

AP American Literature
Summer Reading: Tonal analysis
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Tonal analysis is the study of the techniques used by a writer to convey his tone (attitude towards his subject.) For the AP test, you will be analyzing prose writing which includes: speeches, historical documents, autobiographical works, essays, and narratives.

A good preliminary technique to use in order to begin the tonal analysis of a writing sample is the SOAPS technique. SOAPS stands for the following:

S – the **S**ubject the writer is describing

O – the **O**ccasion for the writing

A – the specific **A**udience the writer addressing.

P – the **P**urpose of the writing

S - the **S**peaker's characteristics/attitudes/views (The speaker can be the author or a persona the author assumes.)

The SOAPS information is useful in helping you to determine the **tone** of the writing. All prose writing has a tone, and good prose writing usually has a very specific tone which the writer is trying to convey.

The tone is conveyed in many different ways, but we will concentrate on four specific techniques that writers use.

They are: imagery, diction, syntax, and structure.

Imagery – These are the descriptive details that were used by the writer. You must learn to understand the reasons why the writer selected the details in the writing. Do the details create a certain atmosphere or mood? Usually, imagery is carefully controlled by the writer to convey a consistent tone. For example, if I wanted to convey how much I hated something, I would only use negative details to describe it. These negative details would make my hatred clear to the reader. Pay attention to the details which are used. Try to see what unifies them and why they were selected.

Diction – This refers to the words which are used by the writer in his writing. There are many words in the English language which are highly connotative—that is, they have meanings and associations which go beyond the literal definitions. For example, look at the following list of words which essentially describe the same thing (beauty) and see how the words differ in their connotative meaning: lovely, attractive, cute, beautiful, hot, pretty. Usually, the diction helps the writer to convey his tone clearly. Learn to distinguish which words are used by the writer to make his tone clear.

Syntax – This refers to the sentence structures present in a piece of writing. Some common syntactical features which are used by writers include repetition and parallel structure. The use of a short sentence can emphasize a point clearly, while a long sentence can be used to delay or obscure the main point. A good writer uses different syntactical strategies to convey his tone clearly.

Structure – This is a term which covers a broad category of devices a writer can use to manipulate his writing. Structure includes such things as organization, arrangement of ideas, point of view used, style of writing used, etc.

In this class, we will be studying writing samples to determine what tone is present in them and then analyze how the aforementioned structures are used to make this tone clear. This first step—learning to see and understand these structures is the most difficult. It requires “active reading” in which you ask questions about the reading. Ask “why” and “how” questions instead of “what?” While an understanding of the content of the writing is important, the emphasis is on how the writer conveys his tone. The exercises we will do in class will emphasize this skill. As you become more comfortable and proficient with this skill, we will move on to organizing and defending your findings in a persuasive essay.

For your summer reading, you must purchase the essay collection: *Everything's an Argument*, by Andrea A. Lunesford. You must choose five essays that are of interest to you to read for summer reading. After each essay, you must perform the SOAPS technique to analyze the tone of each piece. For each essay, you must submit a one-page, double-spaced summary and analysis of the tone of the essay. This should be written in paragraph form, but do not just dedicate one paragraph to each SOAPS term. Integrate subject, occasion, audience, purpose, and speaker's characteristics into each paragraph of your analysis. Also be sure to reference imagery, syntax, diction, and structure. Make overarching comments on the effect of the tone in each piece.

On the first day of school, you should turn in a five-page (one page per essay) tonal analysis packet. Please don't hesitate to contact me via e-mail (avandenbosch@ccss.org) this summer with any questions about this assignment.