

# Tone Classification Assignment

SAMPLE: *The Odyssey*, Homer

"I shall throw you on a black ship and send you to the mainland, To King Echetos, destroyer of all mortal men, Who will cut off your nostrils and ears with a sharp bronze sword; He will tear off your private parts and give them to the dogs to eat raw."

SAMPLE ANSWER: THREATENING--In this excerpt, one of Homer's characters makes dire threats against another. The key to classifying a tone as "threatening" is the possibility or promise of negative action against the subject. Our particular subject has achieved quite a severe set of consequences for himself and thus more than merits the designation.

1. *The Idiot*, Dostoyevsky

"There were always children there, and I spent all my time with the children, only with the children. They were the children of the village where I lived, a whole gang of them, who went to the local school. I was simply with them mostly, and I spent all my four years like that. I did not want anything else."

[A] amused [B] reflective [C] reverent [D] remorseful

2. *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency*, Douglas Adams

Time passed.

Susan waited.

The more Susan waited, the more the doorbell didn't ring. Or the phone. She looked at her watch. She felt that now was about the time that she could legitimately begin to feel cross. She was cross already, of course, but that had been in her own time, so to speak. They were well and truly into his time now, and even allowing for traffic, mishaps, and general vagueness and dilatoriness, it was now well over half an hour past the time that he had insisted was the latest time they could possibly afford to leave, so she'd better be ready.

[A] apprehensive [B] elegiac [C] disdainful [D] threatening

3. "Happy Thought," Robert Louis Stevenson

The world is so full of a number of things, I'm sure we should all be as happy as kings.

[A] bantering [B] simpering [C] pedantic [D] amused

4. *Angela's Ashes*, Frank McCourt

"Look at what he did. Thrun up his First Communion breakfast. Thrun up the body and blood of Jesus. I have God in me backyard. What am I goin' to do? I'll take him to the Jesuits for they know the sins of the Pope himself." She dragged me through the streets of Limerick. She told the neighbors and passing strangers about God in her backyard. "In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. It's a day since me last confessions." "A day? And what sins have you committed in a day, my child?" "I overslept. I nearly missed my First Communion, My grandmother said I have standing up, North of Ireland, Presbyterian hair. I threw up

my First Communion breakfast. Now Grandma says she has God in her backyard and what should she do."

[A] horrific [B] disdainful [C] condescending [D] amusing

5. "A Hunger Artist," Kafka

The hunger artist sometimes remarked to himself that perhaps things might look a little brighter if he were not located quite so near the stables. But he did not dare complain to the management; after all he had the animals to thank for the numerous visitors who did pass his cage, among whom there always might be the one who was there just to see him, and lord knew where they might tuck him away if he called attention to his existence and thereby to the fact that, strictly speaking, he was no more than an obstacle in the path to the animals.

[A] detached [B] persuasive [C] sympathetic [D] disdainful

6. *Fathers and Sons*, Turgenev

No crowd of serfs ran out on to the steps to meet the masters; a little girl of twelve years made her appearance alone. After her there came out of the house a young lad, very like Piotr, dressed in a coat of gray livery, with white armorial buttons, the servant of Pavel Petrovitch Kirsanov. Without speaking, he opened the door of the carriage, and unbuttoned the apron of the coach. Nikolai Petrovitch, with his son and Bazarov, walked through a dark and empty hall.

[A] reflective [B] urgent [C] somber [D] apprehensive

7. "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest," Kesey

She tells them right back in a loud, brassy voice that he's already plenty damn clean, thank you. "They showered me this morning at the courthouse and last night at the jail. And I swear I believe they'd of washed my ears for me on the taxi over if they coulda found the facilities. Hoo boy, seems like every time they ship me someplace I gotta get scrubbed down before, after, and during the operation-- and get back away from me with that thermometer, Sam."

