

## Tone Explained

It is always possible to describe the way that a writer uses language. Therefore, every piece of writing has a tone. Even when a writer's aim is to use completely neutral language—as is often the case in scientific papers or investigative journalism—the language still sounds a certain way, whether it's "scientific," "journalistic," "formal," "professional," or even "mechanical." The way a writer makes use of tone can tell you a lot about the writer's attitude or relationship toward their subject matter and what they are trying to say about it, as well as the effect they are trying to create for their reader. Here's just a partial list of words that are commonly used to talk about tone, with examples of the types of writing they might be used to describe:

- **Lofty, soaring, elevated**
  - A particularly stirring campaign speech
  - The Declaration of Independence
  - Maya Angelou's famous poem, "Still I Rise"
- **Grandiose, flowery, melodramatic**
  - A sappy love poem
  - An over-the-top television sermon
  - A wordy letter of apology
- **Smug, pompous, preachy**
  - A know-it-all at a cocktail party
  - The comments section of almost any YouTube video
  - A speech made by a boastful or proud character
- **Somber, dark, serious, gloomy**
  - A speech at a funeral
  - A murder mystery
  - A novel about someone's struggles with depression
- **Sarcastic, satirical, ironic**
  - An article in the newspaper *The Onion*
  - A work of [parody](#) like *Don Quixote*
  - A [satire](#), like many skits on SNL
- **Humorous, witty, goofy**
  - A stand-up comedy routine
  - A play like Shakespeare's *As You Like It*
  - A TV show like *Seinfeld* or *Friends*
- **Lighthearted, cheerful, optimistic**
  - A Dr. Seuss Book
  - A wedding speech
  - A friendly joke
- **Intellectual, analytical, critical**
  - An essay you'd write for school
  - A dense work of political theory
  - An article analyzing a political event
- **Dry, official, scientific, cold**
  - A letter from the IRS
  - A scientific paper
  - Instructions on how to assemble furniture