

RECOGNIZING AND WRITING ABOUT TONE

The denotative meaning of tone is simple: the author's attitude toward his or her subject or audience. But tone is a large and complex umbrella concept in style analysis for poetry and prose, fiction and nonfiction. Just as every human voice has "tone," all writing has tone. It is the end result of how the author uses all other literary devices, so devices like imagery, diction, syntax, figurative language, and selection of detail, for example, are the tools a writer uses to create tone. If a reader does not understand the tone of a piece, then he or she simply does not understand the piece. In AP English, both tone and "undertone" are important, meaning the surface level tone and what is detected underneath. For example, Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is famous for its light, humorous, folksy surface tone and its sometimes dark, bitter undertone. In addition to tone and undertone, a piece of writing may likely also have shifts in tone. This complexity of tone characterizes much of the writing a student is likely to see on AP English tests. It may be helpful to think of the complete phrase "tone...of voice." In general, any word that can describe a tone of voice can also be used to describe tone in writing.

What follows is a nice long list of some favorite tone words. Are there any you don't know? Ask about them, look them up—make a point of learning all of them!

TONE WORDS BY CATEGORY

REVERENCE

reverent
awe
venerated
solemn
mystical
majestic
apocalyptic
religious
pious

IRREVERENCE

irreverent
impious
iconoclastic

JOY

joyful
elated
zealous
fervent
ardent
jubilant
buoyant
euphoric
ecstatic

HAPPINESS

glad
pleased
merry
gleeful
light
delightful
cheerful
cheery
sanguine
mirthful
enjoyable
with relish
giddy
agreeable
amiable
warm
whimsical
friendly
blissful
effusive

SADNESS

somber
melancholy
sorrowful
lament

despair
despondent
regretful
dismal
funereal
saturnine
dark
gloomy
dejected
grave
grieving
morose
sullen
woeful
bleak
remorseful
forlorn
agonized
anguished
depressed
miserable
barren
empty
bereft
pitiful
pathetic
lugubrious
distressed

discouraged
disheartened
hurt
wounded
elegiac

LOVE

loving
affectionate
cherished
fond
admiring
tender
sentimental
romantic
platonic
adoring
narcissistic
passionate
impassioned
lustful
rapturous
infatuated
enamored
compassionate
benevolent
dreamy

sweet
flirtatious
coy
seductive
sexy
inviting
yearning
longing

HATE

hateful
vengeance
abhorrence
evil
animosity
enmity
malicious
aversion
loathsome
despising
scornful
contemptuous
disdainful
jealous
envious
repugnance
repulsion

revulsion
resentment
spiteful
disgusted
vicious
invective
harsh
cold
threatening
savage

ANGER

vehement
rage
outrage
antipathy
irritated
indignant
vexed
incensed
petulant
irascible
riled
bitter
acrimonious
irate
furious
wrathful
rancorous
consternation
hostile
miffed
choleric
aggravated
futile
umbrage
galling
bristling
exasperated
explosive
caustic
revengeful
belligerent
perturbed
piqued
sharp
contentious

CONFUSION

shocked
befuddled

baffled
bewildered
disturbed
addled
upset

HOPE

expectant
anticipatory
encouraged

CALMNESS

serene
tranquil
placid
peaceful
content
complacent
accepting
easy
satisfied
soothing

FEAR

frightened
afraid
timid
apprehensive
anxious
terror
horror
dismay
agitation
sinister
alarm
startled
uneasy
qualms
angst
alarmed
disturbed

STRENGTH

authoritative
confident
superior
dominant
arrogant
proud
audacious

WEAKNESS

weak
impotent
passive
lethargic
ashamed
guilty

IRONY

ironic
biting
smirking
sneering
derisive
icy
witty
sarcastic
mocking
sardonic
flippant
cynical
mock-heroic
mock-serious
taunting

YOUTH

young
innocent
callow
naive
childish
immature
fresh

MYSTERY

mysterious
furtive
surreptitious
sneaky
covert
subtle
allusive

MISC.

agreeable
apologetic
bittersweet
bored
chaotic
chauvinistic

classical
complimentary
concerned
condescending
convincing
critical
curious
cynical
determined
didactic
diffident
dramatic
explosive
frivolous
funny
gentle
heroic
hollow
horrific
humble
humorous
hypnotic
hypocritical
impatient
inflammatory
informal
insolent
jealous
laconic
lethargic
lofty
morbid
obnoxious
obsessive
passive
patronizing
pedantic
petty
poignant
preachy
presumptuous
prudish
regretful
remote
respectful
restrained
rude
sensational
sexist
solemn
stem

stuffy
sultry
vulgar

WORDS THAT DESCRIBE LANGUAGE

abstract
abstruse
artificial
bombastic
colloquial
concrete
connotative
cultured
detached
emotional
esoteric
euphemistic
exact
figurative
folksy
formal
grotesque
homespun
idiomatic
informal
insipid
jargon
learned
literal
moralistic
nostalgic
objective
pedantic
picturesque
plain
poetic
precise
pretentious
provincial
scholarly
sensuous
simple
slang
subjective
symbolic
trite
vulgar