

Advanced Placement English Literature and Composition
Tone Words

adapted from Lisa Boyd's list of tone words (Salem High School)

abhorrent strongly opposed feeling; showing intense disagreement

acerbic acidic in temper, mood, or tone

acrimonious caustic, biting, or rancorous especially in feeling, language, or manner

acquiescing complying or submitting tacitly or passively

altruistic unselfish regard for or devotion to the welfare of others

angst-ridden consumed by anxiety and fear

apathetic having or showing little or no feeling or emotion

ardent characterized by warmth of feeling typically

audacious fearlessly daring; recklessly bold; adventurous

austere stern and cold in appearance or manner; morally strict

averse having an active feeling of repugnance or distaste

benign of a gentle disposition;

bristle to take on an aggressive attitude or appearance

buoyant capable of quick recovery; having positive indications

callous feeling no emotion or sympathy for others; completely uncaring

caustic capable of destroying; marked by incisive sarcasm

chagrined vexed or unsettled through embarrassment or humiliation; mortified

choleric easily moved to often unreasonable or excessive anger; hot-tempered

circumspect careful to consider all circumstances and possible consequences; cautious

coddled treated with extreme care; pampered

complacent self-satisfied; unconcerned and unaware of deficiencies and dangers

confrontation face-to-face conflict; the clashing of forces or ideas

consternation amazement or dismay that hinders or throws into confusion

cowering shrinking away or crouching from something that menaces, domineers, or dismays

credulous ready to believe with little proof; gullible

deferent full of respect or esteem due a superior or and elder; showing regard for another's wishes

defiant full of boldness and resistance; rebellious

deluded misled in judgment; deceived or tricked

derisive expressing or causing the use of ridicule or scorn; showing contempt

despondent feeling or showing extreme discouragement, dejection, or depression; having lost all hope

deterministic believing in predestination; accepting that social or psychological phenomena are caused by preceding events or natural laws

didactic designed to teach; intended to convey instruction and information; making moral observations

disdainful full of or expressing dislike

disquieted having lost peace or tranquility; disturbed or alarmed

dynamic having force or energy; marked by productive activity

embittered possessing sour, hostile, or resentful feelings
empathic showing emotion based on sensitivity towards others
enamored inflamed with love or passion
enervated reduced mental or moral vigor; lessened in vitality or strength
exasperated feeling irritation or annoyance; aggravated
exultant filled with or expressing great joy or triumph; jubilant

fatuous complacently or inanely foolish; silly
fawning courting favor by a cringing or flattering manner
fervent exhibiting or marked by great intensity of feeling; zealous
funereal with solemnity befitting or suggesting a funeral; marked by an atmosphere that is lacking in cheer; gloomy
futile serving no useful purpose; completely ineffective; occupied with trifles

hackneyed lacking in freshness or originality; trite; unoriginal; clichéd
halcyon calm, peaceful, golden
haughty disdainfully proud; blatantly arrogant

idiosyncratic peculiar in temperament
idolatrous worshipping a physical object as a god; exhibiting an excessive devotion to an object
imperious characteristic of one of eminent rank or attainments; commanding, dominant
inane empty and insubstantial; lacking point; silly
indolent averse to activity, effort, or movement; habitually lazy
indomitable incapable of being subdued; unconquerable
inept unfit; lacking sense or reason; foolish; generally incompetent; bungling
insipid lacking qualities that interest, stimulate, or challenge; dull, flat
insular characterized by isolation; having a narrow provincial viewpoint
intrepid characterized by resolute fearlessness, fortitude, and endurance
irascible marked by hot temper and easily provoked anger
ire intense and usually openly displayed anger

jaded dulled by experience or exposure

lugubrious exaggeratedly or affectedly mournful and melancholy

maudlin weakly and effusively sentimental
menacing making a show of intention to harm; posing a threat to; endangering
mendacious characterized by deception, falsehood, or divergence from absolute truth
meticulous marked by excessive care in details
mirthful merry, glad, or gay as shown by or accompanied with laughter
misogynistic displaying a hatred of women
morose having a sullen disposition; marked by gloom

narcissistic loving one's own body or self; egoistic; egocentric

obsequious marked by or exhibiting a fawning attentiveness; subservient

patronizing adopting an air of condescension; treating haughtily
pedantic narrowly, stodgily, and often ostentatiously learned
petulant insolent or rude in speech or behavior; displaying capricious ill humor; peevish
piqued aroused in anger or resentment toward; irritated; provoked, challenged, or rebuffed
placid serenely free of interruption or disturbance
Platonic participating in a relationship marked by the absence of sex
pompous excessively elevated or ornate; having or exhibiting self-importance; arrogant
Pollyannaish characterized by irrepressible optimism and a tendency to find good in everything
portentous eliciting amazement or wonder; fateful and ominous
pragmatic relating to matters of fact or practical affairs; practical as opposed to idealistic
provincial limited in outlook; narrow-minded; lacking the polish of urban society; unsophisticated

rancorous having a mark of bitter, deep-seated ill will
rapturous being carried away by overwhelming emotion; feeling ecstasy or intense passion
repugnant exciting distaste or aversion; incompatible
rueful exciting pity or sympathy; pitiable, mournful, regretful

sagacious possessing keen and farsighted judgment; intellectually discerning; showing great wisdom
sanguine cheerfully confident and optimistic
sardonic disdainfully or skeptically humorous; derisively mocking
secular relating to the worldly or temporal; not religious
self-effacing causing oneself to disappear or to become unnoticed; defacing one's self
serene clear and free of unpleasant change; marked by utter calm and unruffled repose; quietude
servient serving to promote some personal end; useful in an inferior capacity; submissive
solemn marked by the observance of established form or ceremony; somber, gloomy
stern having a definite hardness or severity of nature or manner; austere
stoic apparently or professedly indifferent to pleasure or pain
stolid having or expressing little or no sensibility; unemotional

trepid timorous; fearful

upbraiding criticizing severely; finding fault with; reproaching severely; scolding vehemently
vapid lacking liveliness, briskness, or force; flat or dull especially in intellect
vehement marked by forceful energy; powerful; intensely emotional; impassioned and fervid
venerating regarding with reverential respect or admiring deference; honoring with an act of devotion
vindictive disposed to seek revenge; vengeful
vivacious lively in temper, conduct, or spirit
volcanic explosively violent; volatile

whimsical characterized by caprice; subject to erratic behavior or unpredictable change
woeful characterized by suffering and calamity; grievous; lamentably serious
wrathful filled with strong vengeful anger; irate
wry cleverly and often ironically or grimly humorous

zealous exhibiting great intensity of feeling