those having to take these words in. Or for the Ronseal consumer – 'does what it says on the tin' ignores the transformative potential of the product and of words themselves.

“Short words suit swift actions...But it can be a boring, monotonous diet for those having to take the words in.”

That's why I value the occasional idiosyncratic word that can be like a slice of ginger in boiled rice. We need to savour words. I'm not advocating a return to Victorian propensities towards mellifluous concoctions of verbal superfluity. Let's simply aim for variety – but not of the *Good Old Days* kind, which used to recreate Victorian music hall linguistic excesses on the television of my childhood. The aim was to induce groans in the knowing audience, so be aware of the effect your words will have on those listening. Think carefully about your choice of words.

One relatively neglected aspect is the choice we have to use compound words. English seems to recognise these words less as we have moved further from the language's Germanic and Anglo-Saxon roots. One of the features of the earliest English poetry is the regular use of words like whaleroad as a figurative description of the sea. Words like meadhall, marshden, warcry,

chainmail seem to emerge through Celtic mists. In those days they used to unlock their wordhoard in order to speak.

Let's not forget we also have access to a wordhoard and we need not use it for archaic purposes. Watergate has ever since inspired an endless succession of scandalgates. In a similar vein the popularity of hashtags on Twitter shows that we relish our ability to join words together for a cause #standupfortrees #raisethebat #writingcommunity. Without compound words like keyboard, notebook and download I would not have the linguistic bandwidth to write in a hitech age in lockdown. It seems to me clearly in the tradition of Mr Bedonebyasyoudid and Mrs Doasyouwouldbedoneby in *The Water Babies*. These are inventions which linger in the memory. Perhaps we need to pursue this kind of verbal invention more frequently if we're to achieve what we might call mindlift.

With a new chapter released weekly, look out for the next in the series, T-u, arriving with you on Friday 21 August. Follow us on [Linked In](#) or via our [Insights page](#) to find your weekly dose of writing inspiration.

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