

TONE: THE ATTITUDE OF AN AUTHOR

The difficult but subtle task of a good reader is to identify the tone or attitude revealed by an author in a piece of writing. *Any human emotion* may become the author's tone. Gestures, voice inflections, pauses, facial movement, even the sparkle of his eye can reveal a speaker's attitude toward his subject. However, an author's attitude or tone has to be inferred from less obvious clues. To avoid inaccurate interpretations, you, as a reader, must heed whether the author is *serious, humorous, witty, ironic, patriotic, sentimental, defensive, moralizing, compassionate, pessimistic, cynical, nostalgic, satirical, critical, horrifying, or rejoicing* in his attitude toward his subject. Remember, an author may color his ideas with these or *any other emotions*.

The perceptive reader recognizes these attitudes or tones by identifying the subject, the length and flow of the sentences, the atmosphere, the work connotations, the point of view and purpose of the author. In an effective piece, the author creatively and thoughtfully blends many elements together to unify and focus an overall tone which reflects his attitude. Some explanations and examples follow.

NOSTALGIC TONE. Reveals a kind of homesickness for the past, a desire to return to "the good ole days." The following statement reflects nostalgia:

"Oh, for the halcyon days of our childhood when there was time for playing family games, reading good books, enjoying dinner conversation; we knew each other; we shared our joys and disappointments--no boob tube then," the mother reminisced.

SENTIMENTAL TONE. Identifies that which is affectedly or extravagantly emotional instead of rational; it may also reveal romantic feelings. A good example is the paragraph which follows:

Jim and Mary Smith had looked forward to the trip for months. They were returning to a city they had fallen in love with during the five years it was their home over a decade ago. So many memories were rooted in those years when they lived near Washington D.C. They had bought their first house while they lived in a nearby suburb. Their two sons had begun school during those years, and Jim and Mary had established many close friendships. Above all, they had become caught up in the excitement of living in the nation's capital, with its continual political intrigue and constant awareness of international affairs. Indeed, they were more than eager to return, see friends, and visit the beautiful city they loved.

MORALIZING TONE. Attempts to explain or interpret good or bad features of something. It is explicitly and clearly trying to reform. There is no subtlety involved. An example of moralizing is the following statement:

"Well, if you want to live like a yuppie, you better study hard and complete your education. That piece of parchment is the bottom rung of the yuppie ladder!"

CYNICAL TONE. Reveals a sense of helplessness and hopelessness toward life--a feeling that nothing really can be changed, that evil will prevail, that man is basically selfish, incapable of being reformed. As an example of cynicism, consider the following statement made by a person of voting age.

"Don't talk to me about voting or politics. I'm not interested. All politicians are self-serving and corrupt. My vote won't change a thing."

List of Words to Describe Tone

Tone refers to a writer's ability to express an attitude toward the subject matter of a text. It is often implied and requires the reader to make inferences in order to identify the overall tone. The following list of "45 words" can be used to identify the tone of a passage.

accusatory	calm	dejected	excited	humorous	paranoid	sinister
acrimonious	catty	demanding	facetious	hurt	passive	somber
aggravated	caustic	depressed	fearful	indignant	pedantic	soothing
agitated	cheerful	desperate	feckless	inquisitive	persuasive	stern
ambivalent	circumspect	despondent	flirtatious	intriguing	pessimistic	superficial
angry	coarse	didactic	forceful	invidious	pleading	surprised
annoyed	comforting	disappointed	forgiving	ironic	pleasant	sweet
anxious	confronting	disgusted	friendly	irritated	proud	sympathetic
apathetic	condescending	dismissive	frustrated	judgmental	resigned	tired
apologetic	confused	doleful	furious	livid	reverent	ticillating
appreciative	consoling	doubtful	grieving	longing	rhetorical	vibrant
arrogant	contemptuous	dreamy	guilty	loving	sarcastic	vibratic
artificial	content	dubious	harsh	manipulative	saturnine	wary
attacking	coy	ecstatic	haughty	melancholic	scrupulous	whimsical
authoritative	curt	elegiac	hesitant	mocking	seductive	wistful
bitter	cynical	encouraging	hollow	morese	sentimental	
bored	defeated	euphoric	hopeful	omnipotent	sharp	
brash	defensive	exasperated	humble	optimistic	sinful	

