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AP ENGLISH LITERATURE · FREE RESOURCE

Tone and Attitude Word Bank

A bank of 200+ tone and attitude words sorted into families, with short definitions, guidance on telling near-synonyms apart, the "paired adjective" answer pattern used on the multiple-choice section, and a 30-item practice set with a key. Use it to replace vague words like "sad," "angry," and "negative" with the precise word a strong essay or a correct MCQ answer needs.

Why Tone Vocabulary Matters

Tone is the speaker's or narrator's attitude toward the subject, the characters, or the audience. On the AP English Literature exam it shows up in three places:

- **Multiple choice.** Stems such as "The tone of the passage is best described as..." and "The speaker's attitude toward X is best described as..." are among the most common items. Answer choices are often single adjectives or **paired adjectives** ("wistful and resigned").
- **Q1 and Q2 prompts.** Every post-2019 prompt asks about a *complex* attitude, experience, or portrayal. A thesis that says "the speaker is sad" does not name a complexity. A thesis that says "the speaker's grief is shot through with relief" does.
- **Commentary.** Row B rewards explanation of how specific language creates meaning. The right tone word is often the hinge of that explanation.

Three habits make this vocabulary useful rather than decorative:

1. **Choose the measured word.** The key to a tone item is rarely the most extreme option. If the text supports "skeptical," then "contemptuous" is a distractor. Read the diction for intensity before choosing.
2. **Check valence first.** Decide whether the attitude is positive, negative, neutral, or mixed. Then narrow within the family. Many wrong answers have the wrong valence entirely.
3. **Never use a tone word you cannot support with a quoted word or phrase.** A tone label is a claim. It needs evidence.

Part 1: The Word Bank by Family

Each table gives the word, a short definition, and a quick note on intensity or the word it is most often confused with. Words are grouped by family, but many belong to more than one: "wistful" sits between warm and sorrowful, and "wry" between comic and critical.

Family 1: Warm, Admiring, and Affectionate

WORD	DEFINITION	NOTE
admiring	Regarding with respect and approval	Milder than “worshipful”
adoring	Loving deeply and openly	Stronger than “fond”
affectionate	Showing warm fondness	Often applied to gentle humor about a loved subject
appreciative	Recognizing and valuing worth	Quiet, measured praise
benevolent	Kindly, well-meaning toward others	Often has a hint of superiority
celebratory	Marking something joyfully	Public in feel
complimentary	Expressing praise	May be flattering without being sincere
compassionate	Feeling and showing concern for suffering	Warmer than “sympathetic”
convivial	Friendly, festive, sociable	Applies to social scenes
doting	Excessively fond	Hints at indulgence
empathetic	Sharing another’s feeling	Closer than “sympathetic”
encouraging	Giving hope or support	Directed at a listener
fond	Having affection for	Mild and tender
genial	Cheerful, friendly, easygoing	Often describes a narrator
gentle	Mild, tender, careful	Describes manner more than feeling
gracious	Courteous, kind, generous	Formal warmth
grateful	Thankful	Direct emotion
laudatory	Expressing praise	Formal, strong praise
loving	Showing deep affection	General
reverent	Showing deep respect, awe	Religious or near-religious feeling
sympathetic	Showing understanding of another’s trouble	Distance remains; compare “empathetic”
tender	Gentle, caring, vulnerable	Often about small physical details
venerating	Regarding with great respect	Stronger than “respectful”
warm	Friendly and kind in feeling	A catch-all; prefer a more specific word

