

Tone Vocabulary

Like the tone of a speaker's voice, the tone of a work of literature expresses the writer's feelings. To determine the tone of a passage, ask yourself the following questions:

1. What is the subject of the passage? Who is its intended audience?
2. What are the most important words in the passage? What connotations do these words have?
3. What feelings are generated by the images of the passage?
4. Are there any hints that the speaker or narrator does not really mean everything he or she says? If any jokes are made, are they lighthearted or bitter?
5. If the narrator were speaking aloud, what would the tone of his or her voice be?

Positive Tone/Attitude Words

Amiable	Consoling	Friendly	Playful
Amused	Content	Happy	Pleasant
Appreciative	Dreamy	Hopeful	Proud
Authoritative	Ecstatic	Impassioned	Relaxed
Benevolent	Elated	Jovial	Reverent
Brave	Elevated	Joyful	Romantic
Calm	Encouraging	Jubilant	Soothing
Cheerful	Energetic	Lighthearted	Surprised
Cheery	Enthusiastic	Loving	Sweet
Compassionate	Excited	Optimistic	Sympathetic
Complimentary	Exuberant	Passionate	Vibrant
Confident	Fanciful	Peaceful	Whimsical

Negative Tone/Attitude Words

Accusing	Choleric	Furious	Quarrelsome
Aggravated	Coarse	Harsh	Shameful
Agitated	Cold	Haughty	Smooth
Angry	Condemnatory	Hateful	Snooty
Apathetic	Condescending	Hurtful	Superficial
Arrogant	Contradictory	Indignant	Surly
Artificial	Critical	Inflammatory	Testy
Audacious	Desperate	Insulting	Threatening
Belligerent	Disappointed	Irritated	Tired
Bitter	Disgruntled	Manipulative	Uninterested
Boring	Disgusted	Obnoxious	Wrathful
Brash	Disinterested	Outraged	
Childish	Facetious	Passive	

Humor-Irony-Sarcasm Tone/Attitude Words

Amused	Droll	Mock-heroic	Sardonic
Bantering	Facetious	Mocking	Satiric
Bitter	Flippant	Mock-serious	Scornful
Caustic	Giddy	Patronizing	Sharp
Comical	Humorous	Pompous	Silly
Condescending	Insolent	Quizzical	Taunting
Contemptuous	Ironic	Ribald	Teasing
Critical	Irreverent	Ridiculing	Whimsical
Cynical	Joking	Sarcastic	Wry
Disdainful	Malicious		

Sorrow-Fear-Worry Tone/Attitude Words

Aggravated	Embarrassed	Morose	Resigned
Agitated	Fearful	Mournful	Sad
Anxious	Foreboding	Nervous	Serious
Apologetic	Gloomy	Numb	Sober
Apprehensive	Grave	Ominous	Solemn
Concerned	Hollow	Paranoid	Somber
Confused	Hopeless	Pessimistic	Staid
Dejected	Horrific	Pitiful	Upset
Depressed	Horror	Poignant	
Despairing	Melancholy	Regretful	
Disturbed	Miserable	Remorseful	

Neutral Tone/Attitude Words

Admonitory	Dramatic	Intimate	Questioning
Allusive	Earnest	Judgmental	Reflective
Apathetic	Expectant	Learned	Reminiscent
Authoritative	Factual	Loud	Resigned
Baffled	Fervent	Lyrical	Restrained
Callous	Formal	Matter-of-fact	Seductive
Candid	Forthright	Meditative	Sentimental
Ceremonial	Frivolous	Nostalgic	Serious
Clinical	Haughty	Objective	Shocking
Consoling	Histrionic	Obsequious	Sincere
Contemplative	Humble	Patriotic	Unemotional
Conventional	Incredulous	Persuasive	Urgent
Detached	Informative	Pleading	Vexed
Didactic	Inquisitive	Pretentious	Wistful
Disbelieving	Instructive	Provocative	Zealous

Language Words-Used to describe the force or quality of the entire piece

Like word choice, the language of a passage has control over tone. Consider language to be the entire body of words used in a text, not simply isolated bits of diction, imagery, or detail. For example, an invitation to a graduation might use formal language, whereas a biology text would use scientific and clinical language.

Different from tone, these words describe the force or quality of the diction, images, and details AS A WHOLE. These words qualify how the work is written.

Artificial	Exact	Literal	Pretentious
Bombastic	Figurative	Moralistic	Provincial
Colloquial	Formal	Obscure	Scholarly
Concrete	Grotesque	Obtuse	Sensuous
Connotative	Homespun	Ordinary	Simple
Cultured	Idiomatic	Pedantic	Slang
Detached	Informal	Picturesque	Symbolic
Emotional	Insipid	Plain	Trite
Esoteric	Jargon	Poetic	Vulgar
Euphemistic	Learned	Precise	

Attitude Words

1. accusatory: charging of wrongdoing
2. apathetic: indifferent due to lack of energy or concern
3. awe: solemn wonder
4. bitter: exhibiting strong animosity as a result of pain or grief
5. cynical: questions the basic sincerity and goodness of people
6. condescension: a feeling of superiority
7. callous: unfeeling, insensitive to feelings
8. contemplative: studying, thinking, reflecting on the issue
9. critical: finding fault
10. choleric: hot-tempered, easily angered
11. contemptuous: showing or feeling that something is worthless; lacking respect
12. caustic: intense use of sarcasm; stinging, biting
13. conventional: lacking spontaneity, originality and individuality
14. disdainful: scornful
15. didactic: author attempts to educate or instruct the reader
16. derisive: ridiculing, mocking
17. earnest: intense, a sincere state of mind
18. erudite: learned, polished, scholarly
19. fanciful: using the imagination
20. forthright: directly frank without hesitation
21. gloomy: darkness, sadness, rejection
22. haughty: proud and vain to the point of arrogance
23. indignant: marked by anger aroused by injustice
24. intimate: very familiar
25. judgmental: authoritative and often critical
26. jovial: happy
27. lyrical: expressing inner feelings, emotional, full of images, songlike
28. matter-of-fact: accepting of conditions, not fanciful or emotional
29. mocking: treating with contempt or ridicule
30. morose: gloomy, sullen, surly, despondent
31. malicious: purposely hurtful
32. objective: unbiased view
33. optimistic: hopeful, cheerful
34. obsequious: polite and obedient only for hope of gain or favor
35. patronizing: air of condescension
36. pessimistic: seeing the worst side of things
37. quizzical: odd, eccentric, amusing
38. ribald: offensive in speech, gesture
39. reverent: treating a subject with honor, respect
40. ridiculing: slightly contemptuous banter
41. reflective: illustrating innermost thoughts
42. sarcastic: sneering, caustic
43. sardonic: scornfully and bitterly sarcastic
44. sincere: without deceit or pretense, genuine
45. solemn: deeply earnest, grave
46. sanguine: optimistic, cheerful
47. whimsical: odd, queer, fantastic