Affectionate	Showing love or care
Ambivalent	Uncertainty in feeling
Angry	Showing anger
Annoyed	Irritated
Anxious	Uneasy, fearful
Apprehensive	Anxious
Bewildered	Confused
Bitter	Hostile
Blunt	Abrupt in manner
Bossy	Overbearing
Brusque	Blunt, rough
Candid	Unprejudiced
Casual	Occurring by chance
Cheerful	Being in good spirits
Choleric	Irritable
Cold	Lacking emotion or passion
Compassionate	Showing care
Conceited	Cocky, full of ones self
Conciliatory	Appease, gain favor by pleasing acts
Confident	Having or showing self-reliance, full of conviction
Confused	Disordered or mixed up, perplexed
Contentious	Of, pertaining to, or fond of contention; quarrelsome
Cynical	Given to questioning people's values, virtues, and sincerity; skeptical
Delightful	Affording delight; very pleasing, charming
Depressed	Sad, dejected, or pressed down
Derisive	Expressive of or characterized by derision; ridicule, scorn
Derogatory	Disparaging or belittling
Desolate	Devoid of inhabitation, deserted
Desperate	Having lost all hopes, despairing
Diabolic	Of, concerning, or characteristic of the devil
Disappointed	Thwarted in hope, desire, or expectation
Doubtful	Subject to or causing doubt; undecided, skeptical
Ebullient	Boiling or seeming to boil over, zestfully, enthusiastic
Effusive	Unrestrained or excessive in emotional expression
Elated	Exultantly proud and joyful
Empathetic	Of, related to, or characterized by identification/understanding another's

	emotion
Encouraging	Giving confidence or hope
Enraged	To infuriate
Euphoric	Feeling great happiness
Excited	Emotionally aroused
Expectant	Having or marked by expectation; eager anticipation
Fatalistic	The feeling that all events are predetermined and unalterable
Fearful	Causing, or capable of causing fear
Fervent	Having or showing great emotion
Foreboding	A sense of impending evil
Frantic	Highly excited with strong emotion
Frightened	To fill with fear or alarm
Frustrated	To thwart, causing feelings of discouragement
Furious	Characterized by extreme anger
Gleeful	Full of jubilant delight; joyful
Gloomy	Partially or totally dark, dismal and dreary; showing or filled with gloom
Grave	Requiring serious thought; momentous; fraught with danger or harm
Greedy	An excessive want
Grim	Dismal, gloomy
Gushy	To flow forth, as with tears
Happy	Delighted, pleased or glad
Haughty	Disdainfully proud; snobbish; scornfully arrogant
Hilarious	Arousing great merriment, very funny
Holier-than-thou	Obnoxiously pious; self-righteous
Hopeless	Without hope
Humorous	Characterized by humor; funny
Impatient	Not accepting delay
Incisive	Impressively direct
Incredulous	Disinclined or indisposed to believe, skeptical; indicating or showing unbelief
Indignant	Expressing strong displeasure at something considered unjust, offensive, insulting
Intimate	Associated in close personal relations; very private
Introspective	A quality of contemplation of ones own thoughts, feelings and sensations
Jocund	Sprightly and lighthearted in disposition, character or quality
Joyful	Feeling, causing or indicating joy

