Tone is one of the concepts that are the most difficult to determine. Often, people mistake tone for the mood (or how the *reader* feels while reading the piece). Tone is the *speaker’s* attitude (or in non-fiction, the author’s attitude) toward a subject, character, or situation. When determining tone, what the reader feels is irrelevant, only the speaker’s feelings are.

To help determine tone, use the DITS method.

**Diction**

The type of diction (words) an author uses helps to convey the tone. For example, the author’s choice of using cynical diction or mocking diction affect the presentation of a humorous situation or humorous character. This is why merely stating that the author uses diction is meaningless: the type of diction is what is important.

**Imagery**

All authors use imagery to convey their point. What type of images are being created? Comical? Melancholic? The types of images an author use helps to determine the tone of the piece. It is at this point that only being able to identify a metaphor or symbol will not help you, because you must also determine how the metaphor or symbol creates the image and what the image is meant to convey.

**Theme**

This may seem pretty obvious, but it is important to realize the theme of the piece will affect our views of the tone. Maybe the author is writing a story set in Puritan times and the theme is that human nature is essentially evil. What does that theme suggest about the tone toward that idea?

**Style**

The author’s style of writing is important to decipher tone. What details does the author tend to leave out? What details does the author emphasize more? What is conveyed in the plot, the descriptions of characters, the character interactions? All of this portrays tone.

Once you have established these four elements, it should be easier to determine the tone of the piece.

**DICTION**

Use adjectives to describe diction. Do not just say they use diction because every writer uses words.

Words to describe diction:

1. 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.
2. Words can be mainly ***colloquial*** (slang), ***informal*** (conversational), ***formal*** (literary) or ***old-fashioned***.
3. Words can be mainly ***general*** or ***specific***
4. Words can be mainly ***denotative*** (containing an exact meaning, e.g., dress) or ***connotative*** (containing suggested meaning, e.g., gown)
5. Words can be ***concrete*** (specific) or ***abstract*** (general or conceptual).
6. Words can ***euphonious*** (pleasant sounding, e.g., languid, murmur) or ***cacophonous*** (harsh sound, e.g., raucous, croak).

Other words to describe diction:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Artificial** | false | **Obscure** | unclear |
| **Bombastic** | pompous, ostentatious | **Obtuse** | dull-witted, undiscerning |
| **Colloquial** | vernacular (slang) | **Ordinary** | every day, common |
| **Concrete** | actual, specific, particular | **Pedantic** | didactic, scholastic, bookish |
| **Cultured** | cultivated, refined, finished | **Plain** | clear, obvious |
| **Detached** | cut-off, removed, separated | **Poetic** | lyric, melodious, romantic |
| **Esoteric** | understood by a chosen few | **Precise** | exact, accurate, decisive |
| **Euphemistic** | indirect, softened | **Pretentious** | pompous, gaudy, inflated |
| **Figurative** | serving as illustration | **Provincial** | rural, rustic, unpolished |
| **Formal** | academic, conventional | **Scholarly** | intellectual, academic |
| **Grotesque** | hideous, deformed | **Sensuous** | passionate, luscious |
| **Homespun** | folksy, homey, native, rustic | **Simple** | clear, intelligible |
| **Idiomatic** | peculiar, vernacular | **Slang** | lingo, colloquialism |
| **Insipid** | uninteresting, tame, dull | **Symbolic** | representative, metaphorical |
| **Jargon** | vocabulary for a profession | **Trite** | common, banal, stereotyped |
| **Learned** | educated, experienced | **Informal** | casual, relaxed, unofficial |
| **Moralistic** | puritanical, righteous | **Vulgar** | coarse, indecent, tasteless |

**TONE**

Most of the time, people want to utilize words for tone that actually describe the mood of the selection, or they wish to use the most fundamental words they can. I wish you to increase your vocabulary: the author wasn’t “angry” about his topic, he was “enraged;” she wasn’t “neutral,” she was “matter of fact” or even “didactic.” Don’t hold yourself back from being more accurate than basic words will allow you to be.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 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. **callous:** unfeeling, insensitive to feelings of others 6. **caustic:** intense use of sarcasm 7. **condescension: a** feeling of superiority 8. **contemplative:** studying, thinking, reflecting on an issue 9. **critical:** finding fault 10. **choleric:** hot-tempered, easily angered 11. **contemptuous:** showing or feeling that something is worthless or lacks respect 12. **conventional:** lacking spontaneity, originality, and individuality 13. **cynical:** questions the basic sincerity and goodness of people 14. **derisive:** ridiculing, mocking 15. **didactic:** author attempts to educate or instruct the reader 16. **disdainful:** scornful 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. **haughty:** proud and vain to the point of arrogance 22. **indignant:** marked by anger aroused by injustice 23. **intimate:** very familiar 24. **jovial:** happy | 1. **judgmental:** authoritative and often having critical opinions 2. **lyrical:** expressing a poet’s inner feelings; emotional; full of images; song-like 3. **malicious:** purposely hurtful 4. **melancholic:** darkness, sadness, rejection 5. **mocking:** treating with contempt or ridicule 6. **morose:** gloomy, sullen, surly, despondent 7. **objective:** an unbiased view-able to leave personal judgments aside 8. **obsequious:** polite and obedient in order to gain something 9. **optimistic:** hopeful, cheerful 10. **patronizing:** air of condescension 11. **pessimistic:** seeing the worst side of things; no hope 12. **reflective:** illustrating innermost thoughts and emotions 13. **reverent:** treating a subject with honor and respect 14. **ribald:** offensive in speech or gesture 15. **ridiculing:** slightly contemptuous banter; making fun of 16. **sanguineous:** optimistic, cheerful 17. **sarcastic:** sneering, caustic 18. **sardonic:** scornfully and bitterly sarcastic 19. **satiric:** ridiculing to show weakness in order to make a point, teach 20. **sincere:** without deceit or pretense; genuine 21. **solemn:** deeply earnest, tending toward sad reflection 22. **whimsical:** odd, strange, fantastic; fun |