

Tone Words Defined

The following terms are often used in discussions of tone on the AP Exam.

- Acerbic – bitter, sharp.
- Adversarial – opposing, relating to conflict.
- Aggressive – tending to attack.
- Alloof – distant and somewhat superior.
- Antagonistic – displaying hostile opposition.
- Apathetic – not taking any interest in anything.
- Apocalyptic – suggesting the end of the world.
- Assertive – confident and forceful.
- Bantering – playful, teasing.
- Candid – clear, honest, open.
- Caustic – biting, bitterly sarcastic, acidic.
- Choleric – quick-tempered, irritable.
- Clever – displaying quick or agile thought (sometimes neg.).
- Colloquial – conversational, informal.
- Conciliatory – intending to bring about peace and trust.
- Contentious – argumentative.
- Coy – provocatively or teasingly pretending to be shy, modest, or ignorant; “playing dumb”.
- Cynical – distrusting human nature, mocking, scornful.
- Detached – impersonal, uninvolved.
- Didactic – teaching or lecturing, preachy, instructive.
- Diffident – insecure, shy, reserved.
- Disdainful – scornful, contemptuous.
- Dramatic – bold, vivid, striking.
- Effusive – extravagantly or excessively emotional.
- Elegiac – sorrowful, lamenting.
- Emphatic – forceful, definite.
- Esoteric – understandable by only a select few.
- Evocative – prompting vivid memories or images.
- Exotic – strikingly unusual and exciting.
- Exploitive – unfairly using somebody or something.
- Exuberant – enthusiastic, lively, energetic.
- Facetious – humorous, light, silly, tongue-in-cheek.
- Fanciful – imaginative, dreamy.
- Fey – intentionally bizarre so as to suggest insanity.
- Flaccid – limp, slack, lacking firmness.
- Flippant – irreverent joking; disrespectful levity.
- Frivolous – trivial, lacking substance.
- Genteel – refined, upper-class, snobbish.
- Grotesque – disturbingly strange.
- Haughty – condescending, superior, arrogant.
- Histrionic – overdramatic, panicked.
- Idealistic – aspiring to perfection, hopeful, very optimistic.
- Incendiary – intentionally and highly provocative, flammable.
- Incisive – sharp, keen, penetrating.
- Incredulous – disbelieving, skeptical, doubtful.
- Indignant – offended, resentful, put-out.
- Inflammatory – arousing passion or anger.
- Inspid – lacking distinctive qualities, dull.
- Ironic – implying meaning beyond the literal, mocking.
- Irreverent – lacking veneration, disrespectful.
- Jingoistic – excessively patriotic.
- Learned – scholarly, educated. (pronounced “learn – ed”)