

## 155 Words to Describe an Author's Tone



### **What is tone?**

Tone refers to an author's use of words and writing style to convey his or her attitude towards a topic. Tone is often defined as what the author feels about the subject. What the reader feels is known as the mood.

**Tip:** Don't confuse tone with voice. Voice can be explained as the author's personality expressed in writing. Tone = Attitude. Voice = Personality.

Tone (attitude) and voice (personality) create a writing style. You may not be able to alter your personality but you can adjust your attitude. This gives you ways to create writing that affects your audience's mood.

### **The mechanics**

Tone is conveyed through diction (choice and use of words and phrases), viewpoint, syntax (grammar; how you put words and phrases together), and level of formality. It is the way you express yourself in speech or writing.

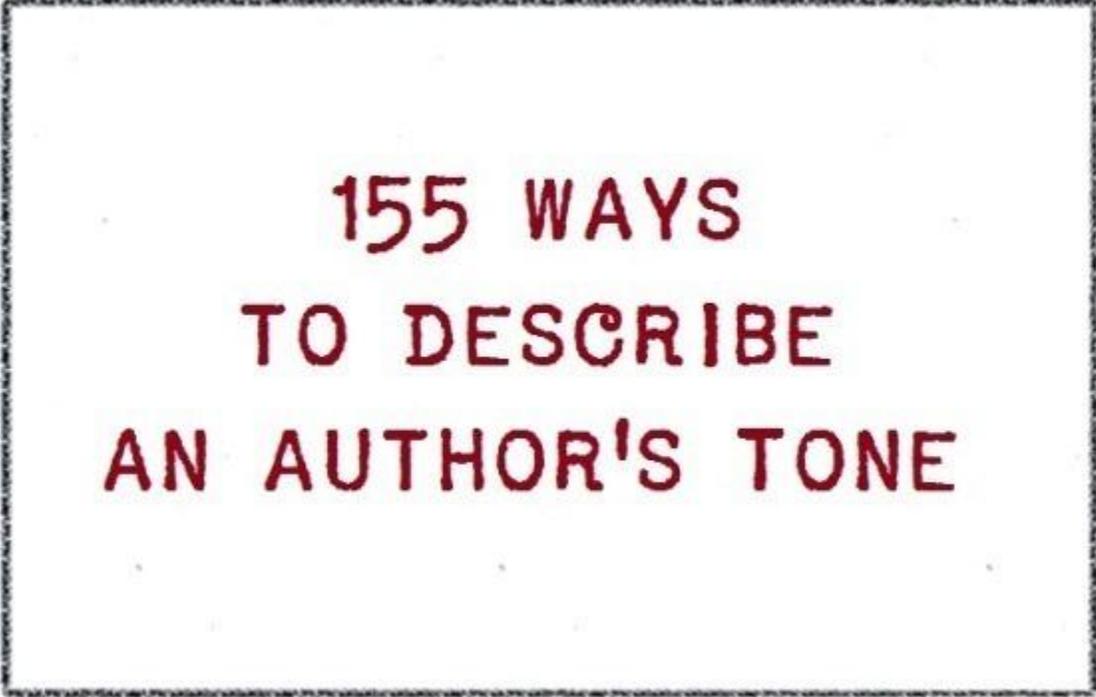
### **How do you find the correct tone?**

You can usually find a tone by asking these three questions:

1. Why am I writing this?
2. Who is my intended audience?
3. What do I want the reader to learn, understand, or think about?

In **formal writing**, your tone should be clear, concise, confident, and courteous. The writing level should be sophisticated, but not pretentious.

In **creative writing**, your tone is more subjective, but you should always aim to communicate clearly. Genre sometimes determines the tone.



