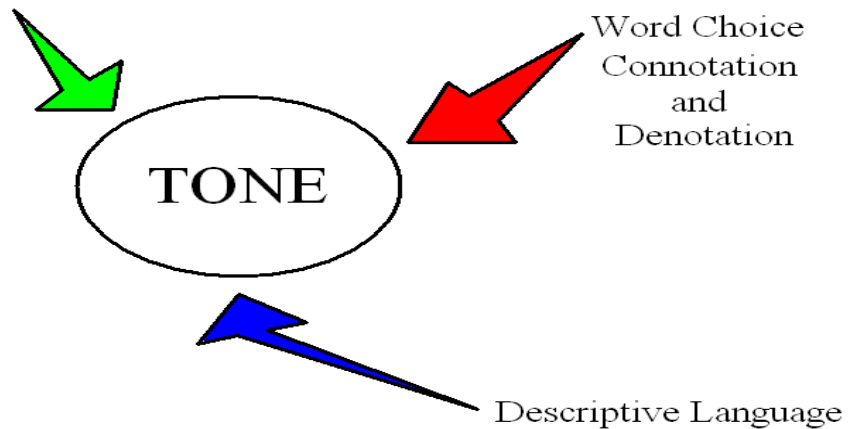


Author's Tone and Bias

Tone is an author's attitude toward the subject he/she is writing about.

In order for a student to identify the tone of a particular passage, he/she must read the text carefully and consider the following elements of tone:

Details: What the author does/does not tell the reader



Denotation is the dictionary definition of a word.
Consider the following sentences:

Sam and Dave got in a fight.

n. A hostile encounter

Denotatively, the word "fight" does not imply blame.

Sam attacked Dave.

Denotatively, the word "attack" implies blame.

v. The act of attacking

Connotation is the emotional associations attached to a word.
Consider the following sentences:

I'm going home for the holidays.

Make a left by the big, white house.

Denotatively, “house” and “home” are similar. Both mean a structure in which people live. However, “home” has a positive connotation – it is a place of warmth and family. A house, on the other hand, is just a building, and has a neutral connotation.

Descriptive language is used to create images in the reader’s mind. An author can say more than he seems to be saying through his choice of descriptive language.
Consider the following sentences:

1) **China Star serves steaming helpings of fresh, tasty food for a reasonable price.**

2) **Asian Express, on the other hand, serves overpriced food that has a “frozen” taste.**

- Sentence one suggests that China Star is good without stating it outright. Sentence two suggests that Asian Express isn’t good without overtly saying it’s bad.

Details are the specific pieces of information given by an author.
Consider the following:

- A candidate for Congress says his opponent voted “no” on a bill to increase financial aid for the poor. What he doesn’t tell, however, is that his opponent wanted to submit his own bill with even more financial aid for the poor.
- Clearly, the details matter. An author’s attitude toward his subject can often be determined by what he doesn’t say.

Ways to Analyze Tone:

- **When considering tone the basic elements can be analyzed using the LIDDS acronym.**
- **L**anguage: overall use of language, such as formal, informal, jargon, etc.
- **I** mages: vivid appeals to understanding through senses (metaphor, simile, etc.)
- **D** iction: the connotation of word choice
- **D** etails: facts that are included or those omitted for a purpose
- **S** yntax: how structure affects the reader’s attitude

The “step method” of analyzing tone:

Step1

- Look at word choice. Words have positive, negative and neutral associations, even if they are not being used to describe. Running amuck and running around are the same action, but leave the reader with different images. Pay attention to the connotations of words.

Step2

- Analyze the phrasing used to describe events. Is the author sarcastic? Do they use many metaphors, or lay out facts without opinion?

Step3

- Ask yourself how the information is presented. What order do you receive information in? How is the author trying to persuade you, if they are?

Step4

- Read the latent text. What information is not present? What has been ignored or omitted? This will tell you the author’s intention and help to clue you into tone.

Step5

- Consider how you feel when reading. What emotions come naturally to you? Do you get angry, sad or joyous? Do you feel that the author’s trying to persuade you?

Tips & Warnings

- It is not always easy to find the tone of a piece of writing, but rest assured it is there. Many authors will use a neutral tone if they are writing about factual events. Others, however, will use the language to show their opinion on the topic.
- Be careful to separate mood from tone. The tone shows you an author's opinion, while mood is the feeling and atmosphere of the text.

What is Bias?

Bias in writing can be defined as:

- A prejudice against something an author is writing about.
- Favoritism for something an author is writing about.
- An author letting feelings or emotions cloud his/her objectivity with regard to something he/she is writing about.

Recognizing Bias

- Look for loaded words – words that are charged with emotion (whether positive or negative) can reveal an author’s opinion about his/her topic.
- Watch out for stereotypes – if the author labels an entire group, the writing is probably biased.
- Notice vague language or generalizations – if the author isn’t using specific language, this could be an indicator of bias.
- Be on the lookout for one-sided arguments – if the author only presents one side of an argument, his/her writing is probably biased.

- Does the author present facts or opinions? Facts are what they are – the truth. But opinions can be based on feelings, emotions, or prejudices, which aren't objective.

An Example of Bias

When I met with Mayor Geovelli, I noticed that he had the appearance of a hobo (*a loaded, negatively charged word*). He was unshaved and wearing dirty clothes (*one sided – notice that the author doesn't tell us why the Mayor was dressed this way. Maybe there was a good reason*). He spoke to me about his horrible plan to fix our city's roads (*vague language – what specifically is horrible about it?*). Anyone who knows the plan will tell you that it will bankrupt our city (*is this a fact or opinion? The author offers no supporting evidence*). The plan to fix our roads mostly benefits friends of the Mayor. He plans to pay his buddies in the construction business thousands of dollars over the next two years. I do not want to insult anyone, but the Mayor is of Italian decent, and we all know what reputation they have in this part of the country. Need I remind you of Al Capone and other Italian Mafia members? (*This is clearly a stereotype – not all Italians are mobsters*).