

## Tone

The attitude that a writer expresses towards a subject.

Tone always sends a message!

“What are you doing?”

A simple question, right? Adding a few extra words to this sentence can completely change the tone.

“What the hell do you think you’re doing?”

Whoever sent this message is not happy, and their tone gets this message across.

Everything we say or write has a tone. It’s shown in lots of different ways through word choice, imagery, sentence structure and even punctuation.

Tones can be driven by emotion. What we say and how we say it can change depending on whether we’re worried, excited, upset or affectionate.

But tone isn’t just about emotions. The situation is important too. This can affect whether you choose a formal or informal tone.

“Dear student, It is with great pleasure that we offer you a place on your chosen university course...”

Though this is a very exciting letter to receive, it’s still written with a formal tone. The message you send your friend right after it might be a tad more informal, though:

“OMGGG!! I GOT INTO UNI! ”

Tone can say a lot in poetry.

In Liz Lochhead’s poem, *My Rival’s House*, she describes a simple scene of visiting her lover’s mother for tea.

“my rival thinks she means me well. But what squirms beneath her surface I can tell.”

Lochhead’s tone here is hostile and critical, as she feels her partner’s mother is trying to undermine her. The word “squirm” suggests discomfort.

“Deferential, daughterly, I sip and thank her nicely for each bitter cup.”

On the face of it, “deferential, daughterly” and “thank her nicely” all sound pleasant enough, but the word choice and imagery of “bitter cup” brings this surface tone into question.

It shows there is a poisonous attitude between the two women, as the speaker feels she is being forced to be submissive in the older woman's presence.

Lochhead's attitude is expressed clearly here through lots of different techniques!

The next time you're at someone's for tea, watch your tone!

Or you'll no get yer puddin'!