

## **TONE: THE ATTITUDE OF AN AUTHOR**

The difficult but subtle task of a good reader is to identify the tone or attitude revealed by an author in a piece of writing. *Any human emotion* may become the author's tone. Gestures, voice inflections, pauses, facial movement, even the sparkle of his eye can reveal a speaker's attitude toward his subject. However, an author's attitude or tone has to be inferred from less obvious clues. To avoid inaccurate interpretations, you, as a reader, must heed whether the author is *serious, humorous, witty, ironic, patriotic, sentimental, defensive, moralizing, compassionate, pessimistic, cynical, nostalgic, satirical, critical, horrifying, or rejoicing* in his attitude toward his subject. Remember, an author may color his ideas with these or *any other emotions*.

The perceptive reader recognizes these attitudes or tones by identifying the subject, the length and flow of the sentences, the atmosphere, the work connotations, the point of view and purpose of the author. In an effective piece, the author creatively and thoughtfully blends many elements together to unify and focus an overall tone which reflects his attitude. Some explanations and examples follow.

**NOSTALGIC TONE.** Reveals a kind of homesickness for the past, a desire to return to "the good ole days." The following statement reflects nostalgia:

"Oh, for the halcyon days of our childhood when there was time for playing family games, reading good books, enjoying dinner conversation; we knew each other; we shared our joys and disappointments--no boob tube then," the mother reminisced.

**SENTIMENTAL TONE.** Identifies that which is affectedly or extravagantly emotional instead of rational; it may also reveal romantic feelings. A good example is the paragraph which follows:

Jim and Mary Smith had looked forward to the trip for months. They were returning to a city they had fallen in love with during the five years it was their home over a decade ago. So many memories were rooted in those years when they lived near Washington D.C. They had bought their first house while they lived in a nearby suburb. Their two sons had begun school during those years, and Jim and Mary had established many close friendships. Above all, they had become caught up in the excitement of living in the nation's capital, with its continual political intrigue and constant awareness of international affairs. Indeed, they were more than eager to return, see friends, and visit the beautiful city they loved.

**MORALIZING TONE.** Attempts to explain or interpret good or bad features of something. It is explicitly and clearly trying to reform. There is no subtlety involved. An example of moralizing is the following statement:

"Well, if you want to live like a yuppie, you better study hard and complete your education. That piece of parchment is the bottom rung of the yuppie ladder!"

**CYNICAL TONE.** Reveals a sense of helplessness and hopelessness toward life--a feeling that nothing really can be changed, that evil will prevail, that man is basically selfish, incapable of being reformed. As an example of cynicism, consider the following statement made by a person of voting age.

"Don't talk to me about voting or politics. I'm not interested. All politicians are self-serving and corrupt. My vote won't change a thing."