

TONE

Tone is defined as the writer's or speaker's attitude toward the subject and the audience.

To misinterpret tone is to misinterpret meaning. If a student misses irony or sarcasm, he may find something serious in veiled humor.

The phrase "I love you" or "I see you" might be said affectionately, questioningly, sarcastically, glibly, or coldly. A brief scene with a simple dialogue between two students using differing tones to fit different characters and contexts emphasizes how tone changes meaning. For example:

A. You're late!
B. I know. I couldn't help it.

A. I understand.
B. I knew you would.

A. I have something for you.
B. Really? What?

A. This!

- How might this scene be played by two lovers who are meeting at a restaurant where one lover is about to propose marriage?
- How would two spies speak the same words?
- How would a parent and a child who has come home late do so? In each scenario, the tone controls audience understanding and interpretation.

Tone Words:

angry	sad	sentimental
sharp	cold	fanciful
upset	urgent	complimentary
silly	joking	condescending
boring	poignant	sympathetic
afraid	detached	contemptuous
happy	confused	apologetic
hollow	childish	humorous
joyful	peaceful	horrific
allusive	mocking	sarcastic
sweet	objective	nostalgic
vexed	vibrant	zealous
tired	frivolous	irreverent
bitter	audacious	benevolent
dreamy	shocking	seductive
restrained	somber	candid
proud	giddy	pitiful
dramatic	provocative	didactic

Using the acronym DIDLS helps students remember the basic elements of tone that they should consider when evaluating prose or poetry. Diction, images, details, language, and sentence structure all help to create the author's or speaker's attitude toward the subject and audience.

DIDLS

Diction: the connotation of the word choice.

Images: vivid appeals to understanding through the senses

Details: facts that are included or those omitted

Language: the overall use of language, such as formal, clinical, or jargon

Sentence structure: how structure affects the reader's attitude.

DICTION

Attitudes implied by the varying word choice.

For example:

To laugh: to guffaw, to chuckle, to titter, to giggle, to cackle, to snicker, to roar

Self-confident: proud, conceited, egotistical, stuck up, haughty, smug, complacent, arrogant, condescending

House: home, hut, shack, mansion, cabin, chalet, abode, dwelling, shanty, domicile, residence

King: ruler, leader, tyrant, dictator, autocrat, rex

Old: mature, experienced, antique, relic, ancient, elderly, senior

Fat: obese, plump, corpulent, portly, roly-poly, stout, rotund, burly, full-figured

IMAGES

The use of vivid descriptions or figures of speech that appeal to sensory experiences helps to create the author's tone.

Evaluate the author's or speaker's tone conveyed in the images of the following lines of poetry:

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun. _____

An old, mad, blind, despised, and dying king. _____

He clasps the crag with crooked hands.

If I should die, think only this of me.

That there's a corner of a foreign field
that is forever England. _____

If we must die, let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious
spot. _____

Love sets you going like a fat gold
watch. _____

Smiling, the boy fell dead. _____

You do me wrong to take me out of the
grave. Thou art a soul in bliss
But I am bound upon a wheel of fire
That mine own tears do scald like
molten lead. _____

DETAILS

Details are most commonly *the facts* given by the author or speaker as support for the attitude or tone. The speaker's perspective shapes what details are given.

Consider how a student might choose some details and omit others to affect an audience.

What changes in detail might a young adolescent make in reporting a minor car accident to her parents, a policeman, or her friends at school?

LANGUAGE

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. For example, an invitation to a graduation might use formal language, whereas a biology text would use scientific and clinical language.

Language words, different from tone, describe the force or quality of the diction, images, and details. These words qualify how the work is written, not the attitude or tone.

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

Examples:

When I told dad I goofed that exam he blew his top. _____

I had him on the ropes in the fourth and if one of those short rights of mine had connected he'd have gone down for the count. I was aiming for his glass jaw, but I couldn't seem to reach. _____

A close examination and correlation of the most reliable current economic indexes justifies the conclusion that the next year will witness a continuation of the present, upward market trend.

Students should examine the passage below and list the author's word choices that contribute to the qualities of the language.

Formal language:

But the Prince Prospero was happy and dauntless and sagacious. When his dominions were half depopulated, he summoned to his presence a thousand hale and light-hearted friends from among the knights and dames of his court, and with these retired to the deep seclusion of one of his castellated abbeys.