## 155 WAYS TO DESCRIBE AN AUTHOR'S TONE

| <b>Tone</b>         | <b>Meaning</b>   |
|---------------------|--|
| <b>Absurd</b>       | illogical; ridiculous; silly; implausible; foolish                 |
| <b>Accusatory</b>   | suggesting someone has done something wrong, complaining           |
| <b>Acerbic</b>      | sharp; forthright; biting; hurtful; abrasive; severe               |
| <b>Admiring</b>     | approving; think highly of; respectful; praising                   |
| <b>Aggressive</b>   | hostile; determined; forceful; argumentative                       |
| <b>Aggrieved</b>    | indignant; annoyed; offended; disgruntled                          |
| <b>Ambivalent</b>   | having mixed feelings; uncertain; in a dilemma; undecided          |
| <b>Amused</b>       | entertained; diverted; pleased                                     |
| <b>Angry</b>        | incensed or enraged; threatening or menacing                       |
| <b>Animated</b>     | full of life or excitement; lively; spirited; impassioned; vibrant |
| <b>Apathetic</b>    | showing little interest; lacking concern; indifferent; unemotional |
| <b>Apologetic</b>   | full of regret; repentant; remorseful; acknowledging failure       |
| <b>Appreciative</b> | grateful; thankful; showing pleasure; enthusiastic                 |
| <b>Ardent</b>       | enthusiastic; passionate   |
| <b>Arrogant</b>     | pompous; disdainful; overbearing; condescending; vain; scoffing    |
| <b>Assertive</b>    | self-confident; strong-willed; authoritative; insistent            |
| <b>Awestruck</b>    | amazed, filled with wonder/awe; reverential                        |
| <b>Belligerent</b>  | hostile; aggressive; combatant                                     |

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| <b>Benevolent</b>    | sympathetic; tolerant; generous; caring; well meaning       |
| <b>Bitter</b>        | angry; acrimonious; antagonistic; spiteful; nasty           |
| <b>Callous</b>       | cruel disregard; unfeeling; uncaring; indifferent; ruthless |
| <b>Candid</b>        | truthful, straightforward; honest; unreserved               |
| <b>Caustic</b>       | making biting, corrosive comments; critical                 |
| <b>Cautionary</b>    | gives warning; raises awareness; reminding                  |
| <b>Celebratory</b>   | praising; pay tribute to; glorify; honour                   |
| <b>Chatty</b>        | informal; lively; conversational; familiar                  |
| <b>Colloquial</b>    | familiar; everyday language; informal; colloquial; casual   |
| <b>Comic</b>         | humorous; witty; entertaining; diverting                    |
| <b>Compassionate</b> | sympathetic; empathetic; warm-hearted; tolerant; kind       |
| <b>Complex</b>       | having many varying characteristics; complicated            |
| <b>Compliant</b>     | agree or obey rules; acquiescent; flexible; submissive      |
| <b>Concerned</b>     | worried; anxious; apprehensive                              |
| <b>Conciliatory</b>  | intended to placate or pacify; appeasing                    |
| <b>Condescending</b> | stooping to the level of one's inferiors; patronising       |
| <b>Confused</b>      | unable to think clearly; bewildered; vague                  |
| <b>Contemptuous</b>  | showing contempt; scornful; insolent; mocking               |
| <b>Critical</b>      | finding fault; disapproving; scathing; criticizing          |
| <b>Cruel</b>         | causing pain and suffering; unkind; spiteful; severe        |
| <b>Curious</b>       | wanting to find out more; inquisitive; questioning          |
| <b>Cynical</b>       | scornful of motives/virtues of others; mocking; sneering    |
| <b>Defensive</b>     | defending a position; shielding; guarding; watchful         |
| <b>Defiant</b>       | obstinate; argumentative; defiant; contentious              |
| <b>Demeaning</b>     | disrespectful; undignified                                  |
| <b>Depressing</b>    | sad, melancholic; discouraging; pessimistic                 |
| <b>Derisive</b>      | snide; sarcastic; mocking; dismissive; scornful             |
| <b>Detached</b>      | aloof; objective; unfeeling; distant                        |
| <b>Dignified</b>     | serious; respectful; formal; proper                         |
| <b>Diplomatic</b>    | tactful; subtle; sensitive; thoughtful                      |
| <b>Disapproving</b>  | displeased; critical; condemnatory                          |
| <b>Disheartening</b> | discouraging; demoralizing; undermining; depressing         |
| <b>Disparaging</b>   | dismissive; critical; scornful                              |
| <b>Direct</b>        | straightforward; honest                                     |
| <b>Disappointed</b>  | discouraged; unhappy because something has gone wrong       |
| <b>Dispassionate</b> | impartial; indifferent; unsentimental; cold; unsympathetic  |
| <b>Distressing</b>   | heart-breaking; sad; troubling                              |
| <b>Docile</b>        | compliant; submissive; deferential; accommodating           |
| <b>Earnest</b>       | showing deep sincerity or feeling; serious                  |
| <b>Egotistical</b>   | self-absorbed; selfish; conceited; boastful                 |

