



The A-Z of writing

W-x

From W to x. When it comes to names, 'in the end that gut feeling really matters'. 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 – X to y, published on Friday 18 September.

What's in a name?' goes the familiar quotation from *Romeo and Juliet*. Obviously quite a lot, as a name is the basis for our identities as individuals, brands or organisations. As Ruth Ozeki put it in her novel *My Year of Meats*:

"How can you say 'just a name'? Name is very first thing. Name is face to all the world."

It's hard to talk about the perils of naming in the 21st century without referring to the U.K.'s once-revered Post Office. Would a rose named Consignia smell as sweet? It might, but the [new Consignia](#) didn't have the same goodwill attached to it as the old Post Office, and the Consignia chairman was regretting this name change to his business within months of it happening.

The problem was that the name Post Office was invested with centuries of stories. Few brands have that kind of heritage. Although the reasons for the change were perfectly rational in a business context – this was a change to the holding company name, the name Post Office could not be registered for use internationally, the technological context in which the business operated had changed dramatically etc etc – these reasons were scorned aside by an emotional response from the general public. The public said we know the Post Office as a symbol of something good that we have valued and whose passing

we regret. Everyone knew personal stories that were based around the idea of the Post Office as the heart of local communities. Here was a new name Consignia, which removed the experience from the individual and local to the impersonal and international.

But that was the strategy. Had the strategy been thought through? Had the rational been weighed properly against the emotional? When it comes to a name the emotional counts for a lot. Think of the emotion we put into naming a child. Naming a business, organisation or brand can involve emotion too, much as we try to approach it through a rational, strategic viewpoint.

“When it comes to a name the emotional counts for a lot.”

So in the end that gut feeling really matters. *I like/hate that name*. New brands are increasingly driven by business and legal necessities towards manufactured names. The need to register domain names on the Internet has added enormous complexity to the whole challenge. There are good solutions: Google, for example, suggests the spirit of searching and serendipity which drives the Internet. There are also questionable solutions, many of them found to be good after deeper questioning, many based on Latinate inventions or rare letter combinations and sounding like high-scoring words in a game of Scrabble: Xanax, Uniq, Zaviva.

Actually that proves another point. You can get used to any name over time. Don't reject new names out of hand, you might just grow to love them. Many copiers followed after Xerox.

With a new chapter released weekly, look out for the next in the series, X-y, arriving with you on Friday 18 September. Follow us on [Linked In](#) or via our [Insights page](#) to find your weekly dose of writing inspiration.

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