

DIDLS (Diction, Imagery, Details, Language, and Sentence Structure).  
DIDLS: The Key to TONE

*Tone is defined as the writer's or speaker's attitude toward the subject and the audience. An appreciation of word choice, details, imagery, and language all contribute to the understanding of tone. To misinterpret tone is to misinterpret meaning.*

**Diction** - the connotation of the word choice

What words does the author choose? Consider his/her word choice compared to another. Why did the author choose that particular word? What are the connotations of that word choice?

***Considering diction . . .***

***Laugh:*** guffaw, chuckle, giggle, cackle, snicker, roar

***Self-confident:*** proud, conceited, egotistical, stuck-up, haughty, smug, condescending

***House:*** home, hut, shack, mansion, cabin, residence

***Old:*** mature, experienced, antique, relic, senior, ancient

***Fat:*** obese, plump, corpulent, portly, porky, burly, husky, full-figured

**Images** - vivid appeals to understanding through the senses - concrete language

What images does the author use? What does he/she focus on in a sensory (sight, touch, taste, smell, etc.) way? The kinds of images the author puts in or leaves out reflect his/her style? Are they vibrant? Prominent? Plain? NOTE: Images differ from detail in the degree to which they appeal to the senses.

***Considering images . . .***

My mistress's eyes are nothing like the sun. (restrained)

An old, mad, blind, despised, and dying king. (somber, candid)

He clasps the crag with crooked hands. (dramatic)

Love sets you going like a fat gold watch. (fanciful)

Smiling, the boy fell dead. (shocking)

**Details** - facts that are included or those that are omitted

What details does the author choose to include? What do they imply? What does the author choose to exclude? What are the connotations of their choice of details? PLEASE NOTE: Details are facts or fact-lets. They differ from images in that they don't have a strong sensory appeal.

***Considering Details . . .***

Details are most commonly the facts given by the author or speaker as support for the attitude or tone.

The speaker's perspective shapes what details are given and which are not.

**Language** - the overall use of language, such as formal, clinical, jargon  
Consider language to be the entire body of words used in a text, not simply isolated bits of diction.

For example, an invitation to a wedding might use formal language, while a biology text would use scientific and clinical language.

What is the overall impression of the language the author uses? Does it reflect education? A particular profession? Intelligence? Is it plain? Ornate? Simple? Clear? Figurative? Poetic? Make sure you don't skip this step.

***Considering Language. . .***

- When I told Dad that I had goofed the exam, he blew his top. (slang)
- I had him on the ropes in the fourth and if one of my short rights had connected, he'd have gone down for the count. (jargon)
- A close examination and correlation of the most reliable current economic indexes justifies the conclusion that the next year will witness a continuation of the present, upward market trend. (turgid [swollen], pedantic)

**Sentence Structure** - how structure affects the reader's attitude

What are the sentences like? Are they simple with one or two clauses? Do they have multiple phrases? Are they choppy? Flowing? Sinuous like a snake? Is there antithesis, chiasmus, parallel construction? What emotional impression do they leave? If we are talking about poetry, what is the meter? Is there a rhyme scheme?

***Considering Sentences. . .***

How a sentence is constructed affects what the audience understands.

Parallel syntax (similarly styled phrases and sentences) creates interconnected emotions, feelings and ideas.

Short sentences are punchy and intense. Long sentences are distancing, reflective and more abstract.

Loose sentences point at the end. Periodic sentences point at the

beginning, followed by modifiers and phrases.

The inverted order of an interrogative sentence cues the reader to a question and creates tension between speaker and listener.

Short sentences are often emphatic, passionate or flippant, whereas longer sentences suggest greater thought.

### **Shifts in Tone**

Good authors are rarely monotone. A speaker's attitude can shift on a topic, or an author might have one attitude toward the audience and another toward the subject. The following are some clues to watch for shifts in tone:

- key words (but, yet, nevertheless, however, although)
- punctuation (dashes, periods, colons)
- paragraph divisions
- changes in sentence length
- sharp contrasts in diction

A list of tone words is one practical method of providing a basic "tone vocabulary." An enriched vocabulary enables students to use more specific and subtle descriptions of an attitude they discover in a text. Here is a short list of simple but helpful "tone words":

Angry	Sad	Sentimental
Afraid	Sharp	Cold
Fanciful	Detached	Upset
Urgent	Complimentary	Contemptuous
Silly	Joking	Condescending
Happy	Boring	Poignant
Sympathetic	Confused	Apologetic
Hollow	Childish	Humorous
Joyful	Peaceful	Horrific
Allusive	Mocking	Sarcastic
Sweet	Objective	Nostalgic
Vexed	Vibrant	Zealous
Tired	Frivolous	Irrelevant
Bitter	Audacious	Benevolent
Dreamy	Shocking	Seductive
Restrained	Somber	Candid
Proud	Giddy	Pitiful
Dramatic	Provocative	Didactic
Lugubrious		