Family 2: Joyful, Hopeful, and Energetic

WORD	DEFINITION	NOTE
buoyant	Light-spirited, cheerful	Implies lift after pressure
celebratory	Joyfully commemorating	See above
confident	Self-assured	Neutral-to-positive
ebullient	Overflowing with enthusiasm	Stronger than "cheerful"
ecstatic	Overwhelmed with joy	Very intense
elated	Greatly uplifted	Often after a turn
euphoric	Intensely happy	Can hint at instability
exhilarated	Thrilled, energized	Physical energy
exuberant	Unrestrained joy	Strong and outward
exultant	Triumphantly joyful	Joy after victory
hopeful	Expecting something good	Mild, forward-looking
jubilant	Joyful, especially in triumph	Public and loud
joyful	Full of joy	General
optimistic	Expecting good outcomes	Disposition rather than moment
rapturous	Ecstatic, enthralled	Elevated, sometimes religious
sanguine	Cheerfully confident despite difficulty	Often the key in Donne-type poems; not "bloody" here
serene	Calm and untroubled	Joy without agitation
triumphant	Celebrating a win	Direct
upbeat	Positive and lively	Casual register
vivacious	Lively, spirited	Describes personality

Family 3: Playful, Comic, and Light

WORD	DEFINITION	NOTE
amused	Entertained by something funny	Detached enjoyment
bantering	Exchanging playful teasing	Between speakers
bemused	Puzzled and slightly amused	Not simply "amused"
buoyant	Light and cheerful	See above
droll	Dryly amusing	Understated humor

WORD	DEFINITION	NOTE
facetious	Treating a serious matter with flippancy	Intended to be funny, often inappropriately
flippant	Not showing proper seriousness	More negative than “playful”
frivolous	Silly, lacking seriousness	Often criticism of a character
genial	Good-humored	See above
humorous	Funny	A catch-all
jocular	Joking, jovial	Hearty
light-hearted	Free from care	Mild
mischievous	Playfully troublesome	Implies mild rule-breaking
mock-serious	Pretending gravity for comic effect	Typical of satire
playful	Fond of fun	Gentle
quizzical	Questioning, slightly mocking	Raised-eyebrow tone
ribald	Coarsely humorous	Bawdy
tongue-in-cheek	Ironically humorous, not meant literally	Signals non-literal intent
whimsical	Fancifully odd	Charming rather than mocking
wry	Dry, twisted humor	Amused and slightly resigned; often the measured alternative to “sardonic”
witty	Cleverly humorous	Intellectual

Family 4: Critical, Mocking, and Hostile

WORD	DEFINITION	NOTE
acerbic	Sharp and forthright, especially in speech	Bitter edge
antagonistic	Showing active hostility	Directed at a target
belittling	Making something seem unimportant	Condescending
biting	Sharp, cutting	Vivid
bitter	Angry and resentful from hurt	Long-held
caustic	Sarcastic in a scathing way	Burns
censorious	Severely critical	Moral judgment
condescending	Showing patronizing superiority	Common in character portraits

WORD	DEFINITION	NOTE
contemptuous	Showing that something is beneath consideration	Stronger than "scornful"
critical	Expressing disapproval	Broad; also neutral in "analytical" sense
cynical	Distrustful of human sincerity	Disillusioned
derisive	Mocking, ridiculing	Open mockery
disapproving	Expressing dislike	Mild
disdainful	Showing contempt, regarding as unworthy	Haughty
dismissive	Treating as unworthy of attention	Brushing off
disparaging	Belittling	Verbal
indignant	Angry at perceived injustice	Righteous
invective	Harsh verbal abuse	Noun used in choices
irate	Very angry	Intense, immediate
mocking	Making fun of	General
patronizing	Treating as inferior	Compare "condescending"
pejorative	Expressing contempt or disapproval	Often about word choice
resentful	Bitterly indignant at unfair treatment	Held grievance
reproachful	Expressing disapproval or disappointment	Directed at someone
sarcastic	Using irony to mock or wound	Personal, harsh
sardonic	Grimly mocking	Bleaker than "wry"
satiric	Using ridicule to expose folly	Aims to correct
scathing	Severely critical	Very intense
scornful	Showing contempt	Strong
supercilious	Behaving as though superior	Haughty look
vitriolic	Filled with bitter criticism	Very strong
vindictive	Wanting revenge	Motive more than tone