[A] disappointed [B] condescending [C] amused [D] audacious

**Step One:**

**Define the following words:**

**amused:**

**reflective:**

**reverent:**

**apprehensive:**

**elegiac:**

**disdainful:**

**threatening:**

**bantering:**

**simpering:**

**pedantic:**

**amused:**

**reverent:**

**detached:**

**provocative:**

**mock-heroic:**

**somber:**

**ominous:**

**urgent:**

**satiric:**

**bantering:**

**somber:**

**urgent:**

**factual:**

**whimsical:**

**sarcastic:**

**Step Two:**

**Complete the starred multiple choice questions on the attached pages. The defined words above will help you identify the correct tone for each passage.**

**Good Luck, and Try Your Best!!**

8. "God is love," Bowring  
God is love; his mercy brightens All the path in which we  
rove; Bliss he wakes and woe he lightens; God is wisdom,  
God is love.  
[A] pedantic [B] simpering [C] reverent [D] detached

9. "Polish War Song," Percival  
Freedom calls you! Quick, be ready- Rouse ye in the  
name of God, - Onward, onward, strong and steady, -  
Dash to earth the oppressor's rod, Freedom calls, ye  
brave! Rise and spurn the name of slave.  
[A] provocative [B] mock-heroic [C] somber [D] ominous

10. "The Three Little Pigs," Politically Correct Bedtime Stories,  
James Finn Garner

At the house of sticks, the wolf again banged on the door  
and shouted, "Little pigs, little pigs, let me in!"

The pigs shouted back, "Go to hell, you carnivorous,  
imperialistic oppressor!"

At this, the wolf chuckled condescendingly. He thought to  
himself: "They are so childlike in their ways. It will be a  
shame to see them go, but progress cannot be stopped."

So the wolf huffed and puffed and blew down the house  
of sticks. The pigs ran to the house of bricks, with the wolf  
close at their heels. Where the house of sticks had stood,  
other wolves built a time-share condo resort complex for  
vacationing wolves, with a fiberglass reconstruction of the  
house of sticks, as well as native curio shops, snorkeling,  
and dolphin shows.

At the house of bricks, the wolf again banged on the door  
and shouted, "Little pigs, little pigs, let me in!"

This time in response, the pigs sang songs of solidarity  
and wrote letters of protest to the United Nations.

By now the wolf was getting angry at the pigs' refusal to  
see the situation from the carnivore's point of view. So he  
huffed and he puffed, and huffed and puffed, then grabbed  
his chest and fell over dead from a massive heart attack  
brought on from eating too many fatty foods.

[A] urgent [B] satiric [C] bantering [D] mock-heroic

11. *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, Hemingway

"Afterwards we will be as one animal of the forest and be  
so close that neither one can tell that one of us is one and  
not the other. Can you not feel my heart be your heart?"

[A] somber [B] urgent [C] factual [D] intimate

12. *Dave Barry's Greatest Hits*, Barry

You never found out why these men spend so much time  
shaking hands [in beer commercials]. Maybe shaking  
hands is just their simple straightforward burly masculine  
American patriotic way of saying to each other: "Floyd, I  
am truly sorry I drank all that beer last night and went to  
the bathroom in your glove compartment."

[A] bantering [B] sympathetic [C] intimate [D] disdainful

13. *Cannery Row*, Steinbeck

Henri the painter was not French and his name was not  
Henri. Henri had so steeped himself in stories of the Left  
Bank in Paris that he lived there although he had never  
been there. Feverishly he followed in periodicals the  
Dadaist movements and schisms, the strangely feminine  
jealousies and religiousness, the obscurantisms of the  
forming and breaking schools. Regularly he revolted  
against outworn techniques and materials. One season he  
threw out perspective. Another year he abandoned red,  
even as the mother of purple. Finally he gave up paint  
entirely. It was not known whether Henri was a good  
painter or not for he threw himself so violently into  
movements that he had little time left for painting of any  
kind.

[A] reverent [B] apprehensive [C] regretful [D] amused

14. *Kink*, Davies

But I felt after the novelty had worn off the Americans  
didn't really understand our music or our culture. Coming  
from a country where having central heating was  
considered posh and a refrigerator a luxury, Americans  
seemed to me to be strangely spoiled and 'old-fashioned.'