Edgar Allan Poe

From "The Masque of the Red Death."

Ordinary language:

It's not easy to know what is true for you or me at twenty-two, my age. But I guess I'm what I feel and see and hear, Harlem, I hear you: hear you, hear me—we two—you, me, talk on this page. (I hear New York, too.) Me—who?

Langston Hughes

Excerpt from "Theme for English B."

Informal language:

The warden said to me the other day (innocently, I think), "Say, Etheridge, why come the black boys don't run off like the white boys do?"

I lowered my jaw and scratched my head and said (innocently, I think), "Well, suh, I ain't for sure, but I reckon it's cause we ain't got no wheres to run to."

Etheridge Knight

"The Warden Said to Me."

SENTENCE STRUCTURE

How a speaker or author constructs a sentence affects what the audience understands. The inverted order of an interrogative sentence cues the reader or listener to a question and creates a tension between speaker and listener. Similarly short sentences are often emphatic, passionate or flippant,

whereas longer sentences suggest the writer's thoughtful response.

SHIFT IN TONE

- key words (but, yet, nevertheless, however, although)
- punctuation (dashes, periods, colons)
- stanza and paragraph divisions
- changes in line and stanza or in sentence length
- sharp contrasts in diction

SHORT PASSAGES FOR DISCUSSION

Begin practicing the analysis of tone by using short passages that use a specific device such as Diction, Images, Details, Language or Sentence Structure to convey tone. Suggest what tone words you would use to describe the speaker's attitude.

1. In his "The Fall of the House of Usher," Edgar Allan Poe has created a sense of foreboding.

During the whole of a dull, dark, and soundless day in the autumn of the year, when the clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens, I had been passing alone, on horseback, through a singularly dreary tract of country, and at length found myself, as the shades of the evening drew on, within view of the melancholy House of Usher...I reined my horse to the precipitous brink of a black and lurid tarn that lay in unruffled luster by the dwelling...(with) vacant and eye-like windows.

Edgar Allan Poe

From "The Fall of the House of Usher."

2. In his chamber the doctor sat up in his high bed. He had on his dressing gown of red watered silk that had come from Paris, a little tight over the chest now if it was buttoned. On his lap was a silver tray with a silver chocolate pot and a tiny cup of eggshell china, so delicate that it looked silly when he lifted it with his big hand, lifted it with the tips of thumb and forefinger and spread the other three fingers wide to get them out of the way. His eyes rested in puffy little hammocks of flesh and his mouth drooped with discontent. He was growing very stout, and his voice was hoarse with the fat that pressed on his throat. Beside him on a table was a small Oriental gong and a bowl of cigarettes.

The furnishings of the room were heavy and dark and gloomy. The pictures were religious, even the large tinted photograph of his dead wife, who, if Masses willed and paid for out of her own estate could do it, was in Heaven. The doctor had once for a short time been a part of the great world and his whole subsequent life was memory and longing for France.

John Steinbeck

From *The Pearl* by John Steinbeck.

3. Examine the complex attitude in *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison. This is written from the point of view of Claudia, an African-American child of perhaps 8 or 9 years. Note the various senses to which Morrison appeals. What do you infer her attitude to be toward the subject here? Why? Note how verbs affect tone in the last 8 or 10 lines. Speculate on how this passage might relate to a major theme in the book:

It had begun with Christmas and the gift of dolls. The big, the special, the loving gift was always a big, blue-eyed Baby Doll. From the clucking sounds of adults I knew that the doll represented what they thought was my fondest wish....Picture books were full of little girls sleeping with their dolls. Raggedy Ann dolls usually, but they were out of the question. I was physically revolted and secretly frightened of those round moronic eyes, the pancake face, and orangeworms hair. The other dolls, which were supposed to bring me great pleasure, succeeded in doing just the opposite. When I took it to bed, its hard unyielding limbs resisted my flesh—the tapered fingertips on those dimpled hands scratched. If, in sleep, I turned, the bone-cold head collided with my own. It was a most uncomfortable, patently aggressive sleeping companion. To hold it was no more rewarding. The starched gauze or lace on the cotton dress irritated any embrace. I had only one desire: to dismember it. To see of what it was made, to discover the dearness, to find the beauty, the desirability that had escaped me, but apparently only me. Adults, older girls, shops, magazines, newspapers, window signs—all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll was what every girl child treasured. "Here," they said, "this is beautiful, and if you are on this day 'worthy' you may have it." I fingered the face, wondering at the single-stroke eyebrows; picked at the pearly teeth stuck like two piano keys between red bowline lips. Traced the turned-up nose, poked the glassy blue eyeballs, twisted the