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| <b>Empathetic</b>     | understanding; kind; sensitive                                |
| <b>Encouraging</b>    | optimistic; supportive  |
| <b>Enthusiastic</b>   | excited; energetic  |
| <b>Evasive</b>        | ambiguous; cryptic; unclear                                   |
| <b>Excited</b>        | emotionally aroused; stirred                                  |
| <b>Facetious</b>      | inappropriate; flippant                                       |
| <b>Farcical</b>       | ludicrous; absurd; mocking; humorous and highly improbable    |
| <b>Flippant</b>       | superficial; glib; shallow; thoughtless; frivolous            |
| <b>Forceful</b>       | powerful; energetic; confident; assertive                     |
| <b>Formal</b>         | respectful; stilted; factual; following accepted styles/rules |
| <b>Frank</b>          | honest; direct; plain; matter-of-fact                         |
| <b>Frustrated</b>     | annoyed; discouraged  |
| <b>Gentle</b>         | kind; considerate; mild; soft                                 |
| <b>Ghoulish</b>       | delighting in the revolting or the loathsome                  |
| <b>Grim</b>           | serious; gloomy; depressing; lacking humour; macabre          |
| <b>Gullible</b>       | naïve; innocent; ignorant                                     |
| <b>Hard</b>           | unfeeling; hard-hearted; unyielding                           |
| <b>Humble</b>         | deferential; modest   |
| <b>Humorous</b>       | amusing; entertaining; playful                                |
| <b>Hypercritical</b>  | unreasonably critical; hair splitting; nitpicking             |
| <b>Impartial</b>      | unbiased; neutral; objective                                  |
| <b>Impassioned</b>    | filled with emotion; ardent                                   |
| <b>Imploring</b>      | pleading; begging   |
| <b>Impressionable</b> | trusting; child-like  |
| <b>Inane</b>          | silly; foolish; stupid; nonsensical                           |
| <b>Incensed</b>       | enraged   |
| <b>Incredulous</b>    | disbelieving; unconvinced; questioning; suspicious            |
| <b>Indignant</b>      | annoyed; angry; dissatisfied                                  |
| <b>Informative</b>    | instructive; factual; educational                             |
| <b>Inspirational</b>  | encouraging; reassuring                                       |
| <b>Intense</b>        | earnest; passionate; concentrated; deeply felt                |
| <b>Intimate</b>       | familiar; informal; confidential; confessional                |
| <b>Ironic</b>         | the opposite of what is meant                                 |
| <b>Irreverent</b>     | lacking respect for things that are generally taken seriously |
| <b>Jaded</b>          | bored; having had too much of the same thing; lack enthusiasm |
| <b>Joyful</b>         | positive; optimistic; cheerful; elated                        |
| <b>Judgmental</b>     | critical; finding fault; disparaging                          |
| <b>Laudatory</b>      | praising; recommending  |
| <b>Light-Hearted</b>  | carefree; relaxed; chatty; humorous                           |
| <b>Loving</b>         | affectionate; showing intense, deep concern                   |

