

Tone - Tutor Tips

The *tone* of a passage is the *writer's* attitude or feeling about the subject that he or she is presenting. *Tone* does **not** reflect the *reader's* attitude toward the subject, nor does it involve the attitude expressed by characters, besides the author, in the passage.

Important: When you are determining the author's *tone*, focus on the feeling that the author is conveying. The author may, for example, present facts that for many readers are amusing, exciting, or disturbing, but that does not mean that the author's *tone* is amused, excited, or disturbed. In order for the *tone* of a passage to be "amused," for example, the author must be using the words to express that feeling from him or herself to the reader.

Examples: Notice the *tone* that the author displays in the following two passages:

1. The R.M.S. Titanic was cruising at 23 knots in the mid-Atlantic when it struck an iceberg and slowly sank. There were not enough lifeboats to save everyone. 1,523 people went down with the ship into water icy enough to cause instant pain and death by hypothermia within ten to fifteen minutes. After the stern of the ship disappeared beneath the glassy waters, 308 people remained bobbing on the surface, screaming for help. There were, in fact, 20 life boats lingering nearby, which failed to come to their rescue immediately. By the time lifeboat crewmen organized themselves and came back with just one boat, almost all in the water had died.

Even though the above passage gives details that might make you and me shudder, the author is not expressing any feelings. Therefore the *tone* is *objective*.

2. The White Star Corporation was terribly arrogant to build a ship and not provide enough lifeboats for all its passengers. Its management was concerned that too many lifeboats on the Titanic would "sully the aesthetic beauty of the ship." What were they thinking? No ship is unsinkable. And even more unforgivable is that, despite warnings of icebergs, the Titanic was cruising at top speed in order to break a speed record when it encountered the iceberg. What a horrific price those passengers had to pay so that the White Star Corporation could learn a lesson in humility.

In this passage the author is clearly expressing an attitude. The *tone* is *outraged*.

Please see a list of "tone words" and their meanings on the back of this page. Memorize the definitions of any words that are unfamiliar.

WORDS THAT DESCRIBE TONE

Below is a list of words commonly used to describe tone. The words in the box reflect a feeling or judgment.

admiring	curious	playful
affectionate	doubtful	praising
amused	encouraging	respectful
angry	excited	self-pitying
ashamed	forgiving	serious
calming	frightened	sorrowful
caring	grateful	sympathetic
cheerful	humorous	threatening
conceited	insulting	tragic
critical	joyous	warm
cruel	loving	worried

ambivalent	<i>(uncertain about a choice)</i>
arrogant	<i>(full of self-importance; conceited)</i>
bewildered	<i>(confused; puzzled)</i>
bitter	<i>(angry; full of hate)</i>
compassionate	<i>(deeply sympathetic)</i>
depressed	<i>(very sad or discouraged)</i>
detached	<i>(emotionally uninvolved)</i>
disbelieving	<i>(unbelieving)</i>
distressed	<i>(suffering sorrows, misery, or pain)</i>
hypocritical	<i>(false)</i>
impassioned	<i>(filled with strong feelings)</i>
indignant	<i>(angry about something unfair or mean)</i>
instructive	<i>(teaching)</i>
ironic	<i>(meaning the opposite of what is expressed)</i>
lighthearted	<i>(happy and carefree)</i>
matter-of -fact	<i>(sticking to facts; unemotional)</i>
mocking	<i>(making fun of and/or looking down upon something)</i>
nostalgic	<i>(longing for something or someone in the past)</i>
objective	<i>(not influenced by feelings of personal prejudices)</i>
optimistic	<i>(looking on the bright side of things)</i>
pessimistic	<i>(looking on the gloomy, unfavorable side of things)</i>
pleading	<i>(begging)</i>
prideful	<i>(full of pride or exaggerated self-esteem)</i>
remorseful	<i>(guilty over a wrong one has done)</i>
revengeful	<i>(wanting to hurt someone in return for an injury)</i>
sarcastic	<i>(sharp or wounding; ironic)</i>
scheming	<i>(tricky)</i>
scornful	<i>(looking down on someone or something)</i>
self-mocking	<i>(making fun of or looking down of oneself)</i>
sentimental	<i>(showing tender feelings; romantic; overly emotional)</i>
solemn	<i>(involved with serious concerns)</i>
straightforward	<i>(direct and honest)</i>
superior	<i>(looking down on others)</i>
tolerant	<i>(respectful of others views and behavior; patient about problems)</i>
uncertain	<i>(doubting)</i>