yellow hair. I could not love it. But I could examine it to see what it was that all the world said was lovable. Break off the tiny fingers, bend the flat feet, loosen the hair, twist the head around, and the thing made one sound—a sound they said was the sweet and plaintive cry "Mama," but which sounded to me like the bleat of a dying lamb, or, more precisely, our icebox door opening on rusty hinges in July. Remove the cold and stupid eyeball, it would bleat still, "Ahhhhhh," take off the head, shake out the sawdust, crack the back against the brass bed rail, it would bleat still. The gauze back would slit, and I could see the disk with six holes, the secret of the sound. A mere metal roundness.

Toni Morrison

From *The Bluest Eye*, copyright © 1970

4. In the following passage from *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde, the sensuous detail suggests excess, a languid beauty that describes the character's self-indulgence:

The studio was filled with the rich odour of roses, and when the light summer wind stirred amidst the trees of the garden there came through the open door the heavy scent of the lilac, or the more delicate perfume of the pink-flowering thorn. From the corner of the divan of Persian saddlebags on which he was lying, smoking, as was his custom, innumerable cigarettes, Lord Henry Wotton could just catch the gleam of the honey-sweet and honey-coloured blossoms of a laburnum, whose tremulous branches seemed hardly able to bear the burden of a beauty so flame-like as theirs; and now and then the fantastic shadows of birds in flight flitted across the long tussore-silk curtains that

were stretched in front of the huge window, producing a kind of momentary Japanese effect, and making him think of those pallid jade-faced painters of Tokio who, through the medium of an art that is necessarily immobile, seek to convey the sense of swiftness and motion. The sullen murmur of the bees shouldering their way through the long unmown grass, or circling with monotonous insistence round the dusty gilt horns of the straggling woodbine, seemed to make the stillness more oppressive. The dim roar of London was like the bourdon note of a distant organ.

From *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. New

5. The following excerpt is taken from a letter by Shaw on the death of his mother. Read the passage carefully. Then write an essay in which you describe the attitude of the writer toward his mother and her cremation. Using specific references to the text, show how Shaw's diction and use of detail serve to convey this attitude.

At the passage "earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust" there was a little alteration of the words to suit the process. A door opened in the wall: and the violet coffin mysteriously passed out through it and vanished as it closed. People think that the door is the door of the furnace: but it isn't. I went behind the scenes at the end of the service and saw the real thing. People are afraid to see it; but it is wonderful. I found there the violet coffin opposite another door, a real unmistakable furnace door this time: when it lifted there was a plain little chamber of cement and fire-brick. No heat, no noise. No roaring draught. No flame. No fuel. It looked cool, clean, sunny. You would have walked in or put

your hand in without misgiving. Then the violet coffin moved again and went in, feet first. And behold! The feet burst miraculously into streaming ribbons of garnet coloured lovely flame, smokeless and eager, like pentecostal tongues, and as the whole coffin passed in, it sprang into flame all over; my mother became that beautiful fire. The door fell; well, they said that if we wanted to see it all through to the end, we should come back in an hour and a half. I remembered the wasted little figure with the wonderful face, and said, "Too long" to myself—but off we went... When we returned, the end was wildly funny; Mama would have enjoyed it enormously. We looked down through an opening in the floor. There we saw a roomy kitchen, with a big cement table and two cooks busy at it. They had little tongs in their hands, and they were deftly and busily picking nails and scraps of coffin handles out of Mama's dainty little heap of ashes and samples of bone. Mama herself being at the moment leaning over beside me, shaking with laughter. Then they swept her up into a sieve and shook her out; so that there was a heap of dust and a heap of bone scraps. And Mama said in my ear, "Which of the two heaps do you suppose is me?..." and that merry episode was the end, except for making dust of the bone scraps and scattering them on a flow bed... O grave, where is thy victory?... And so goodnight, friends who understand about one's mother.

