

Tone

When an author writes a story, he may express his attitude or feelings about the subject and the characters. This expression of the author's attitude gives a certain *tone* to the piece. This tone not only tells you how the *author* feels toward a subject or characters, it also influences how *you*, the reader, feel toward them. Because the author wants you to feel the same way as he does, he chooses words that he thinks will bring out the same emotions in you.

Look at the following example. What attitudes or emotions does the author feel? What words does the author use that tell you this?

The carefree child skipped along under the blossoming trees. A playful puppy trotted after her as fast as he could.

By the use of lighthearted words such as *carefree*, *skipped*, *blossoming*, *playful*, and *trotted*, the author means to paint a pleasant scene that will bring out positive feelings.

The emotions that an author wants you to feel can be pleasant (such as humor, joy, or peacefulness) or unpleasant (such as fear, horror, or disgust). Nearly any emotion can be the tone of a passage.

In the example that follows, four people have just learned that a friend is pregnant. In the column on the left, read the reaction of each person to this news. Then match the tone from the column on the right with each statement on the left. Write the correct letter in the blank next to each statement.

Reaction

Tone

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| <p>_____ 1. "I can't believe it! What a stupid thing to do—and not even married a year yet! She should have been smarter than that!"</p> <p>_____ 2. "That's great! Bob is a nice guy. He'll be a wonderful father, I'm sure."</p> <p>_____ 3. "Now I suppose they'll come crying to me for money to help them. They always want me to bail them out of the scrapes they get into."</p> <p>_____ 4. "Babies are so cute and cuddly. When is she due? Do they want a boy or a girl? Oh, I can't wait to hold it!"</p> | <p>(1) complaining</p> <p>(2) angry</p> <p>(3) eager</p> <p>(4) approving</p> |
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See how your answers compare with these:

1. (2) angry
You can infer this from the speaker's attitude that the pregnancy is a "stupid" mistake, and that the friend "should have been smarter" than to become pregnant.
2. (4) approving
This speaker approves of the pregnancy. The father is "a nice guy," and he'll "be a wonderful father."
3. (1) complaining
You can infer this tone from the speaker's comments, "They'll come crying to me," and, "They always want me to bail them out." This speaker is concerned more about the impact of the pregnancy on his life than on anyone else's.
4. (3) eager
You can infer this from the words *cute* and *cuddly*, and the phrase "Oh, I can't wait"

Complete the next exercise for more practice in identifying the tone of a passage.

EXERCISE 8: UNDERSTANDING TONE

Directions: As you read the following passage, picture the person and the scene. Pay particular attention to the words the author uses, and the emotions those words bring out in you. Then answer the questions that follow.

It was an evil night to be driving. The wind drove the rain in great sheets onto the windshield. The wipers could not keep up with the downpour.

Cheri drove slowly. She had left her last client late and probably should have stayed in town, but Sal had demanded that she drive on to Union City. That way, she would be there for the breakfast appointment with a new client.

Suddenly Cheri slammed on her brakes.

“What was that? I thought I saw something in the road. Someone crouching. I must have imagined it. Whoa, I must be tired . . . talking to myself.”

Cheri had increased her speed again when she heard a pop. The car swerved savagely to the right.

“Oh no . . . not a flat . . . not tonight—I don’t even have a spare.” The car rolled to a stop near a ditch. She felt for her flashlight, found it in the glove compartment, and got out of the car. The flashlight beam came to rest on the tire, sagging useless against the soggy ground.

“Better try to find help.”

Cheri looked through the black trees that lined the road. Somewhere to her left, she heard a dog howl.

Her flashlight stabbed the darkness. She walked back down the road, head down against the driving rain. Then she saw the row of nails on the road. She could see the place where her tires had disturbed them. Someone had deliberately placed a straight line of nails across the right lane.

Her eyes widened in fear. A cold knot gripped her stomach. She began to run, blindly.

1. What was the weather like?

- (1) snowing and cold
- (2) foggy and damp
- (3) raining hard
- (4) sunny and warm
- (5) hot and windy

2. Cheri slammed on her brakes because she
 - (1) heard a dog howl
 - (2) had to get to Union City early in the morning
 - (3) nearly hit a dog
 - (4) thought she saw someone crouching in the road
 - (5) remembered that she should have made a phone call

3. Cheri stopped the car because she
 - (1) ran out of gas
 - (2) had a flat tire
 - (3) had transmission trouble
 - (4) crashed into a tree
 - (5) saw someone she knew

4. After Cheri got out of her car she found
 - (1) a dead dog
 - (2) a farmer who could help her
 - (3) a row of nails placed on the road
 - (4) her purse
 - (5) a lost child

5. The author uses words like *evil night*, *black trees*, *stabbed the darkness*, *fear*, and *cold knot*. What emotion does the author want you, the reader, to feel?
 - (1) happiness
 - (2) sadness
 - (3) anger
 - (4) fear
 - (5) embarrassment

THINKING SKILL

6. What conclusion did Cheri draw from what she saw on the road?
 - (1) Someone had deliberately placed nails so she would get a flat tire.
 - (2) Someone was coming to help her.
 - (3) The farmers in the area were friendly.
 - (4) The rain would stop soon.
 - (5) She would miss her breakfast appointment.

For answers and explanations, see page 228.