

Tone is an author's attitude toward his or her audience and characters. It is an integral part of an author's style.

Like the tone of a speaker's voice, the tone of an author's words expresses the writer's feelings. The difficult aspect of determining tone through mere words is not hearing those cues that we have been accustomed to in speech that suggest a particular attitude, whether it is anger, joy, or sarcasm. In other words, there is no voice inflection to obscure or carry meaning.

Good authors rarely use only one tone in their writings. Complex attitudes might include a changing attitude (**tone shift**) or one attitude toward the reader and another attitude toward the subject (**split tone**).

To misread tone is to misinterpret meaning.

If one misses irony or sarcasm, one may misread the meaning of an entire passage.

Use the acronym DIDLS to help you remember those elements of tone that you should consider when evaluating prose or poetry. Diction, imagery, details, language, and sentence structure all help to create the author's or speaker's attitude toward the subject and the audience.

Familiarize yourself with the denotations and connotations of the following tone words. Some are not interchangeable! Be sure you can use both adjective and adverb forms of each word.

DIDLS

Diction—the connotation of the word choice

Imagery—vivid appeals to understanding through the senses

Details—specific facts that are included or omitted

Language—overall choice of language (formal, informal, jargon, etc.)

Syntax—sentence structure and order

THIS IS NOT A COMPLETE LIST! ADD TO IT AS YOU LEARN MORE.

Positive

amiable	compassionate	enthusiastic	joyful	relaxed
amused	complimentary	excited	jubilant	reverent
appreciative	confident	exuberant	lighthearted	romantic
authoritative	consoling	fanciful	optimistic	soothing
benevolent	content	friendly	passionate	surprised
brave	dreamy	happy	peaceful	sweet
calm	ecstatic	hopeful	playful	sympathetic
cheerful	encouraging	impassioned	pleasant	vibrant
cheery	energetic	jovial	proud	whimsical

Negative

accusing	boring	critical	hurtful	shameful
admonitory	brash	desperate	indignant	snooty
agitated	callous	disappointed	inflammatory	superficial
angry	childish	disgruntled	insulting	surly
apathetic	choleric	disgusted	irritated	testy
arrogant	coarse	facetious	manipulative	threatening
artificial	cold	furious	obnoxious	tired
audacious	condemnatory	harsh	outraged	uninterested
belligerent	condescending	haughty	passive	wrathful
bitter	contradictory	hateful	quarrelsome	

Sorrow/Fear/Worry

aggravated	despairing	horrific	ominous	serious
agitated	disturbed	horror	paranoid	sober
anxious	embarrassed	lugubrious	pessimistic	solemn
apologetic	fearful	melancholy	pitiful	somber
apprehensive	foreboding	miserable	poignant	staid
concerned	gloomy	morose	regretful	upset
confused	grave	mournful	remorseful	
dejected	hollow	nervous	resigned	
depressed	hopeless	numb	sad	

Humor/Irony/Sarcasm

amused	cynical	ironic	pompous	scornful
bantering	disdainful	irreverent	quizzical	sharp
bitter	droll	joking	ribald	silly
caustic	facetious	malicious	ridiculing	taunting
comical	flippant	mock-heroic	sad	teasing
condescending	giddy	mocking	sarcastic	whimsical
contemptuous	humorous	mock-serious	sardonic	wry
critical	insolent	patronizing	satiric	

Miscellaneous

allusive	disinterested	informative	obsequious	sentimental
apathetic	dramatic	inquisitive	patriotic	serious
authoritative	earnest	instructive	persuasive	shocking
baffled	expectant	intimate	pleading	sincere
candid	factual	judgmental	pretentious	smooth
ceremonial	fervent	learned	provocative	unemotional
clinical	formal	loud	questioning	urgent
contemplative	forthright	lyrical	reflective	vexed
conventional	frivolous	matter-of-fact	reminiscent	wistful
detached	histrionic	meditative	resigned	zealous
didactic	humble	nostalgic	restrained	
disbelieving	incredulous	objective	seductive	

