155 Words To Describe An Author’s Tone

**What is tone?**

Tone refers to an author’s use of words and writing style to convey his or her attitude towards a topic. Tone is often defined as what the author feels about the subject. What the reader feels is known as the mood.

**Tip:** Don’t confuse tone with voice. [Read [How Do You Find Your Writing Voice?](https://writerswrite.co.za/how-do-you-find-your-writing-voice)] Voice can be explained as the author’s personality expressed in writing. Tone = Attitude. Voice = Personality.

Tone (attitude) and voice (personality) create a [writing style](https://writerswrite.co.za/the-4-writing-styles-everybody-should-know). You may not be able to alter your personality but you can adjust your attitude. This gives you ways to create writing that affects your audience’s mood. (Click [here](http://examples.yourdictionary.com/examples-of-tone-in-a-story.html) for examples of tone in a story.)

**The mechanics of tone**

Tone is conveyed through diction (choice and use of words and phrases), viewpoint, syntax (grammar; how you put words and phrases together), and level of formality. It is the way you express yourself in speech or writing.

**How do you find the correct tone?**

You can usually find a tone by asking these three questions:

1. Why am I writing this?
2. Who is my intended audience?
3. What do I want the reader to learn, understand, or think about?

In **formal writing**, your tone should be clear, concise, confident, and courteous. The writing level should be sophisticated, but not pretentious.

In **creative writing,** your tone is more subjective, but you should always aim to communicate clearly. Genre sometimes determines the tone.