They seemed to be lost in the forties and fifties. I expected  
to find Americans more forward and progressive but I was  
surprised to find many very set in their ways, just like their  
English counterparts.

[A] urgent [B] disappointed [C] sardonic [D] detached

15. *Catcher in the Rye*, Salinger

So all of a sudden, I sort of leaned over and said, "Would  
any of you girls care to dance?" I didn't ask them crudely  
or anything. Very suave, in fact. But God damn it, they  
thought that was a panic, too. They started giggling some  
more. I'm not kidding, they were three real morons.

[A] condescending [B] persuasive [C] amused  
[D] audacious

16. *Crime and Punishment*, Dostoyevsky

He had not a minute more to lose. He pulled the axe  
quite out, swung it with both arms, scarcely conscious of  
himself, and almost without effort, almost mechanically,  
brought the blunt side down on her head. He seemed not  
to use his own strength in this. But as soon as he had once  
brought the axe down, his strength returned to him.

[A] apprehensive [B] remorseful [C] detached [D] intimate

17. *The Way Things Work*, David Macaulay

The kind of nuclear reaction that happens inside a  
nuclear reactor is called nuclear fission. The fuel is  
uranium or plutonium, two very heavy elements which  
have many protons and neutrons in their nuclei. Fission  
starts when a fast-moving neutron strikes a nucleus. The  
nucleus cannot take in the extra neutron, and the whole

nucleus breaks apart into two smaller nuclei.  
[A] provocative [B] factual [C] detached [D] pedantic

18. *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley

"I am not made," I cried energetically, "the sun and the heavens, who have viewed my operations, can bear witness of my truth. I am the assassin of those most innocent victims; they died by my machinations. A thousand times would I have shed my own blood, drop by drop, to have saved their lives; but I could not, my father, indeed I could not sacrifice the whole human race."  
[A] ominous [B] sardonic [C] elegiac [D] remorseful

19. *Last of the Mohicans*, James Fenimore Cooper

Six Delaware girls, with their long, dark, flowing tresses falling loosely across their bosoms, stood apart, and only gave proofs of their existence as they occasionally strewed sweet-scented herbs and forest flowers on a litter of fragrant plants, that, under a pail of Indian robes, supported all that now remained of the ardent, high-souled, and generous Cora. Her form was concealed in many wrappers of the same simple manufacture, and her face was shut forever from the gaze of men.  
[A] elegiac [B] apprehensive [C] reverent [D] provocative

20. *Don Quixote*, Cervantes [Don Quixote has just liberated a group of dangerous criminals.]

"That is all very well," answered Don Quixote, "but I know what we should do now." Then he called all the galley slaves, who were now running hither and thither in a riotous mood and had stripped the commissary to the skin, and when they had gathered around him in a circle, he addressed them as follows: "It is the duty of well-bred people to be grateful for benefits received, and ingratitude is one of the most hateful sins in the eyes of God. I say this sirs, because you know what favor you have received from me, and the only return I wish and demand is that you all go from here, laden with the chains from which I have just freed your necks, to the city of El Toboso. There you are to present yourselves before Lady Dulcinea of El Toboso and tell her that her Knight of the Rueful Figure sent you there to commend his service to her. You are to tell her, point by point, the details of this famous adventure, and when you have done this, you may then go whichever way you please and good luck be with you."  
[A] mock-heroic [B] detached [C] urgent [D] disdainful

21. "Send in the Clowns," Sonheim

Just when I'd stopped opening doors,  
Finally knowing the one that I wanted was yours,  
Making my entrance again with my usual flair,  
Sure of my lines, No one is there.  
Don't you love farce? My fault, I fear.  
I thought that you'd want what I want.

