Author’s Tone
What is an author’s tone?
Tone indicates the writer’s attitude. Often an author's tone is described by adjectives, such as: *cynical*, *depressed*, *sympathetic*, *cheerful*, *outraged*, *positive*, *angry*, *sarcastic*, *prayerful*, *ironic*, *solemn*, *vindictive*, *intense*, *excited*.
Tone is not an action. It is an attitude.
Real-life Example

You can say the same phrase in different ways, each showing a different attitude or tone.

Try saying, “Come here, Sally” using the following tones:

- Commanding or bossy
- Secretive
- Loving
- Angry
- Excited
- Playful
Tone is not explained or expressed directly.
A reader must “read between the lines” to feel the author’s attitude and identify the tone.
Tone is different than "Mood."
Tone is the **author’s** own attitude toward the subject.

Mood is the emotion the author wanted the **readers** to feel while reading about the subject.
An author’s tone influences the story’s mood and atmosphere.
Author’s Tone

leads to

Story’s Atmosphere & Mood
Example:

An author writes a horror story using a **serious** and **sinister** tone.

That tone helps create a **scary** atmosphere and a **nervous, frightened** mood for the readers.
Another Example:

An author writes a satire, making fun of a horror story using a playful or sarcastic tone.

That playful tone helps create a humorous mood for the readers.
Literary Examples of Author’s Tones...
“The girl remembered little from the raid at Okeadan in which she had been captured. She knew her parents had been killed. She had no idea what had happened to her brothers and sisters. Much of what she had experienced had been so horrible that she had simply shut it out of her mind. . . .”

At Her Majesty’s Request p. 17
“The girl remembered her brothers and sisters. Of what she had experienced had been so horrible that she had simply shut it out of her mind. . . .”

This author’s serious **tone** inspires an atmosphere of tragedy. This leads to a **mood** of sadness, sympathy, and caring in the reader when reading this passage.

*At Her Majesty’s Request*  p. 17
“Just look at the Titanic. The captain said, ‘Even God can’t sink this ship.’ Then, on the first voyage across the Atlantic Ocean, boom, it hit an iceberg and sank. And as soon as a daredevil utters the words ‘piece of cake’ before attempting a stunt, he is doomed. ‘Piece of cake’ becomes his ‘famous last words.’ …”

My Brother’s Arm  p. 111-2
“Just look at the Titanic. The ‘Even God can’t sink this first voyag

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cake’ becomes his ‘famous last

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words.’ …”

This author’s sarcastic tone inspires a slightly humorous atmosphere in spite of tragedy.

This puts the reader in a cynical mood.

My Brother’s Arm  p. 111-2
“When he realized he was still in one piece, he knew that at the very least he must be completely flat, with his face peering out of his own bottom and his brains leaking out of his ears. . . .”

Toad Heaven   p. 64
This author’s humorous **tone** inspires a comic atmosphere. This leads to a playful **mood** in the reader. (It also helps the reader identify with and care about the characters.)
“By nightfall on Monday, the center of the storm had barely moved, and icy winds of hurricane force swept across an area from Virginia up to Nova Scotia, Canada. The wind was so powerful that in Liberty, New York, the local train station had its roof entirely ripped off …”

Blizzard p. 56
“By nightfall on Monday barely a trace of snow remained, and the center of the storm had moved, and icy winds of hurricane force swept across an area from Virginia up to Nova Scotia, Canada. The wind was so powerful that in Liberty, New York, the entire roof of our train station had its roof blown off. ...”

This author’s impersonal tone inspires a serious atmosphere, typical of nonfiction (such as news reports). The mood for this piece might be considered studious or academic.
“... the next minute, Winn-Dixie looked like a furry bullet, shooting across the building, chasing that mouse. He was barking and his feet were skidding all over the polished Pick-It-Quick floor, and people were clapping and hollering and pointing. They really went wild when Winn-Dixie actually caught the mouse.”

Because of Winn-Dixie  p. 36
“...the next minute, furr...bullet polished Pick-It-clapping andointing. They really went wild when Winn-Dixie looked like a y, shooting across the building, chasing that mouse. He was barking and his feet were skidding all over the Quick floor, and people were hollering and pw...