D	Diction
I	Imagery
D	Details
L	Language
S	Sentence Structure

<b>Diction Examples</b>	<b>Effect</b>
<b>Imagery Examples</b>	<b>Effect</b>
<b>Details Examples</b>	<b>Effect</b>
<b>Language Examples</b>	<b>Effect</b>
<b>Sentence Structure Examples</b>	<b>Effect</b>

# **TONE**

## **Language to describe tone**

**Positive tone/attitude:** *lighthearted, hopeful, exuberant, enthusiastic, complimentary, confident, cheery, optimistic, loving, passionate, amused, elated, sympathetic, compassionate, proud*

**Negative tone/attitude:** *angry, disgusted, outraged, accusing, condemnatory, furious, wrathful, inflammatory, irritated, indignant, threatening*

**Irony/Sarcasm:** *scornful, disdainful, contemptuous, sarcastic, cynical, critical, facetious, patronizing, satiric, condescending, sardonic, mock-heroic, bantering, irreverent, mock-serious, taunting, insolent, pompous, ironic, flippant, grotesque*

**Sorrow/Fear/Worry:** *somber, elegiac, melancholic, sad, disturbed, mournful, solemn, serious, apprehensive, concerned, hopeless, staid, resigned*

**Neutral tone/attitude words:** *formal, objective, incredulous, nostalgic, ceremonial, candid, shocked, reminiscent, restrained, clinical, baffled, sentimental, detached, objective, disbelieving, questioning, urgent, instructive, matter-of-fact, admonitory, learned, factual, didactic, informative, authoritative*

## **Developing a Tone Vocabulary**

angry	cold	complimentary	learned	flippant	insipid
sharp	urgent	condescending	informative	condescending	pretentious
upset	joking	sympathetic	somber	patronizing	vibrant
silly	poignant	contemptuous	urgent	facetious	irreverent
boring	detached	apologetic	confident	clinical	sentimental
afraid	confused	humorous	mock-heroic	mock-serious	moralistic
happy	childish	horrific	objective	inflammatory	complimentary
hollow	peaceful	sarcastic	diffident	benevolent	contemptuous
joyful	mocking	nostalgic	ironic	burlesque	sympathetic
allusive	objective	zealous	petty	detached	taunting
sweet	vibrant	irreverent	factual	cynical	angry
vexed	frivolous	benevolent	restrained	incisive	turgid
tired	audacious	seductive	elegiac	allusive	sardonic
bitter	shocking	candid	disdainful	scornful	contentious
dreamy	somber	pitiful	lugubrious	effusive	insolent
restrained	giddy	didactic	candid	fanciful	concerned
proud	provocative	satiric	pedantic	colloquial	
dramatic	sentimental	whimsical	indignant	compassionate	
sad	fanciful	dramatic	bantering	impartial	

## Attitude Words

1. accusatory: charging of wrongdoing
2. apathetic: indifferent due to lack of energy or concern
3. awe: solemn wonder
4. bitter: exhibiting strong animosity as a result of pain or grief
5. cynical: questions the basic sincerity and goodness of people
6. condescension: a feeling of superiority
7. callous: unfeeling, insensitive to feelings
8. contemplative: studying, thinking, reflecting on the issue
9. critical: finding fault
10. choleric: hot-tempered, easily angered
11. contemptuous: showing or feeling that something is worthless; lacking respect
12. caustic: intense use of sarcasm; stinging, biting
13. conventional: lacking spontaneity, originality and individuality
14. disdainful: scornful
15. didactic: author attempts to educate or instruct the reader
16. derisive: ridiculing, mocking
17. earnest: intense, a sincere state of mind
18. erudite: learned, polished, scholarly
19. fanciful: using the imagination
20. forthright: directly frank without hesitation
21. gloomy: darkness, sadness, rejection
22. haughty: proud and vain to the point of arrogance
23. indignant: marked by anger aroused by injustice
24. intimate: very familiar
25. judgmental: authoritative and often critical
26. jovial: happy
27. lyrical: expressing inner feelings, emotional, full of images, songlike
28. matter-of-fact: accepting of conditions, not fanciful or emotional
29. mocking: treating with contempt or ridicule
30. morose: gloomy, sullen, surly, despondent
31. malicious: purposely hurtful
32. objective: unbiased view
33. optimistic: hopeful, cheerful
34. obsequious: polite and obedient only for hope of gain or favor
35. patronizing: air of condescension
36. pessimistic: seeing the worst side of things
37. quizzical: odd, eccentric, amusing
38. ribald: offensive in speech, gesture
39. reverent: treating a subject with honor, respect
40. ridiculing: slightly contemptuous banter
41. reflective: illustrating innermost thoughts
42. sarcastic: sneering, caustic
43. sardonic: scornfully and bitterly sarcastic
44. sincere: without deceit or pretense, genuine
45. solemn: deeply earnest, grave
46. sanguine: optimistic, cheerful
47. whimsical: odd, queer, fantastic