

DEVELOPING YOUR “TONE WORD” VOCABULARY

Determining the “tone” of a piece of writing is a vitally important clue in interpreting the piece’s meaning. For this reason, AP test readers particularly value this quality. They go so far as to say that if you get the tone wrong in your essay, you will not pass their test. Regardless of whether or not your goal is passing the AP test, however, learning how to discuss the tone of a piece of writing is an important skill for college writing. Once you become proficient at it, it becomes an easy way to discuss almost any piece of writing . . . no matter what class you are in at the time.

To discuss tone effectively, it’s important to develop your “tone vocabulary.” In other words, it will help you to learn terms that will help you to describe important nuances or connotations. In college, you want to go beyond -- “This story has a happy/sad/evil/bad tone.” Obviously, there are many words that can describe tone, arm yourself with a dozen or so that will help your papers stand out among the rest. Above all, though, be sure that the tone word you choose actually fits the piece of writing you are discussing AND that you can support your opinion with proof from the piece itself.

A SELECTION OF TONE WORDS

Positive tone/attitude: *lighthearted, hopeful, enthusiastic, confident, optimistic, loving, passionate, amused, elated, sentimental, sympathetic, compassionate, proud*

Negative tone/attitude: *angry, disgusted, outraged, accusing, inflammatory, irritated, indignant, threatening*

Irony/Sarcasm: *sarcastic, cynical, critical, facetious, patronizing, satiric, mock-heroic, irreverent, mock-serious, taunting, ironic, flippant,*

Sorrow/Fear/Worry: *somber, elegiac, gloomy, melancholic, disturbed, mournful, solemn, serious, apprehensive, concerned, hopeless, resigned*

General/Organizational: *formal, objective, nostalgic, ceremonial, candid, shocked, reminiscent, restrained, clinical, baffled, sentimental, detached, objective, questioning, urgent, instructive, matter-of-fact, learned, factual, didactic, informative, authoritative*

How Your Advanced Placement Essays Will Be Read & Scored

A great deal of effort has gone into the creation of your AP English Literature Exam. To create the questions for the exam, a small group of experienced readers and college professors select literature and create what they feel are appropriate questions. Those questions are subsequently field-tested with groups of freshman English students in colleges and universities around the U.S. and then are re-examined and refined. That the test that you end up taking. Once the test has been taken, the Test Development Committee and exam leaders meet to select potential samples to use for the scoring process. The tests come to the scoring site from all across the U.S. Table leaders -- experienced scorers -- arrive one day prior to the start of the reading days to validate, refine, and even challenge scores. Samples to be used by all readers are selected and sequenced. The next day the readers arrive; this group is comprised of about 60% college instructors and 40% AP teachers. The readers are broken into three large groups - one for each question, and question leaders are introduced. Readers are further divided into tables consisting of one table leader and six readers. The first morning (and sometimes more) is spent training readers using pre-selected samples and scoring guides. Later in the day, each reader receives a packet with a scoring sheet and twenty-five exams, which they read and record in numerical order. When finished, readers turn in their packet for a new one. This process goes on until all the tests are scored. Table leader checks by "reading behind" new readers and reading "selected samples" from all readers throughout at least the first several days and usually the entire reading. Each test is read by at least two readers and a third if there are questions about the scoring on that essay.

What AP Readers Long to See

This list was compiled as a help to students during the 1994 AP English Lit Reading.

1. Read the prompt. It hurts to give a low score to someone who misread the prompt but wrote a good essay.
2. Do everything the prompt asks. Most writers focus on a few strategies and never fully answer the question.
3. Think before you write. Which strategies are used and how do they answer the prompt?
4. Plan your response. It is not easy for the reader to pick over an essay attempt to decipher sentences. A little organization will help you avoid extensive editing.
5. Make a strong first impression. Build your opening response. Don't parrot the prompt word for word. The reader knows it from memory.
6. Begin your response immediately. Do not take a circuitous route with generalizations.
7. Be thorough and specific. Do not simply "point out" strategies. Explain how they are used, give examples, and show how they establish what the question is asking. No long quotes!
8. Use clear transitions that help the reader follow the flow of your essays. Keep your paragraphs organized; do not digress.
9. Resist putting in a "canned" quotation or critic's comment if it does not fit. You will get a response from your reader but it will not be the one you want.
10. Write to express, not to impress. Keep vocabulary and syntax within your zone of competence. Students who inflate their writing often inadvertently entertain, but seldom explain.
11. Demonstrate that you understand style. Show the reader how the author has developed the selection to create the desired effect. This indicates that you understand the intricacies of the creative process.
12. Maintain an economy of language: saying much with few words. The best student writers see much, but say it quite succinctly. Often ideas are embedded rather than listed.
13. Let your writing dance with ideas and insights. You can receive a 6 or a 7 with a lockstep approach, but the essays that earn 8's and 9's expand to a wider perspective.
14. Write legibly. If a reader cannot read half the words (especially at 4:30 P.M. on the sixth day of a reading) you will not get a fair reading - even if your essay is passed on to a reader with keener eyesight. Patience decreases as the reading progresses.
15. Let your work stand on its own merits. Avoid penning "pity me" notes ("I was up all night." "I have a cold," etc.) to the reader.