

Tone and Attitude

in Literature

Definition: **Tone** is the verbal stance the author assumes toward the reader and his subject as reflected in his “voice.” It is the quality of language and voice used to convey the speaker’s **Attitude** toward the subject or audience and is perceived through the various **methods** and **diction** used to convey the events of the work. In oral conversation the “tone of voice” may be determined by listening to the words themselves, their inflection, modulation, denotation, and connotation, pitch, stress, or other sound regulators. However, since words on a page are flat, other methods of discernment must be employed.

Mood is the overall atmosphere created by the speaker, the setting the events, or narrator.

Attitude is the feeling the speaker holds toward the characters, events, or situation he is relating to the audience.

With few exceptions and for most practical purposes TONE = ATTITUDE

Problem: The terms “**tone**” and “**attitude**” may become indistinct.

Problem: Students often equate the speaker with the author.

Problem: To misinterpret tone is to misinterpret meaning.

Process: Understanding tone requires making inferences during and after a close reading of a work. The students must distinguish the techniques used to establish “**tone**,” “**mood**,” and “**attitude**.”

Results: Understanding and analyzing the difference between “**tone**,” “**mood**,” and “**attitude**” and perceiving tonal shifts.

Analyzing how Tone Contributes to Meaning and Attitude in Literature – In order to answer these questions, a student will need to examine the speaker’s diction: circling words is a good strategy

1. How does the author feel toward his subject?
2. How does the author feel about the characters?
3. How does the author feel about the events presented?
4. How does the author feel about his audience (readers)?
5. Can or does the author have different feelings for his subject and / or his audience?
6. Does the narrator feel the same as the author?

All of these “feelings” determine the TONE and the ATTITUDE of the work.

Associated Descriptive Vocabulary by Category

Speaker: humble, shallow, bold, insipid, haughty, imperious, proud, audacious, confident, insecure, credulous, innocent, naïve, triumphant, vivacious, insolent, sincere, inane, vain, gullible, foolish

Ironical words: playful, witty, humorous, sarcastic, sardonic, caustic, acerbic, flippant, cynical, mocking, biting, smirking, sneering, derisive, icy

Reverent: awed, veneration, amazed, impressed

Love: affectionate, cherish, fond, admiring, tender, sentimental, romantic, adoring, narcissistic, passionate, lustful, rapturous, ecstatic, infatuated, enamored, compassionate

Joyful: glad, exalted, zealous, merry, gleeful, delightful, cheerful, gay, sanguine, mirthful, enjoy, relish, bliss

Calm: serene, tranquil, placid, content

Sad: somber, solemn, melancholy, sorrowful, lamenting, despair, despondent, regretful, dismal, funereal, saturnine, dark, gloomy, dejected, grave, grief, morose, sullen, bleak, forlorn, disconsolate, distressed, agonized, anguished, depressed, barren, empty, pitiful

Angry: vehement, enraged, outraged, irritated, indignant, vexed, incensed, petulant, irascible, riled, bitter, acrimonious, irate, fury, wrathful, rancorous, consternation, hostile, choleric, frustrated, exasperated, aggravated, futile, umbrage, gall, bristle

Hate: vengeful, detest, abhor, animosity, malice, pique, rancor, aversion, loath, despise, scorn, contempt, disdain, jealous, repugnant, repulsed, resent, spiteful, disgusted

Fear: timid, apprehensive, anxious, terrified, horrified, agitated, sinister, alarmed, startled, uneasy, qualms, angst, trepidation, intimidated, spooked, dread, phobia, appalled

Vocabulary for Tone and Attitude

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| 1. Abstract | Theoretical, without reference to specifics |
| 2. Absurd: | Contrary to logic, but sometimes artistically viable |
| 3. Affected: | Assuming a false manner or attitude to impress others |
| 4. Ambiguous: | Having two or more possible meanings |
| 5. Analytical: | Inclined to examine things by studying their contents or parts. |
| 6. Anecdotal: | Involving short narratives of interesting events |
| 7. Angry: | Resentful, enraged |
| 8. Archaic: | In the style of an earlier period |
| 9. Austere: | Stern, strict, frugal, unadorned |
| 10. Banal: | Pointless and uninteresting |
| 11. Baroque: | Elaborate, grotesque, and ornamental |
| 12. Bizarre: | Unusually strange or odd |
| 13. Bland: | Undisturbing, unemotional, and uninteresting |
| 14. Bombastic: | Pretentious and pompous |
| 15. Breezy: | Quick-paced, but sometimes superficial |
| 16. Childish: | Immature (when applied to adults or to writing): Expressing contempt |
| 17. Cinematic: | Having the qualities of a motion picture |
| 18. Classical: | Formal, enduring, and standard, adhering to certain traditional methods |
| 19. Colloquial: | Characteristic or ordinary and informal conversation |
| 20. Comic: | Humorous, funny, light (there are many levels of comedy) |
| 21. Concise: | Using very few words to express a great deal |
| 22. Confessional: | Characterized by personal admissions of faults |
| 23. Contemptuous | Feeling superior, disdainful |
| 24. Convincing: | Persuasive, believable, plausible |
| 25. Convoluted: | Very complicated or involved (as in the case of sentences with many qualifiers, phrases, and clauses) |
| 26. Crepuscular: | Having to do with twilight or shadowy areas (as in the darker and more hidden parts of human experience) |
| 27. Cynical: | A tendency to believe that all human behavior is selfish and opportunistic |
| 28. Decadent: | Marked by decay in morals, values, and artistic standards |
| 29. Depressing: | Sad, gloomy (without any redeeming qualities of true tragedy) |
| 30. Detached: | Disinterested, unbiased, emotionally disconnected |

