

## How to Determine a Writer's Tone

**Watch the video and read the text. Then answer the questions given.**



The key to understanding a writer's tone is simple: pay attention to their words.

It is an author's diction - the word choices they make - that reveal the attitude the writer has towards their audience and subject. If a writer dazzles you with academic words, they are employing a formal tone - or perhaps a scholarly tone. If they use slang and say "aight" and "lit" - they are using an informal tone.

Tone - you see - is a tool of persuasion. If you want your parents to buy you a Playstation, you will talk about video games positively - as fun, entertaining, and (perhaps) a way for siblings to bond. You want your parents to see what you see: video games as a glorious activity that is exciting and brings people together. If you use the right words in just the right way - maybe - just maybe, they will see the light.

Writers do the same thing when they try to persuade you. They use specific words and phrases to convey a tone. News articles use a formal and serious tone to persuade you that they are objective and seeking truth. Some writers use humor and self deprecation to persuade you that they are humble and can be trusted.

To be an expert at discerning a writer's tone, you must know the difference between denotation and connotation. A word's denotation is its dictionary definition. Take the word "apple," for example. The dictionary definition - or denotation of apple is "the round fruit of a tree of the rose family, which typically has thin red or green skin and crisp flesh." If words only had a dictionary definition, interpreting texts would be simple. However, words are complex and often come packed with emotions and ideas. These feelings that words evoke are called connotations. An apple, for example, can represent original sin and temptation, or the Big Apple - also known as New York City. The Big apple could conjure up ideas of a sprawling metropolis, or even giant rats.

The words frugal and cheap have similar denotations - to be careful with and not spend much money on. However, the connotations of each word are different. A cheap person is stingy and doesn't want to spend money for selfish reasons. A frugal person is simply someone who is smart with money, and does not want to waste it on trivial things. If a person called me frugal, I would be proud. If they called me cheap, I would be offended. Both words have similar definitions, but elicit different feelings.

To unravel the tone of a piece of writing, you must obsess over word connotations. You have to feel words, and analyze why the writer used the words that they did. The compilation of a writer's diction, or word choices, reveals the tone of the writer.

There is only one solution, one proven method to improve your ability to understand word connotations. You have to read. And you have to read a lot. The more you read, the more you become familiar with words and the contexts they are used.

Name:  
Section:



Date:  
Score:

## How to Determine a Writer's Tone

Watch the video and read the text. Then answer the following questions:

1. What do you look at to analyze the tone of a piece of writing?
2. If you want your parents to buy you a video game system, what kind of tone would you use?
3. What kind of tone do news articles use? Why do you think they use this kind of tone?
4. What is a word's denotation?
5. What is a word's connotation?
6. Which two words given in the video have similar denotations, but different connotations?
7. To unravel the tone of a piece of writing, you must obsess over word \_\_\_\_\_.

## Answers

- 1) The writer's diction (word choices).
- 2) A positive tone
- 3) A formal and serious tone. Newspapers do this so they sound objective. It is important for a newspaper to be impartial and seek truth.
- 4) Denotation is a word's dictionary definition.
- 5) An idea or feeling a word evokes.
- 6) Frugal and cheap
- 7) Connotations or word choices

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