Tone: What is it, and how to analyse it?

Tone is the attitude of the narrator, setting or character’s voice. Its **purpose** of writing the text. Knowing the tone helps identify mood (effect on reader). Let’s read an example:

"Oh my god! I can't believe it! Are you okay? Your arm is... bleeding!" A tone of shock and concern. Makes reader feel sympathetic, concerned for the harmed character. Also induces alarm and panic in reader.

“The shocking tone established by the short phrasing and questioning in the sentence induces panic in the reader, who feels sympathetic and concerned for the harmed character. (additional) This is an eloquent use of pathos by the narrator as the phrase effectively grabs the readers’ attention, inducing sympathy and affection for the harmed character.”

Tone can be:

- polite
- formal
- informal
- sarcastic
- arrogant
- kind
- gentle
- sad
- sweet
- bitter
- salty
- conversational

The tone of a text is a **conscious artistic choice** made by the writer of the text. It is the writer who decides whether the character's voice expresses anger or sadness or happiness. Therefore, **tone is a literary technique**, and thus it must be analysed, just like any other technique, if you hope to score high marks in IB English.
Analysis advice: How do we analyse tone?

Now that we've covered exactly what tone is, we now should get onto the practical aspect of it. How do we analyse tone is the correct way?

I’ll tell you several strategies that work very effectively.

- **Tone creates mood.**
  Tone is what directly creates the mood of the reader. The mood is another way of saying the “effect on the reader”.

  So, if the tone sounds very sad, then the reader will feel sympathetic. In cases these, we can go ahead and analyse the direct link between tone and mood (it really makes examiners happy when they see this!):

  “The melancholy tone established by the emotional diction thus induces a sympathetic mood in the readers, compelling them to reflect on the emotional pain experienced by the protagonist’s miscarriage.”

- **Tonal shifts.**
  Narrators, speakers and characters can have a multitude of tones throughout a single story or even a single paragraph. The tone of a character constantly evolves to reflect his or her changing attitude.

  Why am I talking about this? Manipulating tone is a conscious, literary choice made by the writer, so it’s fair game for analysis.

  As always, the main part of the analysis is explaining the purpose of the writer’s tonal manipulation. Why did the writer alter the tone? Answering this question is what your analysis must address.

  Analysing tonal shifts is probably the most impressive thing you can do in a Paper 1 or a Paper 2, period. So if you can find something like a tonal shift and link it to the writer's overarching purpose, then you just won the literary jackpot.