

## Purpose and Tone

An important part of reading critically is realizing that behind everything you read is an author. This author is a person who has a reason for writing a given piece and who works from a personal point of view. To fully understand and evaluate what you read, you must recognize purpose – the reason why the author writes. You must also be aware of tone – the expression of the author’s attitude and feeling.

### **Purpose**

Authors write with a reason in mind, and you can better evaluate what is being said by determining what that reason is. The author’s reason for writing is also called the purpose of a selection. There are three common purposes for writing:

1. To Inform – to give objective information about a subject. Authors with this purpose wish to provide facts that will explain or teach something to readers.
  - Lou Gehrig’s disease causes the body to shut down while the mind remains sharp and clear.
2. To Persuade – to convince the reader to agree with the author’s subjective point of view on a subject. Authors with this purpose may give facts, but their main goal is to argue or prove a point to readers.

Someone you know or love may die from Lou Gehrig’s disease unless a cure is found, so make a generous donation to the Lou Gehrig’s Disease Foundation.

3. To Entertain – to amuse and delight; to appeal to the reader’s senses and imagination. Authors with this purpose entertain in various ways, such as exaggeration, in fiction and non-fiction.
  - In preparing the soil for planting, you will need several tools. Dynamite would be a beautiful thing to use, but it would have a tendency to get the dirt into the front-hall and track up the stairs. —Robert Benchley, “Gardening Notes”



Directions: In the space provided, label each item according to its main purpose: to Inform (I), to persuade (P), or to entertain (E).

Sentence	Answer
1. As Americans have grown more health-conscious, the menus in school cafeterias have begun to change.	
2. Nurses assigned to intensive care units should be given shorter shifts and higher pay because the work is unusually demanding and stressful.	
3. It's easy to quit smoking; I've done it hundreds of times.	
4. More women should get involved in local politics and support the growing number of female candidates for public office.	
5. .The career of a professional athlete is usually quite short.	
6. An artificial odor is added to natural gas so that people can tell whether or not gas is leaking	
7. Fred believes in a seafood diet: when he sees food, he eats it.	
8. Shoparama has low, low prices, an outstanding selection of health and beauty products, and a convenient location near you.	
9. The best approach to take when you feel the urge to exercise is to lie down quickly in a darkened room until the feeling goes away.	
10. In ancient Egypt, priests plucked all the hair from their bodies, including their eyebrows and eyelashes.	
11. The world's first ads were neither printed nor broadcast electronically; they were vocal, called out by street peddlers promoting their wares.	
12. Instead of nagging my father to lose weight, my mother bought him and extra-large T-shirt imprinted with the message "This space for rent."	
13. It is senseless to kill an animal just for a fur coat that is no warmer than the synthetic ones available today.	
14. People should be allowed to use their home computers to vote in elections.	

Sentence	Answer
<p>15. The foundation of public education has always been reading, writing, and arithmetic – the three “R’s.” Yet the schools insist that students who have not mastered these fundamentals continue to take all the other subjects as well. What good does it do for young people to sit in on a history or science class if they can’t read or calculate well? Schools ought to require students who are very far behind in the fundamentals to devote all their time to the three R’s until they are at or near grade level.</p>	
<p>16. More and more elderly people are turning to shared housing as a way to live more economically, more securely, and with more companionship. There are dozens of such projects around the country, including group homes in California, communes in Baltimore, and “Share a Home” in Winter Park, Florida. While the last of these includes 125 participants, a shared-housing project may involve only a few members. Most shared housing projects have full- or part-time help, but members often share in such chores as shopping for food and cooking.</p>	

## Tone

A writer’s tone reveals the attitude he or she has toward a subject. Tone is expressed through the words and details the writer selects. Just as a speaker’s voice can project a range of feelings, a writer’s voice can project one or more tones, or feelings: anger, sympathy, hopefulness, sadness, respect, dislike, and so on. An author chooses the words that make an impact on the reader, words that will help the author convey the intended purpose. Sometimes an author wants to appeal to reason and just give facts and factual explanations. At other times, an author wants to appeal to emotions and stir the reader to feel deeply.

So too can punctuation. Pay attention to the punctuation at the end of sentences to understand what type of tone the author is projecting. Understanding tone is, then, an important part of understanding what an author has written.

To appreciate the differences in tone that writers can employ, read the following versions of a murder confession.



1. "I just shot my husband five times in the chest with this .357 Magnum." (Tone: matter-of-fact, objective)
2. "How could I ever have killed him? I just can't believe I did that!" (Tone: shocked, disbelieving)
3. "Oh, my God! I've murdered my husband. How can I ever be forgiven for this dreadful deed?" (Tone: guilty, regretful)
4. "That dirty rat. He's had it coming for years. I'm glad I finally had the nerve to do it." (Tone: revengeful, well-satisfied)

Below is a list of words commonly used to describe tone. Brief meanings are given for any words that you might be unfamiliar with. Refer to these meanings as needed to learn any words you don't know yet.

