

The tone of a literary work is the writer's attitude toward his or her subject, characters, or audience.

A writer's tone may be formal or informal, friendly or distant, personal or pompous. For example, William Faulkner's tone in his "Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech" is earnest and serious, whereas James Thurber's tone in "The Night the Ghost Got In" is humorous and ironic.

A writer creates tone by selection (diction) and arrangement (syntax) of words, and by purposeful use of details and images.

The reader perceives tone by examining these elements.

Tone sets the relationship between reader and writer. As the emotion growing out of the material and connection the material to the reader, tone is the hallmark of the writer's personality.

Understanding tone is requisite to understanding meaning.

Such understanding is the key to perceiving the author's mood and making the connection between the author's thought and its expression.

Identifying and analyzing tone requires careful reading, sensitivity to diction and syntax, and understanding of detail selection and imagery.

Tone Words

1. **allusive** – intimate, suggest, connote
2. **angry** – mad, furious, irate
3. **bantering** – good-natured teasing, ridicule, joking
4. **benevolent** – magnanimous, generous, noble
5. **burlesque** – mockery, sham, spoof, parody
6. **candid** – clear, frank, genuine, sincere
7. **clinical** - direct, detached, scientific, impersonal
8. **colloquial** -common – ordinary, vernacular
9. **compassionate** – kindly, sympathetic, benevolent
10. **complimentary** – flattering, approving, laudatory
11. **concerned** – touched, affected, influenced
12. **condescending** – scornful, contemptuous, disdainful
13. **confident** – positive, certain, assured
14. **contemptuous** – pompous, arrogant, superior, haughty
15. **contentious** – argumentative, quarrelsome, pugnacious
16. **cynical** – adverse, suspicious, opposed, doubtful, dubious
17. **detached** – separated, severed, apathetic
18. **didactic** – pointed, bombastic, pompous, terse

19. **diffident** – retiring, timid, hesitant, bashful
20. **disdainful** – haughty, arrogant, supercilious
21. **dramatic** – exciting, moving, sensational, emotional
22. **effusive** – talkative, verbose, profuse
23. **elegiac** – sad, mournful, plaintive (like an elegy)
24. **factious** – dissident, rebellious, insubordinate
25. **factual** – authentic, genuine, truthful
26. **fanciful** – capricious, extravagant, whimsical
27. **flippant** – offhand, facetious, frivolous
28. **impartial** – equitable, unbiased, dispassionate
29. **incisive** – cutting, biting, penetrating
30. **indignant** – angry, irritated, resentful
31. **inflammatory** – irritate, arouse, resentful
32. **informative** – acquaint, communicate, disclose
33. **insipid** – flat, bland, tedious, banal (commonplace)
34. **insolent** – insulting, brazen, rude, contemptuous
35. **ironic** – contradictory, implausible, incongruous
36. **irreverent** – profane, impious, blasphemous, ungodly
37. **learned** – skilled, experienced, professional
38. **lugubrious** – gloomy, dismal, melancholy, somber
39. **maudlin** – sentimental, mushy, gushing, insipid
40. **mock-heroic** – mimicking courage (pretend)
41. **mock-serious** – mimicking solemnity (pretend)
42. **moralistic** – virtuous, righteous, blameless
43. **objective** – impartial, detached, impersonal
44. **patronizing** – condescending, scornful, disdainful
45. **pedantic** – academic, bookish, scholastic
46. **petty** – trivial, insignificant, narrow-minded
47. **pretentious** – arrogant, boastful, conceited
48. **restrained** – unwilling, hesitant, reluctant
49. **sardonic** – cutting, biting, penetrating, satirical
50. **satiric** – lampooning, facetious
51. **scornful** – bitter, caustic, acrimonious, mordant
52. **sentimental** – emotional, mushy, maudlin (tearful)
53. **somber** – serious, gloomy, dismal, shadowy
54. **sympathetic** – supportive, favorable, considerate
55. **taunting** – contemptuous, insulting, derisive
56. **terse** – concise, succinct, pithy, pointed
57. **turgid** – pompous, bloated, swollen, distended
58. **urgent** – compelling, demanding, imperative, pressing
59. **vibrant** – resonant, active, resounding
60. **whimsical** – flippant, frivolous, light-hearted, dainty

Practice!

Assignment #1: Choose a passage from *The Great Gatsby* that you enjoyed. In 1-2 paragraphs, explain the tone that Fitzgerald uses. How does he communicate this tone? Include quotes and citations to back up your tone claim.

** Assignments should be typed and should utilize proper MLA formatting.