Sorry, my dear.  
But where are the clowns?  
Quick, send in the clowns.  
Don't bother, they're here.  
[A] ominous [B] satiric [C] intimate [D] regretful

22. *Through the Looking-Glass*, Carroll

They stood so still that she quite forgot they were alive, and she was just going round to see if "TWEEDLE" was written at the back of each collar, when she was startled by a voice coming from the one marked "DUM." "If you think we're wax-works," he said, "you ought to pay, you know. Wax-works weren't made to be looked at for nothing."  
[A] pedantic [B] whimsical [C] threatening [D] sympathetic

23. "Freedom," Ruskin

You will send your child, will you, into a room where the table is loaded with sweet wine and fruit-some poisoned, some not?-you will say to him, "Choose freely, my little child! It is so good for you to have freedom of choice; it forms your character -your individuality! If you take the wrong cup or the wrong berry, you will die before the day is over, but you will have acquired the dignity of a Free child."  
[A] whimsical [B] simpering [C] bantering [D] sarcastic



**Tone** is the attitude a writer takes toward his or her subject or audience.

Like the **tone** of a speaker's voice, the tone of a work of literature expresses the writer's feelings. A work's tone can usually be described with an adjective or two: *bitter*, *playful*, *sarcastic*, and so on. To decide on the tone of a passage, you should ask yourself the following questions?

1. What is the passage's subject, and who is its audience?
2. What would you say are the most important words in the passage? What connotations, or associations, do these words have?
3. What general feeling do the passage's images create?
4. Are there any hints that the narrator or speaker does not really mean everything he or she says?
5. Does the narrator or speaker make any jokes? If so, are these jokes lighthearted, bitter, or something else?
6. If the narrator or speaker were speaking aloud, what tone of voice would he or she be using?

### Analyzing Tone

Write one or two words to describe the tone of each of the numbered passages; circle phrases within the poem that create the tone. You may choose words from the list below, or you may use words of your own.

sad	joyous	bitter	ironic	playful	mocking
impassioned	anxious	contented	affectionate	gloomy	confused
serious	objective	angry	sympathetic	critical	unemotional
approving	grieving	romantic	fearful	melancholy	patriotic
teasing	reflective	admiring	happy	disappointed	loving
agitated	tender	aggressive	mischievous	despairing	hopeful

"I looked upon the scene before me—upon the mere house, and the simple landscape features of the domain—upon the bleak walls—upon the vacant eyelike windows—upon a few rank sedges—and upon a few white trunks of decayed trees . . ." (from "The Fall of the House of Usher" by Edgar Allan Poe)

1. Tone: \_\_\_\_\_

"The war is actually begun! The next gale that sweeps from the north will bring to our ears the clash of resounding arms! Our brethren are already in the field! Why stand we here idle? What is it that gentlemen wish? What would they have?" (from "Speech to the Virginia Convention" by Patrick Henry)

2. Tone: \_\_\_\_\_



"I am not well. I do not know our target. They do not tell us for which city the bird is targeted. I do not know. That is planning. That is not my responsibility. My responsibility is to watch the console and when certain events take place upon the console, turn my key in the lock. Shotwell bounces the rubber ball on the floor in a steady, stolid, rhythmical manner. I am aching to get my hands on the ball, on the jacks."  
(from "Game" by Donald Barthelme)

3. Tone \_\_\_\_\_

"NO TRESPASSING. We Like the snappy, rude signs. NO TRASPASSING. You get the idea. NO TRUSTPASSING. Keep out. NO BOATS ALOUD—silent boats OK, but no boats aloud." (From "Misspelling" by Charles Kuralt)

4. Tone \_\_\_\_\_

"If only I could nudge-you-~~from~~ this sleep, My maimed darling, my skittery pigeon."  
(from "Elegy for Jane" by Theodore Roethke)

5. Tone \_\_\_\_\_

"This battle with Mr. Covey was the turning-point in my career as a slave. It rekindled the few expiring embers of freedom, and revived within me a sense of my own manhood." (from *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* by Frederick Douglass)

6. Tone \_\_\_\_\_

### Changing the Tone of a Passage

Choose one of the numbered passages above and rewrite it, changing some words and images to give the passage a different tone. Then identify the passage's new tone.

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