Because of Winn-Dixie p. 36

This author’s enthusiastic tone inspires an active, lively atmosphere. The author hopes to influence the readers to be in an excited mood, anticipating more action. Enthusiastic Dixie actually caught the mouse.”
“Dana grinned malevolently. His teeth were nubby and yellow, like an old barn dog’s. Kneeling on Roy’s chest, he hauled back to hit him again.”

_Hoot_  p. 184
Hostile / Angry

This author’s angry tone inspires a violent atmosphere. The author may be hoping to inspire a tense and uneasy mood in the reader, emphasizing the conflicts in the story.

“Dana grinned malevolently. His teeth were nubby and yellow, like an old barn. Kneeling on Roy’s chest, he hauled back again.”

_Hoot_  p. 184
“We’d gone a quarter mile down the trail when we ran into a man walking the wrong way. He had a pack on his back – a full, towering, overstuffed pack – and he was sweating hard. His breath sounded like a bellows. I stepped aside to let him pass. I stared. I knew that he was one of the ones who hadn’t made it, who’d quit right there at the start.”

*Halfway to the Sky*  p. 32
“We’d gone a quarter mile down the trail when we ran into a man walking the wrong way. He had a pack on his back – the one who hadn’t made it, who’d quit right there at the start.”

This author’s disapproving tone sets up a competitive atmosphere, leading to a judgmental mood in the reader. It also helps the reader appreciate the accomplishments of the characters.

*Halfway to the Sky*  p. 32
“I feel alive for the first time in years,” said Faber. “I feel I’m doing what I should’ve done a lifetime ago. For a little while I’m not afraid. Maybe it’s because I’m doing the right thing at last . . .”

*Fahrenheit 451* p. 131
“I feel alive for the first time in years,” said Faber. “I feel I’m doing what I should’ve done a lifetime ago. For a little while I’m not afraid. Maybe it’s because I’m doing the right thing at last . . . .

This author’s personal tone leads to an atmosphere of emotional expression and revelation. The author hopes to set a mood of confidentiality and sharing in the readers, helping them to understand and care about the characters.

Fahrenheit 451 p. 131
It sounds clichéd
But at times like this,
I miss my dad.
I mean,
I don’t remember him –
he died of cancer when I was three.
Pictures
are all that’s left.
My favorite one is
us sitting on a bench, eating ice cream.
Our knees are knobby the same way,
we’re both grinning like hyenas,
he’s pointing at the camera.

I haven’t had a dad in twelve years.
Most of the time,
that’s okay.
But today,
right now,
I’d like a hug.
From him.
I was three. Pictures are all that’s left.

I don’t remember him – he died of cancer when I was five years.

But today, right now, I’d like a hug. From him.

Corny
It sounds clichéd
But at times like this,
I miss my dad.
I mean,
I don’t remember him – he died of cancer when

I have eleven years.

Grieving
It sounds clichéd
But at times like this,
I miss my dad.
I mean,
I don’t remember him – he died of cancer when

Poets often “bare their souls” in their poems.
This poet’s grieving tone reveals her deepest
feelings about her father, creating an atmosphere
of sadness and longing. This inspires a mood of
sympathy and caring in the readers.

Shark Girl, Kelly Bingham
Indifferent

Flicker

A maid cleans. A crew cuts the lawn. Even the groceries get delivered. Jordan’s dad is home, for once, but he barely lifts his head from his laptop to meet me. His eyes flicker in surprise, but he slams his attention back to the screen and coughs to dismiss us.

Reaching for Sun,
Tracie Vaughn Zimmer
A maid cleans.
A crew cuts the lawn.
Even back to the screen and coughs to dismiss us.

This poet’s indifferent tone creates an impersonal, possibly uncaring atmosphere. This causes an emotionally empty mood in the reader. It allows the reader to understand why the speaker in the poem may be depressed.

*Reaching for Sun*, Tracie Vaughn Zimmer
Examples of Tone

- Cautious
- Humorous
- Affectionate
- Hostile
- Critical
- Objective
- Personal
- Violent
- Solemn / Serious
- Sarcastic
- Disapproving
- Enthusiastic
- Desperate
- Pleading
- Indifferent
The next time you read a passage, try to identify the author’s tone.

It will help you “get the message” of the text.


