

Tone Words

What are tone words? So glad you asked. They are emotionally-charged words that reflect the author's/speaker's/narrator's attitude or expression of strong feelings towards a situation, an idea, or the audience.

AP exams often ask students to identify the tone/attitude, so below are some examples of different tones that have appeared on previous AP exams.

Tone Word	Explanation/Definition/Synonym
burlesque	comic, mocking through caricature or comic exaggeration
colloquial	using a conversational style, informal conversation
condescending	an air of superiority
contemptuous	expressing contempt, a lack of respect, or hate
cynical	an attitude of distrust of people and human nature
despondent	showing extreme discouragement or depression
didactic	in a tone intended to preach a sermon or teach a lesson about life
disdainful	expressing contempt, dislike, or hate
euphoric	feeling of elation or great joy
facetious	treating serious issues with deliberately inappropriate humor; flippant; tongue-in-cheek
flippant	lacking proper respect
frivolous	lacking in seriousness
hostile	extremely angry
impartial	attitude of being unbiased; objective
incisive	impressively direct or decisive
indignant	attitude of being angry because of an injustice or unworthiness
irreverent	lacking proper respect or seriousness
laudatory	pertaining to or expressing praise
moralistic	characterized by a narrow and conventional moral attitude
nostalgic	a sentimental yearning for a return to some past period of time
patronizing	an air of treating someone well because of a feeling of superiority
pedantic	too picky or worried about trivial details
pretentious	attitude of extreme show to the point of being fake
poignant	affecting the emotions strongly
sarcastic	a tone used to ridicule, amuse, or taunt by sometimes saying the opposite of what the speaker means
somber	conveying a gloomy, dismal, or depressing character or mood
sympathetic	a sensitivity to other's emotions
suspenseful	arousing excited expectation or uncertainty of what may happen
tranquil	free from turmoil or disturbance
whimsical	playfully quaint that appeals in an amusing way