Family 5: Sorrowful, Subdued, and Reflective

WORD	DEFINITION	NOTE
bleak	Hopeless, desolate	Cold, spare
brooding	Deeply thoughtful in a dark way	Dwelling
dejected	Sad and depressed	State
desolate	Empty, forlorn	Setting-linked
despairing	Having lost hope	Stronger than "dejected"
despondent	Low in spirits	Close to "dejected"
doleful	Sad, mournful	Slightly old-fashioned
elegiac	Mournful, meditative on loss	Poem-like
forlorn	Pitifully sad, abandoned	Isolation
funereal	Gloomy, as of a funeral	Heavy
gloomy	Dark, depressing	General
grave	Serious, solemn	Weight, not necessarily sorrow
grieving	In sorrow over loss	Direct
heavy-hearted	Burdened with sadness	Plain
lamenting	Expressing grief	Active crying out
lugubrious	Mournful, especially in an exaggerated way	Slightly comic
melancholy	Pensive sadness, often without clear cause	Beautiful sadness
mournful	Expressing sorrow for a loss	Direct
nostalgic	Longing for the past	Warm sorrow
plaintive	Sad and mournful, with a questioning edge	Pleading
pensive	Engaged in deep thought, often sad	Quiet
regretful	Feeling sorrow for past action	Personal
remorseful	Deep regret over wrongdoing	Guilt
resigned	Accepting something unpleasant	Quiet defeat
somber	Dark, serious, grave	Visual sense
sorrowful	Feeling sorrow	Plain

WORD	DEFINITION	NOTE
wistful	Vaguely longing, often for the past	Softer than “yearning”
woeful	Full of woe	Intense
yearning	Intense longing	Active desire

Family 6: Neutral, Analytical, and Restrained

WORD	DEFINITION	NOTE
analytical	Examining in detail	Intellectual
candid	Frank, open	Not always warm
clinical	Detached, unemotional	Medical coldness
concise	Brief and direct	Style rather than feeling
deliberate	Carefully considered	Controlled
detached	Emotionally uninvolved	Often key in objective narration
dispassionate	Free from emotion	Fair-minded
expository	Explaining or describing	Mode, not feeling
factual	Based on fact	Plain
formal	Following convention	Register
impartial	Treating all sides equally	Fairness
impersonal	Not influenced by personal feeling	Cold
indifferent	Lacking interest	Can be a misread
informative	Giving information	Tone of explanation
laconic	Using few words	Style
matter-of-fact	Straightforward, unemotional	Often in disturbing scenes
measured	Careful, restrained	Controlled
neutral	Not taking sides	Rarely correct for literary passages
objective	Unaffected by personal feeling	Technique
reserved	Slow to reveal feeling	Withheld
restrained	Kept under control	Emotion held in
scholarly	Characteristic of learned study	Formal
stoic	Enduring without complaint	Dignified
straightforward	Direct	Plain

WORD	DEFINITION	NOTE
systematic	Done by a method	Orderly
terse	Abrupt, sparing in words	Can feel curt

Family 7: Intense, Urgent, and Emotional

WORD	DEFINITION	NOTE
agitated	Disturbed, restless	Physical
anguished	Experiencing severe suffering	Strong
anxious	Worried, uneasy	Common
apprehensive	Fearful about what may come	Forward-looking
ardent	Passionate, enthusiastic	Warm intensity
defiant	Openly resisting	Active
desperate	Having lost hope, driven to extremes	Urgent
dread	Great fear of what is coming	Noun in choices
earnest	Sincere and serious	Positive intensity
feverish	Excited and restless	Physical image
fervent	Having intense feeling	Sustained
foreboding	Sense that something bad is coming	Ominous
frantic	Wild with worry	Fast
fraught	Filled with tension	Charged
frenzied	Wildly excited	Out of control
harried	Strained by demands	Pressure
impassioned	Filled with strong feeling	Eloquent
impatient	Restless for change	Mild
insistent	Demanding attention	Persistent
intense	Having strong feeling	Broad
menacing	Threatening	Dark
ominous	Suggesting something bad will happen	Atmosphere
passionate	Having strong feeling	Broad
tense	Strained, taut	Atmosphere
urgent	Requiring immediate action	Pressure

