

The Big Tone List

Though often seen as merely an author's attitude toward his/her audience and characters, it is also the means in which the author conveys his/her attitude in a work of literature.

Tone is integral to a piece of literature's meaning. Used effectively, it controls the reader's response to the literature. By being able to identify the tone, one can then interpret the meaning of a text. Be forewarned, to misinterpret tone is to misinterpret meaning.

An author's tone is revealed through organisation, syntax (sentence structure), and choice of detail. However, diction (word choice) is the strongest indicator of tone.

The following list is not an all-inclusive list, but it should give you ample examples to work from (more than 300 ample examples).

Below the list, you will find an example of how to incorporate a discussion of tone within your analysis papers.

abashed	benevolent	commanding
absurd	biting	compassionate
accepting	bitter	complex
accusing	blithe	complimentary
acerbic	blunt	conceited
admiring	bored	concerned
adoring	brisk	condescending
affectionate	bristling	confident
afraid	brusque	confused
aghast	callous	contented
ambiguous	calm	conversational
amused	candid	coy
angry	casual	critical
animated	caustic	curt
annoyed	cautionary	cynical
antagonistic	cavalier	demanding
apathetic	ceremonial	demeaning
apologetic	cheerful	depressed
ardent	cheery	derisive
argumentative	childish	derogatory
arrogant	child-like	desperate
audacious	clinical	detached
awestruck	clipped	devil-may-care
baffled	cold	diplomatic
bantering	colloquial	direct
begrudging	comforting	disappointed
belligerent	comic	disdainful

disgusted
disrespectful
disturbed
docile
dogmatic
domineering
doubtful
dramatic
dreamy
dry
dubious
earnest
ecstatic
effusive
elated
eloquent
embarrassed
emotionless
empathetic
encouraging
energetic
enraged
enthusiastic
erudite
euphoric
evasive
excited
expectant
exuberant
facetious
factual
familiar
fanciful
farcical
fatalistic
fearful
flippant
forceful
foreboding
formal
frank
frantic
frightened
frustrated
furious

gentle
ghoulish
giddy
gleeful
gloomy
grave
grim
guarded
gullible
happy
harsh
haughty
hilarious
holier-than-thou
hollow
hopeful
hopeless
horrified
hostile
humble
humorous
hypercritical
impartial
impatient
impertinent
impudent
inane
incisive
incredulous
indifferent
indignant
indirect
inflammatory
informal
insecure
insistent
insolent
inspirational
interested
intimate
introspective
ironic
irreverent
irritated
jaded

joking
jovial
joyful
laudatory
lighthearted
lively
lofty
loving
ludicrous
lugubrious
lyrical
macabre
malicious
marveling
matter-of-fact
mock-heroic
meditative
melancholic
melodramatic
mocking
mock--serious
modest
moralistic
mournful
mysterious
naïve
narcissitic
nervous
neutral
nonplussed
nostalgic
obdurate
objective
ominous
optimistic
outraged
outspoken
panicked
passionate
pathetic
patronizing
peaceful
pedantic
pensive
pessimistic

petty	seductive	sympathetic
philosophical	self-critical	taunting
pitiful	selfish	tender
playful	self-pitying	terrified
poignant	sentimental	terse
pompous	serene	thoughtful
powerful	serious	threatening
pragmatic	severe	timorous
pretentious	sharp	tolerant
proud	shocked	tragic
questioning	shocking	tranquil
quiet	silly	uncertain
rebellious	sinister	unconcerned
reflective	skeptical	understated
relaxed	sly	uneasy
resigned	smug	upset
restrained	solemn	urgent
reticent	somber	vexed
ridiculous	sophomoric	vibrant
righteous	sprightly	vindictive
romantic	stately	violent
rueful	stern	vitriolic
sad	stolid	whimsical
sad	straightforward	wistful
sanguine	strident	withering
sarcastic	stubborn	world-weary
sardonic	subdued	wretched
satiric (satirical)	submissive	wry
scathing	sulking	zealous
scholarly	suspenseful	
scornful	suspicious	

Example:

Tone: Mocking

Meaning of term: to treat with ridicule or contempt

Sergeant Grant uses a mocking tone when he describes General Morgan as a paragon of military prowess. Within this description, Grant lets us know the general has the ability to “jump to conclusions,” “muster apathy,” march blindly into himself,” and “mastermind hasty retreats.” In doing so, Grant mockingly describes Morgan’s accomplishments while the general keeps his eye on the prize: his third star.