The Society of Authors on Behalf
of the George Bernard Shaw Estate

SYNTAX

From the time that children begin to respond to the playful inversions of Dr. Seuss ("I do not like you, Sam I am") through the tumbling phrases and clauses by which Poe develops tension in "The Cask of Amontillado" to the rapidity of the Middle Passage section of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, students are influenced by syntax. It is essential to remember that syntax must be examined as to how it contributes to and enhances meaning and effect. Syntax should not be studied in isolation but in conjunction with other stylistic techniques that work together to develop meaning.

At least four areas can be considered when analyzing style: diction, sentence structure, treatment of subject matter, and figurative language

DICTION

Describe diction (choice of words) by considering the following:

Words can be *monosyllabic* (one syllable in length) or *polysyllabic* (more than one syllable in length). The higher the ratio of polysyllabic words, the more difficult the content.

Words can be mainly *colloquial* (slang), *informal* (conversational), *formal* (literary), or *old-fashioned*.

Words can be mainly *denotative* (containing an exact meaning, e.g., dress), or *connotative* (containing a suggested meaning, e.g., gown).

Words can be *concrete* (specific) or *abstract* (general or conceptual).

Words can be *euphonic* (pleasant sounding, e.g., languid, murmur) or *cacophonous* (harsh sounding, e.g., raucous, croak).

SENTENCE STRUCTURE

Describe the sentence structure by considering the following:

1. Examine the sentence length. Are the sentences *telegraphic* (shorter than 5 words in length), *short* (approximately 5 words in length), *medium* (approximately 18 words in length), or *long and involved* (30 words or more in length)? Does the sentence length fit the subject matter? What variety of lengths is present? Why is the sentence length effective?

2. Examine sentence beginnings. Is there a good variety or does a pattern emerge?

3. Examine the arrangement of ideas in a sentence. Are they set out in a special way for a purpose?

4. Examine the arrangement of ideas in a paragraph. Is there evidence of any pattern or structure?

5. Examine sentence patterns. Some elements to consider are listed below:

A *declarative (assertive) sentence* makes a statement: e.g., The king is sick.

An *imperative sentence* gives a command: e.g., Stand up.

An *interrogative sentence* asks a question: e.g., Is the king sick?

An *exclamatory sentence* makes an exclamation: e.g., The king is dead!

A *simple sentence* contains one subject and one verb: e.g., The singer bowed to her adoring audience.

A *compound sentence* contains two independent clauses joined by a coordinate conjunction (and, but, or) or by a semicolon: e.g., The singer bowed to the audience, but she sang no encores.

A *complex sentence* contains an independent clause and one or more subordinate clauses: e.g., You said that you would tell the truth.

A *compound-complex sentence* contains

two or more principal clauses and one or more subordinate clauses: e.g.. The singer bowed while the audience applauded, but she sang no encores.

A *loose sentence* makes complete sense if brought to a close before the actual ending: e.g.. We reached Edmonton/that morning/after a turbulent flight/and some exciting experiences,

A *periodic sentence* makes sense only when the end of the sentence is reached: e.g.. That morning, after a turbulent flight and some exciting experiences, we reached Edmonton.

In a *balanced sentence*, the phrases or clauses balance each other by virtue of their likeness of structure, meaning, or length: e.g.. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters.

Natural order of a sentence involves constructing a sentence so the subject comes before the predicate: e.g., Oranges grow in California.

Inverted order of a sentence (sentence inversion) involves constructing a sentence so the predicate comes before the subject: e.g.. In California grow oranges. This is a device in which normal sentence patterns are reversed to create an emphatic or rhythmic effect.

Split order of a sentence divides the predicate into two parts with the subject coming in the middle: e.g., In California oranges grow.

Juxtaposition is a poetic and rhetorical device in which normally unassociated ideas, words, or phrases are placed next to one another, creating an effect of surprise and wit: e.g., "The apparition of these faces in the crowd;/Petals on a wet, black bough" ("In a Station of the Metro" by Ezra Pound)

Parallel structure (parallelism) refers to a grammatical or structural similarity between sentences or parts of a sentence. It involves an arrangement of words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs so that elements of equal importance are equally developed and similarly phrased: e.g.. He was walking, running, and jumping for joy.