31. Discursive:	Moving pointlessly from one subject to another; rambling
32. Dreamlike:	Having the characteristics of a dream
33. Earthy:	Realistic, rustic, coarse, unrefined, instinctive animalize
34. Effeminate:	Soft, delicate, unmanly
35. Elegiac:	Expressing sorrow or lamentation (elegy is a mournful poem)
36. Emotional:	Much given to strong feelings
37. Epistolary:	Involving letters
38. Erudite:	Learned, scholarly
39. Eulogistic:	Involving formal praise in speech or writing, usually in honor of the dead
40. Evocative:	Having the ability to call forth memories or other responses
41. Expressionistic:	Stressing the subjective and symbolic in art and literature
42. Facetious:	Amusing, but light, unserious, frivolous
43. Farcical:	Humorous in a light way, comedy with high exaggeration
44. Fatalistic:	Believing that everything that happens is destined and, therefore, out of the hands of the individual
45. Flamboyant:	Conspicuously bold or colorful
46. Fluid:	Flowing smoothly.
47. Iconoclastic:	Inclined to attack cherished beliefs and traditions
48. Impressionistic:	Inclined to use subjective impressions rather than objective reality
49. Ironic:	Characterized by unexpected turn of events, often the opposite of the intended.
50. Irreverent:	Showing disrespect for things that are usually respected or revered.
51. Journalistic:	Characterized by the kind of language used in journalism
52. Lyrical:	Intense, spontaneous, musical
53. Metaphorical:	Having the characteristics of melodrama in which emotions and plot are exaggerated and characterization is shallow
54. Mournful:	Feeling or expressing grief. (Certain literary forms are devoted to the expression of grief, such as elegies.)
55. Mundane:	Ordinary or common, as in everyday matters
56. Naturalistic:	Tending to present things in art and literature as they appear in nature or actuality.
57. Nostalgic:	Inclined to long for or dwell on things of the past; sentimental
58. Objective:	Uninfluenced by personal feelings. Making judgments based on facts
59. Ominous:	Indicating or threatening evil or danger as dark clouds indicate that storm is coming.
60. Parody:	A satirical imitation of something serious, such as a comic takeoff of Romeo and Juliet . The parody must have enough elements of the original for it to be recognized.
61. Persuasive:	Able to get a person to do something or to agree with one by an appeal to reason or other convincing devices.
62. Philosophical:	Interested in the study of basic truths of existence and reality.
63. Pious:	Having or displaying a reverence for God and religion. Sometimes used pejoratively, when the display is excessive and overly righteous.
64. Poetical:	Having the qualities of poetry, such as pleasing rhythms or images.
65. Pompous:	Displaying one's importance in an exaggerated way. Sometimes this quality is found in comic characters.
66. Primitive:	Simple and crude. (Primitivism in the arts tries to make use of a sophisticated way of what seems simple and crude.)
67. Prurient:	Preoccupied with lewd and lustful thoughts.
68. Psychological:	Having to do with the human mind and human behavior.
69. Puritanical:	Strict or severe in matters of morality.
70. Realistic:	Inclined to represent things as they really are.
71. Rhythmic:	Characterized by certain patterns, beats, or accents (dancing music, poetry.)

72. Romantic: Having feelings or thoughts of love, but when associated with nineteenth century literature or any such literature it suggests a style that emphasizes freedom of form, imagination, and emotion.
73. Sardonic: Mocking, taunting, bitter, scornful, sarcastic
74. Satirical: Using sarcasm and irony, often humorously to expose human folly.
75. Sensuous: Taking pleasure in things that appeal to the senses. (Sensual suggests a strong preoccupation with such things, especially sexual pleasures.)
76. Stark: Plain, harsh, completely (as in “stark raving mad”). Simple or bare, when applied to style, sometimes even bleak or grim.
77. Subjective: Relying on one’s own inner impressions, as opposed to being objective.
78. Trite: Stale, worn out, as in trite expressions.
79. Urbane: Sophisticated, socially polished
80. Victorian: Prudish, stuffy, and puritanical (qualities during with Queen Victoria’s reign.)
81. Whimsical: Inclined to be playful, humorous, or fanciful
82. Wordy: Using more words than necessary to say what you have to say.