### Tone Words

Straightforward – direct, to the point

Arrogant – stuck-up; proud  
haughty

Objective – not personally involved

Irreverent – lacking respect

Subjective – personally involved

Cynical – believing the worst

Serious – thoughtful; solemn;  
somber

Indignant – strongly opinionated

Informal – casual; familiar

Revengeful – unforgiving; spiteful

Bitter – showing contempt; angry

Malicious – mean; cruel

Sorrowful – full of sadness

Ambivalent – uncertain; hesitant

Depressed – feeling "blue" or low

Optimistic – predicting positive  
results

Nostalgic – remembering fondly

Desperate – having lost hope

Angry – showing anger

Grim – desolate; dismal

Critical – judging harshly

Realistic – true to life

Cruel – fiercely unkind

Conversational – talkative; chatty

Fearful – scared

Ironic – contrary, not predicted

Unrealistic – not mindful of reality



Detached – not interested; aloof

Anxious – worried

Earnest – sincere

Alarmed – fearful; apprehensive

Uncertain – doubting

Tragic – extremely sad

Incredulous – unwilling to accept

Self-Pitying – focusing on your troubles

Intense – deeply felt

Disbelieving – doubtful

Moralistic – trying to change or reform

Reassuring – calmly convincing

Appreciative – expressing gratitude

Surprised – amazed, astonished

Vindictive – wanting revenge

Regretful – sorry, remorseful

Zealous – obsessive enthusiasm

Sympathetic – showing sensitivity to others

Tolerant – respectful

Compassionate – strongly sympathetic

Loving – feeling tender affection

Sentimental – showing tender feelings

Excited – thrilled

Forgiving – expressing pardon

Cheerful – glad; happy

Outspoken – direct in speech; candid

Joyous – feeling great happiness

Impassioned – filled with conviction

Lighthearted – carefree

Remorseful – filled with regret or guilt

Amused – entertained

Outraged – indignant; offended; insulted

Humorous – witty; joking

Sarcastic – with double meaning

Comical – laughable; funny

Mocking – poking fun; ridiculing

Teasing – playful

Scornful – disapproving

Righteous – morally correct

Melancholy – dejected; woebegone

Bewildered – puzzled; unclear



Let's practice using some of the words.

A.

Directions: Below are five statements expressing different attitudes about a shabby apartment. Five different tones are used. Fill in the blank for each statement with the tone you think is present. Use each tone only once.

- optimistic
- humorous
- sentimental
- tolerant
- bitter

Sentence	Selected Tone Word
This place may be shabby, but since both of my children were born while we lived here, it has a special place in my heart.	
This isn't the greatest apartment in the world, but it's not really that bad.	
If only there were some decent jobs out there, I wouldn't be reduced to living in this miserable dump.	
This place does need some repairs, but I'm sure the landlord will be making improvements sometime soon.	
When we move away, we're planning to release three hundred cockroaches and two mice so we can leave the place exactly as we found it.	



B.

Directions: Each of the following passages illustrates one of the five different tones identified below. In the space provided, write the tone word that applies to each passage.

- caring
- pessimistic
- self-mocking
- critical
- admiring

Paragraph	Add tone word
<p>Whatever happened to the practice of saving up for what you want? It seems nobody has that kind of patience any more. Many Americans buy what they want when they want it and worry about paying for it later. The average American spends significantly more than he or she earns, much to the enjoyment of the credit card companies. Apparently people need to reach a financial crisis before they realize that it's downright stupid to neglect to balance their budgets and to save for a rainy day.</p>	
<p>Machines are complete mysteries to me, and this has resulted in some embarrassing services calls at my home. For example, there was the time I called in a repairman because our refrigerator was too warm. Imagine my humiliation when he told me that the cause of the problem was a dirty filter, which I didn't know existed and therefore hadn't cleaned even once in the two years we owned the refrigerator. The best example of my brilliance with machines, however, has to be the time I called for someone to fix my washing machine. The repairman's solution was simply to put the plug back in the outlet, from which it had been jarred loose by the constant vibration of the washer.</p>	
<p>I think Tina Turner is a terrific role model for anyone who thinks he or she cannot overcome obstacles early in life. Turner grew up in poverty, survived an abusive marriage, and dealt with dishonest business associates early in her career. Many people might have just given up at any point along the way. But Turner had the determination and inner strength to go it alone. Doing it her way, she first became a superstar when she was in her 40's, when she finally received the money, the acclaim, and the respect she always deserved but</p>	

Paragraph	Add tone word
<p>had been deprived of. Not only is Turner talented and tough-minded; she has proved that beauty and sex appeal can be ageless. Way to go, Tina!</p>	
<p>Research on rats show that when animals live in crowded conditions they live disorderly, violent lives. Humans are no different. Crowded inner cities are models of lawlessness; the crowded highways of Los Angeles encourage aggression by drivers, and even shootings. As our urban areas continue to grow in population density, these types of problems will surely also grow. That means more family violence and more fighting over available resources. The American dream will become just that—only a dream.</p>	
<p>Those addicted to drugs and alcohol probably feel terrible about themselves—even if they don't show it—and harsh judgments only worsen their self-image. What these people need are programs to help rid themselves of their addictions. It is also important that we all open our hearts and minds to these troubled people. Their addiction does not make them any less "children of God," nor does it mean that they deserve to be stripped of the dignity that is the birthright of every human being. We must strive to create an environment of hope and help for those who so desperately need it.</p>	