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| **Tone** | **Meaning** |
| **Absurd** | illogical; ridiculous; silly; implausible; foolish |
| **Accusatory** | suggesting someone has done something wrong, complaining |
| **Acerbic** | sharp; forthright; biting; hurtful; abrasive; severe |
| **Admiring** | approving; think highly of; respectful; praising |
| **Aggressive** | hostile; determined; forceful; argumentative |
| **Aggrieved** | indignant; annoyed; offended; disgruntled |
| **Ambivalent** | having mixed feelings; uncertain; in a dilemma; undecided |
| **Amused** | entertained; diverted; pleased |
| **Angry** | incensed or enraged; threatening or menacing |
| **Animated** | full of life or excitement; lively; spirited; impassioned; vibrant |
| **Apathetic** | showing little interest; lacking concern; indifferent; unemotional |
| **Apologetic** | full of regret; repentant; remorseful; acknowledging failure |
| **Appreciative** | grateful; thankful; showing pleasure; enthusiastic |
| **Ardent** | enthusiastic; passionate |
| **Arrogant** | pompous; disdainful; overbearing; condescending; vain; scoffing |
| **Assertive** | self-confident; strong-willed; authoritative; insistent |
| **Awestruck** | amazed, filled with wonder/awe; reverential |
| **Belligerent** | hostile; aggressive; combatant |
| **Benevolent** | sympathetic; tolerant; generous; caring; well meaning |
| **Bitter** | angry; acrimonious; antagonistic; spiteful; nasty |
| **Callous** | cruel disregard; unfeeling; uncaring; indifferent; ruthless |
| **Candid** | truthful, straightforward; honest; unreserved |
| **Caustic** | making biting, corrosive comments; critical |
| **Cautionary** | gives warning; raises awareness; reminding |
| **Celebratory** | praising; pay tribute to; glorify; honour |
| **Chatty** | informal; lively; conversational; familiar |
| **Colloquial** | familiar; everyday language; informal; colloquial; casual |
| **Comic** | humorous; witty; entertaining; diverting |
| **Compassionate** | sympathetic; empathetic; warm-hearted; tolerant; kind |
| **Complex** | having many varying characteristics; complicated |
| **Compliant** | agree or obey rules; acquiescent; flexible; submissive |
| **Concerned** | worried; anxious; apprehensive |
| **Conciliatory** | intended to placate or pacify; appeasing |
| **Condescending** | stooping to the level of one’s inferiors; patronizing |
| **Confused** | unable to think clearly; bewildered; vague |
| **Contemptuous** | showing contempt; scornful; insolent; mocking |
| **Critical** | finding fault; disapproving; scathing; criticizing |
| **Cruel** | causing pain and suffering; unkind; spiteful; severe |
| **Curious** | wanting to find out more; inquisitive; questioning |
| **Cynical** | scornful of motives/virtues of others; mocking; sneering |
| **Defensive** | defending a position; shielding; guarding; watchful |
| **Defiant** | obstinate; argumentative; defiant; contentious |
| **Demeaning** | disrespectful; undignified |
| **Depressing** | sad, melancholic; discouraging; pessimistic |
| **Derisive** | snide; sarcastic; mocking; dismissive; scornful |
| **Detached** | aloof; objective; unfeeling; distant |
| **Dignified** | serious; respectful; formal; proper |
| **Diplomatic** | tactful; subtle; sensitive; thoughtful |
| **Disapproving** | displeased; critical; condemnatory |
| **Disheartening** | discouraging; demoralizing; undermining; depressing |
| **Disparaging** | dismissive; critical; scornful |
| **Direct** | straightforward; honest |
| **Disappointed** | discouraged; unhappy because something has gone wrong |
| **Dispassionate** | impartial; indifferent; unsentimental; cold; unsympathetic |
| **Distressing** | heart-breaking; sad; troubling |
| **Docile** | compliant; submissive; deferential; accommodating |
| **Earnest** | showing deep sincerity or feeling; serious |
| **Egotistical** | self-absorbed; selfish; conceited; boastful |
| **Empathetic** | understanding; kind; sensitive |
| **Encouraging** | optimistic; supportive |
| **Enthusiastic** | excited; energetic |
| **Evasive** | ambiguous; cryptic; unclear |
| **Excited** | emotionally aroused; stirred |
| **Facetious** | inappropriate; flippant |
| **Farcical** | ludicrous; absurd; mocking; humorous and highly improbable |
| **Flippant** | superficial; glib; shallow; thoughtless; frivolous |
| **Forceful** | powerful; energetic; confident; assertive |
| **Formal** | respectful; stilted; factual; following accepted styles/rules |
| **Frank** | honest; direct; plain; matter-of-fact |
| **Frustrated** | annoyed; discouraged |
| **Gentle** | kind; considerate; mild; soft |
| **Ghoulish** | delighting in the revolting or the loathsome |
| **Grim** | serious; gloomy; depressing; lacking humor; macabre |
| **Gullible** | naïve; innocent; ignorant |
| **Hard** | unfeeling; hard-hearted; unyielding |
| **Humble** | deferential; modest |
| **Humorous** | amusing; entertaining; playful |
| **Hypercritical** | unreasonably critical; hair splitting; nitpicking |
| **Impartial** | unbiased; neutral; objective |
| **Impassioned** | filled with emotion; ardent |
| **Imploring** | pleading; begging |
| **Impressionable** | trusting; child-like |
| **Inane** | silly; foolish; stupid; nonsensical |
| **Incensed** | enraged |
| **Incredulous** | disbelieving; unconvinced; questioning; suspicious |
| **Indignant** | annoyed; angry; dissatisfied |
| **Informative** | instructive; factual; educational |
| **Inspirational** | encouraging; reassuring |
| **Intense** | earnest; passionate; concentrated; deeply felt |
| **Intimate** | familiar; informal; confidential; confessional |
| **Ironic** | the opposite of what is meant |
| **Irreverent** | lacking respect for things that are generally taken seriously |
| **Jaded** | bored; having had too much of the same thing; lack enthusiasm |
| **Joyful** | positive; optimistic; cheerful; elated |
| **Judgmental** | critical; finding fault; disparaging |
| **Laudatory** | praising; recommending |
| **Light-Hearted** | carefree; relaxed; chatty; humorous |
| **Loving** | affectionate; showing intense, deep concern |
| **Macabre** | gruesome; horrifying; frightening |
| **Malicious** | desiring to harm others or to see others suffer; ill-willed; spiteful |
| **Mean-Spirited** | inconsiderate; unsympathetic |
| **Mocking** | scornful; ridiculing; making fun of someone |
| **Mourning** | grieving; lamenting; woeful |
| **Naïve** | innocent; unsophisticated; immature |
| **Narcissistic** | self-admiring; selfish; boastful; self-pitying |
| **Nasty** | unpleasant; unkind; disagreeable; abusive |
| **Negative** | unhappy, pessimistic |
| **Nostalgic** | thinking about the past; wishing for something from the past |
| **Objective** | without prejudice; without discrimination; fair; based on fact |
| **Obsequious** | overly obedient and/or submissive; fawning; groveling |
| **Optimistic** | hopeful; cheerful |
| **Outraged** | angered and resentful; furious; extremely angered |
| **Outspoken** | frank; candid; spoken without reserve |
| **Pathetic** | expressing pity, sympathy, tenderness |
| **Patronizing** | condescending; scornful; pompous |
| **Pensive** | reflective; introspective; philosophical; contemplative |
| **Persuasive** | convincing; eloquent; influential; plausible |
| **Pessimistic** | seeing the negative side of things |
| **Philosophical** | theoretical; analytical; rational; logical |
| **Playful** | full of fun and good spirits; humorous; jesting |
| **Pragmatic** | realistic; sensible |
| **Pretentious** | affected; artificial; grandiose; rhetorical; flashy |
| **Regretful** | apologetic; remorseful |
| **Resentful** | aggrieved; offended; displeased; bitter |
| **Resigned** | accepting; unhappy |
| **Restrained** | controlled; quiet; unemotional |
| **Reverent** | showing deep respect and esteem |
| **Righteous** | morally right and just; guiltless; pious; god-fearing |
| **Satirical** | making fun to show a weakness; ridiculing; derisive |
| **Sarcastic** | scornful; mocking; ridiculing |
| **Scathing** | critical; stinging; unsparing; harsh |
| **Scornful** | expressing contempt or derision; scathing; dismissive |
| **Sensationalistic** | provocative; inaccurate; distasteful |
| **Sentimental** | thinking about feelings, especially when remembering the past |
| **Sincere** | honest; truthful; earnest |
| **Skeptical** | disbelieving; unconvinced; doubting |
| **Solemn** | not funny; in earnest; serious |
| **Subjective** | prejudiced; biased |
| **Submissive** | compliant; passive; accommodating; obedient |
| **Sulking** | bad-tempered; grumpy; resentful; sullen |
| **Sympathetic** | compassionate; understanding of how someone feels |
| **Thoughtful** | reflective; serious; absorbed |
| **Tolerant** | open-minded; charitable; patient; sympathetic; lenient |
| **Tragic** | disastrous; calamitous |
| **Unassuming** | modest; self-effacing; restrained |
| **Uneasy** | worried; uncomfortable; edgy; nervous |
| **Urgent** | insistent; saying something must be done soon |
| **Vindictive** | vengeful; spiteful; bitter; unforgiving |
| **Virtuous** | lawful; righteous; moral; upstanding |
| **Whimsical** | quaint; playful; mischievous; offbeat |
| **Witty** | clever; quick-witted; entertaining |
| **Wonder** | awe-struck; admiring; fascinating |
| **World-Weary** | bored; cynical; tired |
| **Worried** | anxious; stressed; fearful |
| **Wretched** | miserable; despairing; sorrowful; distressed |