Laidback	Having a casual attitude
Lethargic	Characterized by laziness
Lugubrious	Mournful, dismal, or gloomy
Melancholy	Sadness or depression
Mirthful	Joyous, gay, jolly
Miserable	Wretchedly unhappy, uneasy, or uncomfortable
Mocking	To treat with ridicule or contempt; deride
Mournful	Feeling or expressing sorrow or grief
Mysterious	Simultaneously arousing wonder
Nervous	Easily agitated or distressed; high strung or jumpy
Nostalgic	A bittersweet longing for things, persons or situations of the past
Objective	Uninfluenced by emotions
Ominous	Threatening
Optimistic	Expects a favorable outcome
Outspoken	Candid or unreserved in speech
Paranoid	Extreme irrational fear
Passionate	Powerful emotion to something
Pathetic	Arousing sympathetic sadness
Pedantic	Narrow concern for book learning
Pensive	Deeply, often wistfully or dreamily thoughtful
Pessimistic	Stressing the negative or taking the gloomiest possible view
Pithy	Precisely meaningful; forceful and brief
Playful	Full of fun and high spirits
Proud	Feeling pride, showing proper self-respect
Psychotic	Crazed behavior
Relaxed	Easy manner, laidback
Reticent	Inclined to be silent or uncommunicative with speech
Romantic	Emotional attachment or involvement between people; love
Sad	Affected or characterized by sorrow or unhappiness
Sanguine	Of the color of blood; red
Sardonic	Scornfully or cynically mocking
Scared	To be struck with sudden fear; alarm
Scornful	Contempt or disdain felt toward a person or object considered despicable or unworthy
Selfish	Concerned chiefly or only with ones self
Serene	Unaffected by disturbance
Serious	Exhibiting or marked by thought or

	concern
Silly	Foolish
Sinister	Suggesting or threatening evil
Skeptical	Marked or given to doubt, questioning
Solemn	Deeply earnest, serious, sober
Stressful	Full of or tending to cause stress
Suspenseful	Full of suspense, anxiety due to a mysterious situation
Suspicious	Arousing suspicion
Sympathetic	Exposing feelings of sympathy
Tender	One who tends something, to be kind towards
Tense	Lightly stressed
Terse	Brief to point
Thoughtful	Full of thought
Timorous	Cautious, to be timid
Uncaring	No concern or sympathy
Unconcerned	Not interested
Uneasy	Lacking security
Unhappy	Not joyful
Unsympathetic	Not affected by
Upset	Mad or angry
Vitriolic	Similar to
Whimsical	Erratic behavior
Wistful	Full of wishes
Worried	Feeling uneasy
Zealous	Fervent

tone = speaker's attitude

POSITIVE TONE WORDS

admiring	hilarious
adoring	hopeful
affectionate	humorous
appreciative	interested
approving	introspective
bemused	joyful
benevolent	joyful
blithe	laudatory
calm	light
casual	lively
celebratory	mirthful
cheerful	modest
comforting	nostalgic
comic	optimistic
compassionate	passionate
complimentary	placid
conciliatory	playful
confident	poignant
contented	proud
delightful	reassuring
earnest	reflective
ebullient	relaxed
ecstatic	respectful
effusive	reverent
elated	romantic
empathetic	sanguine
encouraging	scholarly
euphoric	self-assured
excited	sentimental
exhilarated	serene
expectant	silly
facetious	sprightly
fervent	straightforward
flippant	sympathetic
forthright	tender
friendly	tranquil
funny	whimsical
gleeful	wistful
gushy	worshipful
happy	zealous

NEUTRAL (+, -, or neutral)

commanding
direct
impartial
indirect
meditative
objective
questioning
speculative
unambiguous
unconcerned
understated

NEGATIVE TONE WORDS

abhorring	hostile
acerbic	impatient
ambiguous	incredulous
ambivalent	indifferent
angry	indignant
annoyed	inflammatory
antagonistic	insecure
anxious	insolent
apathetic	irreverent
apprehensive	lethargic
belligerent	melancholy
bewildered	mischievous
biting	miserable
bitter	mocking
blunt	mournful
bossy	nervous
cold	ominous
conceited	outraged
condescending	paranoid
confused	pathetic
contemptuous	patronizing
curt	pedantic
cynical	pensive
demanding	pessimistic
depressed	pretentious
derisive	psychotic
derogatory	resigned
desolate	reticent
despairing	sarcastic
desperate	sardonic
detached	scornful
diabolic	self-deprecating
disappointed	selfish
disliking	serious
disrespectful	severe
doubtful	sinister
embarrassed	skeptical
enraged	sly
evasive	solemn
fatalistic	somber
fearful	stern
forceful	stolid
foreboding	stressful
frantic	strident
frightened	suspicious
frustrated	tense
furious	threatening
gloomy	tragic
grave	uncertain
greedy	uneasy
grim	unfriendly
harsh	unsympathetic
haughty	upset
holier-than-thou	violent
hopeless	wry

mood = emotional effect that the text creates for the audience

POSITIVE MOOD WORDS

amused	jubilant
awed	liberating
bouncy	light-hearted
calm	loving
cheerful	mellow
chipper	nostalgic
confident	optimistic
contemplative	passionate
content	peaceful
determined	playful
dignified	pleased
dreamy	refreshed
ecstatic	rejuvenated
empowered	relaxed
energetic	relieved
enlightened	satiated
enthralled	satisfied
excited	sentimental
exhilarated	silly
flirty	surprised
giddy	sympathetic
grateful	thankful
harmonious	thoughtful
hopeful	touched
hyper	trustful
idyllic	vivacious
joyous	warm
	welcoming

