Tone

Introduction

We examine tone last because understanding tone requires an understanding of all the elements writers use to create it: diction, detail, figurative language, imagery, and syntax. Tone can be a little difficult to identify at first, but the elements of voice you have already studied will help you, and you will get better with practice.

So, what is tone? **Tone** is the expression of the author's **attitude** toward his/her audience and subject matter. It can also be the expression of the speaker or narrator's attitude toward his/her listener or subject matter. And sometimes it's a little of both. It is the **feeling** that grows out of the material, the feeling that the writer creates for the reader. There are as many different tones as there are feelings: serious, light-hearted, playful, sarcastic, accepting, and so forth. The trick is to be able to identify and create tone in writing.

It's easy to understand tone in spoken language. If your mother says, "Don't use that tone of voice with me!" you know exactly what she means. You have expressed a disrespectful feeling through *what* you said and *how* you said it. And you understand her tone all too well: she is angry with you. We understand tone in speech by listening not only to words but to the way words are said and the facial expressions of those who say them.

Here's another example. Take the single word *right* and consider the many different ways you can say it to suggest an attitude. See if you can express the different attitudes behind the word *right* that are listed below. Work with a partner.

Right?	Is this right?
Right!	You're absolutely right.
Right!	This won't happen.
Right.	I heard you, but I don't believe you.
Right!	Turn right, not left!

It's harder to understand and create tone in writing since you can't depend on vocal and facial expressions. But it can be done. Just as we understand tone in speech from *what* is said and *how* it's said, the same is true in writing. It just takes more practice to see it. We create tone in writing through all of the elements of voice:

1. Diction
2. Detail
3. Figurative language
4. Imagery
5. Syntax

Tone

Read and think:

The Baudelaire orphans went to the bedroom and glumly packed their few belongings. Klaus looked distastefully at each ugly shirt Mrs. Poe had bought for him as he folded them and put them into a small suitcase. Violet looked around the cramped, smelly room in which they had been living. And Sunny crawled around solemnly biting each of Edgar and Albert's shoes, leaving small teeth marks in each one so she would not be forgotten.

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Lemony Snicket, *A Series of Unfortunate Events: The Bad Beginning*

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Talk about it:

1. What is the tone of this passage? Brainstorm tone words with your class and add new words to your Tone Words list.

2. How do you know the tone of this passage? Use the following chart to fill in the evidence for what you identify as the tone of this passage. Discuss your chart.

Diction	Detail	Imagery	Syntax
What words help create the tone?	What details add to the tone?	How does imagery help create the tone?	How does the sentence structure help create the tone?

Now you try it:

Write a paragraph about packing for a trip. In your paragraph create an enthusiastic tone.