

How to Describe Tone

Describing tone as merely "positive" and "negative" shows a lack of sophistication and imagination, and (unfortunately) suggests that the writer has a poor vocabulary. Successful analysis depends on a clear, specific description of tone, both for your understanding and for your readers. Some excellent tone words include:

1. accusatory -- charging with wrongdoing
2. apathetic -- indifferent due to lack of energy or concern
3. awed -- in solemn wonder
4. bitter -- exhibiting strong animosity as a result of pain or grief
5. cynical -- questioning the basic sincerity and goodness of humanity
6. condescending -- feeling superior
7. callous -- unfeeling, insensitive to feelings of others
8. contemplative -- thoughtful, reflective
9. critical -- finding fault
10. choleric -- hot-tempered, easily angered
11. contemptuous -- showing or feeling that something is worthless or does not deserve respect
12. caustic -- intensely sarcastic; stinging, biting
13. conventional -- lacking spontaneity, originality, and individuality
14. disdainful -- scornful
15. didactic -- educating or instructing the reader
16. derisive -- ridiculing, mocking
17. earnest -- intensely sincere
18. erudite -- learned, polished, scholarly
19. fanciful -- imaginative
20. forthright -- directly frank without hesitation
21. gloomy -- dark, sad, dejected
22. haughty -- proud, vain to the point of arrogance
23. indignant -- angry, especially if aroused by injustice
24. intimate -- very familiar
25. judgmental -- authoritative and often having critical opinions
26. jovial -- happy
27. lyrical -- expressing feelings in a beautiful or poetic way; emotional
28. matter -- of -- fact -- -- accepting of conditions; not fanciful or emotional
29. mocking -- treating with contempt or ridicule
30. morose -- gloomy, sullen, surly, despondent
31. malicious -- purposely hurtful
32. objective -- unbiased; able to leave personal judgments aside
33. optimistic -- expecting or seeing the best, hopeful, cheerful
34. obsequious -- polite and obedient in order to gain something
35. patronizing -- condescending
36. pedantic -- overly or inappropriately scholarly
37. pessimistic -- expecting or seeing the worst; hopeless
38. quizzical -- odd, eccentric, amusing
39. ribald -- offensive in speech or gesture
40. reverent -- treating a subject with honor and respect
41. ridiculing -- slightly contemptuous; making fun of
42. reflective -- illustrating innermost thoughts and emotions
43. sarcastic -- sneering, caustic
44. sardonic -- scornfully and bitterly sarcastic
45. satiric -- ridiculing to show weakness in order to teach or reform
46. sincere -- without deceit or pretense; genuine
47. solemn -- deeply earnest, tending toward serious reflection
48. sanguine -- optimistic, cheerful
49. whimsical -- odd, strange, fantastic; fun

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