

Writer's Tone and Point of View

Key Ideas

- The writer's attitude toward a subject is conveyed by the tone of the writing.
- To determine tone, look at word choice and manner of expression. How would the writer sound reading the piece?
- The writer's point of view is the position she is writing from.

ON THE GED® TEST

Some kinds of tone you might see in GED® passages are formal or informal, positive or negative, objective, sarcastic, arrogant, concerned, affectionate, or nostalgic.

Tone

A writer usually has a certain attitude toward the subject he or she is writing about. This attitude is the **tone** of the piece. The tone is not directly stated. You have to sense it by the writer's choice of words and manner of expression.

As you read this drama review, ask yourself, "What tone of voice would the author have if she were reading this aloud to me?"

Watching actor Brian Dennehy as Willy Loman in the stage production of *Death of a Salesman* was transforming. I know intellectually that live theater is better than movies. Movie actors reshoot scenes until they are perfect. An actor on stage has one chance to get it right. It is immediate. The actors are breathing human beings in the same room with you. Theater provides the opportunity for strong emotions to surface, right there, in the moment. Seeing a play often envelops me in energy.

But I've never gone so far as to cry at a theater performance until now. I cried because Dennehy's Loman reminded me of my father, of the brevity of our lives, of how easy it is to waste our lives. This was not an intellectual response. I suddenly heard what this man on stage was saying—his life wasn't worth living, though he had tried hard, had a devoted wife and two sons. It didn't matter that this play was written in the 1940s. Mr. Dennehy stood on stage and roared at us about our lives now. It was hard-hitting, emotional drama.

- Which of the following best describes the tone of this piece?
- (1) positive and somewhat awed
 - (2) cool and objective

The correct response is (1). The writer states positive opinions. She also chooses short, clipped expressions—"It is immediate" and "right there, in the moment"—that by themselves create a sense of drama and awe. If the tone were cool and objective, you would not sense the writer's emotional attitude toward the play.

Point of View

The **point of view** of a piece is "where the author is coming from"—that is, the writer's background and experiences that may affect her opinions. For example, when you read a column in a newspaper, you can usually tell whether the writer has a liberal or a conservative point of view.

- What point of view does the writer of the review above have?
- (1) that of a person who prefers sitting at home watching TV
 - (2) that of an enthusiastic theatergoer

You are correct if you chose (2). You can conclude that the writer goes to the theater ("Seeing a play often envelops me") and enjoys it ("theater is better than movies"). Knowing this helps you evaluate the merits of the review.

PRACTICE 8

Questions 1 through 5 refer to the following review.

EXCERPTED FROM "TALKING BACK TO THE TUBE"

- 1 CBS delivered a television low mark called *Big Brother*. Focusing on ten fame-seeking, people-pleasing, hair-teasing losers willing to submit to surveillance by a nation of snoops for three months, it was so bad that it wasn't even good. Forget about camp reversals that transform trash into the perversely fascinating, forget about the Cheese Factor, which allows a pop-cultural product to be moldy and musty and stinky and still taste good. *Big Brother* was so bad that even Jean-Paul Sartre would have yawned, and the dude wrote hundreds of pages about useless passion in *Being and Nothingness*.
- 2 But something good did come of *Big Brother*, something wicked and warped and witty, something created by people with way too much time on their hands and way too much venom in their bite. While the reality series was channeling banality through the cable cords and over the airwaves six nights a week, a small crew of writers were deconstructing and eviscerating the tedium on the Internet. They were taking hours and hours of prime-time dross and turning it into decadent, amoral, sharp, electronic gold.
- 3 Internet sass.
- 4 You gotta love it, if only because it keeps razor-tongued fanatics and uncensored savants off the streets and out of trouble.
- 5 Not only was there a site devoted entirely to the ridiculing of CBS, *Big Brother*, its ten cast members, their families, host Julie Chen, and the gaseous *Big Brother* house pug, but a number of other general interest sites, notably Salon.com, spent the summer providing wry daily updates on the non-goings-on of the non-people in the non-house. They, too, took the non-pulse of a DOA television series and gave it a semblance of life on the Internet.

Excerpt from "Talking Back to the Tube," by Matthew Gilbert. Reprinted courtesy of the *Boston Globe*.

1. Who are referred to as "razor-tongued fanatics and uncensored savants" (paragraph 4)?
- A. the television writers
 - B. the television cast of *Big Brother*
 - C. the Internet writers
 - D. the Internet audience
2. Which of the following best summarizes the reviewer's point about *Big Brother*?
- A. The Internet reviews were much more interesting than the TV show.
 - B. The TV show was so bad that it was funny.
 - C. Internet writers are better than TV writers.
 - D. The main problem was with the ten people on the TV show.
3. What opinion is supported by the statement "even Jean-Paul Sartre would have yawned, and the dude wrote hundreds of pages about useless passion" (paragraph 1)?
- A. The show was boring.
 - B. The show should have been longer.
 - C. The show needed more passion.
 - D. The show was incomprehensible.
4. Which of the following best describes the tone of this review?
- A. apologetic
 - B. nostalgic for earlier shows
 - C. informal and hip
 - D. objective
5. From whose point of view is this piece likely written?
- A. a television script writer
 - B. a person who hates watching TV
 - C. someone knowledgeable about the media
 - D. a disgruntled fan

Answers and explanations start on page 646.