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| <b>Macabre</b>          | gruesome; horrifying; frightening                                     |
| <b>Malicious</b>        | desiring to harm others or to see others suffer; ill-willed; spiteful |
| <b>Mean-Spirited</b>    | inconsiderate; unsympathetic  |
| <b>Mocking</b>          | scornful; ridiculing; making fun of someone                           |
| <b>Mourning</b>         | grieving; lamenting; woeful   |
| <b>Naïve</b>            | innocent; unsophisticated; immature                                   |
| <b>Narcissistic</b>     | self-admiring; selfish; boastful; self-pitying                        |
| <b>Nasty</b>            | unpleasant; unkind; disagreeable; abusive                             |
| <b>Negative</b>         | unhappy, pessimistic  |
| <b>Nostalgic</b>        | thinking about the past; wishing for something from the past          |
| <b>Objective</b>        | without prejudice; without discrimination; fair; based on fact        |
| <b>Obsequious</b>       | overly obedient and/or submissive; fawning; grovelling                |
| <b>Optimistic</b>       | hopeful; cheerful   |
| <b>Outraged</b>         | angered and resentful; furious; extremely angered                     |
| <b>Outspoken</b>        | frank; candid; spoken without reserve                                 |
| <b>Pathetic</b>         | expressing pity, sympathy, tenderness                                 |
| <b>Patronizing</b>      | condescending; scornful; pompous                                      |
| <b>Pensive</b>          | reflective; introspective; philosophical; contemplative               |
| <b>Persuasive</b>       | convincing; eloquent; influential; plausible                          |
| <b>Pessimistic</b>      | seeing the negative side of things                                    |
| <b>Philosophical</b>    | theoretical; analytical; rational; logical                            |
| <b>Playful</b>          | full of fun and good spirits; humorous; jesting                       |
| <b>Pragmatic</b>        | realistic; sensible   |
| <b>Pretentious</b>      | affected; artificial; grandiose; rhetorical; flashy                   |
| <b>Regretful</b>        | apologetic; remorseful  |
| <b>Resentful</b>        | aggrieved; offended; displeased; bitter                               |
| <b>Resigned</b>         | accepting; unhappy  |
| <b>Restrained</b>       | controlled; quiet; unemotional  |
| <b>Reverent</b>         | showing deep respect and esteem                                       |
| <b>Righteous</b>        | morally right and just; guiltless; pious; god-fearing                 |
| <b>Satirical</b>        | making fun to show a weakness; ridiculing; derisive                   |
| <b>Sarcastic</b>        | scornful; mocking; ridiculing   |
| <b>Scathing</b>         | critical; stinging; unsparing; harsh                                  |
| <b>Scornful</b>         | expressing contempt or derision; scathing; dismissive                 |
| <b>Sensationalistic</b> | provocative; inaccurate; distasteful                                  |
| <b>Sentimental</b>      | thinking about feelings, especially when remembering the past         |
| <b>Sincere</b>          | honest; truthful; earnest   |
| <b>Skeptical</b>        | disbelieving; unconvinced; doubting                                   |
| <b>Solemn</b>           | not funny; in earnest; serious  |
| <b>Subjective</b>       | prejudiced; biased  |

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| <b>Submissive</b>  | compliant; passive; accommodating; obedient            |
| <b>Sulking</b>     | bad-tempered; grumpy; resentful; sullen                |
| <b>Sympathetic</b> | compassionate; understanding of how someone feels      |
| <b>Thoughtful</b>  | reflective; serious; absorbed                          |
| <b>Tolerant</b>    | open-minded; charitable; patient; sympathetic; lenient |
| <b>Tragic</b>      | disastrous; calamitous                                 |
| <b>Unassuming</b>  | modest; self-effacing; restrained                      |
| <b>Uneasy</b>      | worried; uncomfortable; edgy; nervous                  |
| <b>Urgent</b>      | insistent; saying something must be done soon          |
| <b>Vindictive</b>  | vengeful; spiteful; bitter; unforgiving                |
| <b>Virtuous</b>    | lawful; righteous; moral; upstanding                   |
| <b>Whimsical</b>   | quaint; playful; mischievous; offbeat                  |
| <b>Witty</b>       | clever; quick-witted; entertaining                     |
| <b>Wonder</b>      | awe-struck; admiring; fascinating                      |
| <b>World-Weary</b> | bored; cynical; tired                                  |
| <b>Worried</b>     | anxious; stressed; fearful                             |
| <b>Wretched</b>    | miserable; despairing; sorrowful; distressed           |

**Helpful Tip:** Finding the correct tone is a matter of practice. Try and write for different audiences. Even if you only want to write novels, it is an apprenticeship of sorts. Write press releases. Write opinion pieces. Write interviews. Write copy. Write a business plan. The more you write, the better you will become at pitching your work with the nuances needed to create the perfect book.