Repetition is a device in which words, sounds, and ideas are used more than once to enhance rhythm and create emphasis: e.g., "...government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth" ("Address at Gettysburg" by Abraham Lincoln)

A *rhetorical question* is a question that expects no answer. It is used to draw attention to a point and is generally stronger than a direct statement: e.g.. If Mr. Ferchoffis always fair, as you have said, why did he refuse to listen to Mrs. Baldwin's arguments?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

1. Examine the Syntax Within A Single Sentence

Example:

Next morning when the first light came into the sky and the sparrows stirred in the trees, when the cows rattled their chains and the rooster crowed and the early automobiles went whispering along the road, Wilbur awoke and looked for Charlotte.

E. B. White From *Charlotte's Web*.

Example:

Col. Grangerford was very tall and very slim, and had a darkish-paly complexion, not a sign of red in it anywheres; he was clean-shaved every morning all over his thin face, and he had the thinnest kind of lips, and

the thinnest kind of nostrils, and a high nose, and heavy eyebrows, and the blackest kind of eyes, sunk so deep back that they seemed like they was looking out of caverns at you, as you may say.

Mark Twain From *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

Example:

She was standing in the middle of the railroad tracks.

From *The Wars* by Timothy Findley..

2. Examine the Syntax Within A Single Page of a Novel

Example:

It was a cold grey day in late November. The weather had changed overnight, when a backing wind brought a granite sky and a mizzling rain with it, and although it was not only a little after two o'clock in the afternoon the pallor of a winter evening seemed to have closed upon the hills, cloaking them in mist. It would be dark by four. The air was clammy cold, and for all the tightly closed windows it penetrated the interior of the coach. The leather seats felt damp to the hands, and there must have been a small crack in the roof, because now and again little drips of rain fell softly through, smudging the leather and leaving a dark blue stain like a splodge of ink. The wind came in gusts, at times shaking the coach as it travelled round the bend of the road, and in the exposed places on the high ground it blew with such force that the whole body of the coach trembled and swayed, rocking between the high wheels like a drunken man. The driver, muffled in a greatcoat to his ears, bent almost double in his seat in a faint endeavour to gain shelter from his own shoulders, while the dispirited

horses plodded sullenly to his command, too broken by the wind and the rain to feel the whip that now and again cracked above their heads, while it swung between the numb fingers of the driver. The wheels of the coach creaked and groaned as they sank into the ruts on the road, and sometimes they flung up the soft splattered mud against the windows, where it mingled with the constant driving rain, and whatever view there might have been of the countryside was hopelessly obscured.

Daphne DuMaurier

From *Jamaica Inn*. In *Four Great*

Cornish Novels:

Jamaica Inn, Rebecca, Frenchman's Creek, My Cousin Rachel.

THEME CHART

PLOT

A summary of the "plot" or events of a poem (or short story or novel) is written in paragraph form.

Examples:

In "Janet Waking," Janet awakens one morning and runs to greet her pet chicken only to discover that a bee had stung and killed the bird. The discovery desolates Janet to such a degree that her father cannot comfort her.

In "Barter," the poet describes the beauty of the ocean, fire, children's faces, music, pine trees, and thoughts. The poet urges the reader not to "count the cost" but to "Count many a year of strife well lost" and "Give all you have" for "a breath of ecstasy."

SUBJECTS

Subjects of the poem (or short story or novel) are listed as words or phrases

Examples:

“Janet Waking”

- (1) a child's first experience of death
- (2) loss of a pet
- (3) innocence

“The Barter”

- (1) beautiful things in life
- (2) barter/exchange
- (3) the suffering and problems in life

THEMES

After combining subjects where appropriate, students write a complete have" for "a breath of ecstasy."

sentence identifying what idea the author is conveying about each subject.

Examples:

“Janet Waking”

- (1) Children become aware of the inevitability of death and are transformed by the knowledge
- (2) The death of innocence is inevitable. (Note: Subjects 1 and 2 are combined into one theme.)

“The Barter”

Exchange the suffering and problems of life for moments of loveliness