NEGATIVE MOOD WORDS

aggravated	insidious
annoyed	intimidated
anxious	irate
apathetic	irritated
apprehensive	jealous
barren	lethargic
brooding	lonely
cold	melancholic
confining	merciless
confused	moody
cranky	morose
crushed	nauseated
cynical	nervous
depressed	nightmarish
desolate	numb
disappointed	overwhelmed
discontented	painful
distressed	pensive
drained	pessimistic
dreary	predatory
embarrassed	rejected
enraged	restless
envious	scared
exhausted	serious
fatalistic	sick
foreboding	somber
frustrated	stressed
futile	suspenseful
gloomy	tense
grumpy	terrifying
haunting	threatening
heartbroken	uncomfortable
hopeless	vengeful
hostile	violent
indifferent	worried
infuriated	

Tone is more than merely an author's attitude toward his or her subject, audience, and/or characters; it is the stylistic means by which an author conveys his or her attitude(s) in a work of literature. Tone is an integral part of a work's meaning because it controls the reader's response, which is essential to fully experiencing literature. In order to recognize tonal shift and to interpret complexities of tone, the reader must be able to make inferences based on an active reading of the work.

Tonal Scale of Author/Speaker's Attitude

reverence	love	happiness	calm	hope	irony	fear	sadness	anger	hate
admiring adoring amazed awed deferential elegiac fawning flattering honoring humbled nostalgic obsequious respectful submissive venerating worshipful	affectionate ardent compassionate enamored fond impassioned infatuated lustful narcissistic passionate Platonic rapturous romantic sentimental tender wistful zealous	blissful buoyant ecstatic elated exalting exultant fervent jubilant thrilled carefree cheerful delightful gay gleeful jovial joyful merry mirthful pleased	content composed mellow mild passive peaceful placid satisfied sedate serene submissive tranquil undisturbed unruffled	anticipatory assured confident eager expectant halcyon idealistic intrepid naive optimistic Pollyannaish positive rose-colored sanguine trusting	absurd acerbic biting caustic cynical derisive flippant humorous icy inconsistent jeering mocking paradoxical playful sarcastic sardonic scornful smirking sneering witty wry	agitated alarmed angst-ridden anguished anxious appalled apprehensive averse dismayed disquieted distressed dreading horrified intimidated pessimistic sinister spooky startled terrified timid timorous trepid troubled uneasy	bleak dejected depressed despairing despondent disconsolate dismal empty forlorn funereal gloomy grave grievous hopeless lamenting lugubrious melancholic miserable morose pitiful regretful remorseful solemn somber sorrowful sullen woeful	acrimonious aggravated antipathetic bitter bristling choleric consternated enraged exasperated frustrated furious futile galled hostile incensed indignant irascible irate irritated miffed outraged perturbed petulant riled vexed wrathful	abhorrent averse contemptuous despising detesting disdainful disgusted jealous loathing malevolent malicious misanthropic misogynistic piqued rancorous repugnant repulsed resentful vengeful

Reader's Perception of Speaker or Character

affable	compassionate	perceptive	sincere
aloof	condescending	pernicious	subservient
arrogant	confident	pedantic	triumphant
audacious	credulous	petulant	unreliable
austere	demoralized	proud	unsophisticated
benevolent	detached	querulous	vain
bold	didactic	rational	vapid
cerebral	fatuous	shallow	vivacious
	foolish	insightful	
	gullible	insipid	
	haughty	insolent	
	humble	judgmental	
	imperious	keen	
	inane	loathsome	
	incredulous	naïve	
	insecure	pathetic	