AP LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION: Tone/Attitude Words

1.        accusatory-charging of wrong doing

2.        apathetic-indifferent due to lack of energy or concern

3.        awesome (not the slang definition) characterized by awe or solemn wonder

4.        bitter-exhibiting strong animosity as a result of pain or grief

5.        cynical-questions the basic sincerity and goodness of people

6.        condescending-a feeling of superiority

7.        callous-unfeeling, insensitive to feelings of others

8.        contemplative-studying, thinking, reflecting on an issue

9.        critical-finding fault

10.     choleric-hot-tempered, easily angered

11.     contemptuous-showing or feeling that something is worthless or lacks respect

12.     caustic-intense use of sarcasm; stinging, biting

13.     conventional-lacking spontaneity, originality, and individuality

14.     disdainful-scornful

15.     didactic-author attempts to educate or instruct the reader

16.     derisive-ridiculing, mocking

17.     earnest-intense, a sincere state of mind

18.     erudite-learned, polished, scholarly

19.     fanciful-using the imagination

20.     forthright-directly frank without hesitation

21.     gloomy-darkness, sadness, rejection

22.     haughty-proud and vain to the point of arrogance

23.     indignant-marked by anger aroused by injustice

24.     intimate-very familiar

25.     judgmental-authoritative and often having critical opinions

26.     jovial-happy

27.     lyrical-expressing a poet’s inner feelings; emotional; full of images; song-like

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-an unbiased view-able to leave personal judgments aside

33.     optimistic-hopeful, cheerful

34.     obsequious-polite and obedient in order to gain something

35.     patronizing-air of condescension

36.     pessimistic-seeing the worst side of things; no hope

37.     quizzical-odd, eccentric, amusing

38.     ribald-offensive in speech or gesture

39.     reverent-treating a subject with honor and respect

40.     ridiculing-slightly contemptuous banter; making fun of

41.     reflective-illustrating innermost thoughts and emotions

42.     sarcastic-sneering, caustic

43.     sardonic-scornfully and bitterly sarcastic

44.     satiric-ridiculing to show weakness in order to make a point, teach

45.     sincere-without deceit or pretense; genuine

46.     solemn-deeply earnest, tending toward sad reflection

47.     sanguineous -optimistic, cheerful

48.     whimsical-odd, strange, fantastic; fun

**THE IMPORTANCE OF TONE ON THE AP EXAM**

The Chief Reader at the AP grading session for 2004 said, "Teachers *should teach* ***tone,*** *always asking students to show how it is achieved and how it contributes to a work's overall effect."*

In his summary comments about the essays written for last year's free-response questions, the Chief Reader also noted, "The most successful students paid careful attention to the prompt and allowed it to lead them into discussions, avoiding rehearsed and mechanical responses. The best writers developed their essays by allowing the content to dictate the organizational pattern and development strategies." (College Board AP Central website)

Since most AP essay questions (prose and poetry) deal with the tone (or attitude) of the speaker, understanding what tone is and how to identify it is critical to your success on the AP exam.

**What is Tone?**

Tone refers to the means by which a writer conveys attitudes, more specifically what attitude the writer wants to convey to the reader. An understanding of tone depends largely on your ability to make inferences from the work being read.

Tone is one of the first things we as humans recognize in communication. Think “tone of voice.” Tone of voice is a reflection of your attitude toward the person or persons whom you are addressing and also toward the subject matter of your discussion. Identifying tone in speech is easy—it’s something we have known to do since we were a baby. At that age, we may not have understood the words “Don’t touch that vase,” but we clearly understood the tone in which it was delivered.

Identifying tone in literature is another beast altogether. As readers, we do not hear the modulations of timbre in a speaker’s voice. Tone, in a skilled writer’s hands, is delivered solely through the words on the page. Look at this attempt at tone: 1. “I love shopping with my wife.” Really? It’s hard to tell. Maybe the writer does, but maybe he is being sarcastic; it’s hard to tell from this sentence. Try this sentence: 2. “I love shopping with my wife, slightly more than I love having my pinkie toes gnawed on by anemic alligators.” Okay, this sentence is clearly sarcastic unless the writer has a sick, masochistic bent.

**What tone is being used?**

On the AP exam, you will be asked to identify the tone or attitude of the speaker and analyze the means by which they are expressed. First, let’s deal with what tone is being utilized (realize that a writer does not always use one tone, sometimes the tone can be complex). Here are some basic examples of different tones:

**burlesque-** comic; mocking through caricature or comic exaggeration **colloquial-** using a conversational style; informal conversation **condescending-** an air of superiority **contemptuous-** expressing contempt, a lack of respect, or hate **cynical-** an attitude of distrust of people and human nature **despondent-** showing extreme discouragement or depression **didactic-** in a tone intended to preach a sermon or teach a lesson about life **disdainful-** expressing contempt, dislike, or hate

**euphoric-** feeling of elation or great joy **facetious-** playfully humorous **flippant-** lacking proper respect **frivolous-** lacking in seriousness **hostile-** extremely angry **impartial-attitude** of being unbiased **incisive-** impressively direct and decisive **indignant-attitude** of being angry because of an injustice or unworthiness **irreverent-** lacking proper respect or seriousness