WORD	DEFINITION	NOTE
vehement	Showing intense feeling	Forceful
volatile	Liable to sudden change	Unstable

Family 8: Thoughtful, Uncertain, and Questioning

WORD	DEFINITION	NOTE
ambivalent	Having mixed, opposed feelings	The most useful word for “complex attitude”
contemplative	Deeply thoughtful	Quiet
curious	Eager to know	Open
doubtful	Feeling uncertain	Mild
enigmatic	Mysterious, difficult to interpret	About ambiguity
equivocal	Open to more than one interpretation, evasive	Slippery
hesitant	Reluctant to act or speak	Hedging
inquisitive	Eager to learn	Active questioning
introspective	Examining one’s own thoughts	Inward
meditative	Absorbed in thought	Calm
perplexed	Completely baffled	Puzzled
philosophical	Reflecting on deep questions	Calm acceptance
questioning	Expressing doubt	Open
reflective	Thoughtfully looking back	Memory-linked
skeptical	Doubting claims	Measured; often the correct answer where “cynical” is too strong
speculative	Tentative, conjectural	Guessing
tentative	Not certain	Careful
uncertain	Not sure	Plain
vacillating	Wavering	Back and forth

Family 9: Moral, Instructive, and Persuasive

WORD	DEFINITION	NOTE
admonitory	Warning or reprimanding	Gentle correction

WORD	DEFINITION	NOTE
cautionary	Warning against danger	Advice
didactic	Intended to teach, often morally	Can be negative if heavy-handed
exhortatory	Urging strongly	Persuasive
hortatory	Strongly encouraging	Near-synonym
moralizing	Preaching about right and wrong	Often criticism
oracular	Prophetic, delivered as authority	Elevated
pious	Devout	Sincere or showy
preachy	Excessively moralistic	Pejorative
prophetic	Foretelling	Visionary
sententious	Given to pompous moralizing	Negative
solemn	Formal and serious	Weight
urgent	Pressing	See above

Family 10: Arrogant, Pompous, and Self-Regarding

WORD	DEFINITION	NOTE
arrogant	Having exaggerated self-importance	Direct
bombastic	High-sounding but with little meaning	Language
boastful	Bragging	Obvious
complacent	Smugly self-satisfied	Unaware of danger
egotistical	Excessively self-centered	Character
grandiose	Impressive in appearance but exaggerated	Scale
haughty	Arrogantly superior	Facial/manner
imperious	Domineering	Commanding
narcissistic	Excessively self-admiring	Strong
ostentatious	Designed to impress	Showy
pedantic	Overly concerned with learning and rules	Academic fussiness
pompous	Self-importantly solemn	Satire target
pretentious	Claiming importance one lacks	Fake grandeur

WORD	DEFINITION	NOTE
self-righteous	Confident in one's own virtue	Moral
smug	Irritatingly self-satisfied	Mild
vain	Excessively proud of one's looks or qualities	Character

Family 11: Humble, Submissive, and Pleading

WORD	DEFINITION	NOTE
apologetic	Expressing regret	Direct
deferential	Showing respectful submission	Social
diffident	Modest or shy from lack of confidence	Hesitant
docile	Ready to accept control	Passive
fawning	Showing exaggerated flattery	Negative
humble	Having a modest view of one's importance	Positive
meek	Quiet and gentle, submissive	Mild
obsequious	Excessively eager to please	Strongly negative
pleading	Making an emotional appeal	Direct
servile	Excessively submissive	Negative
sycophantic	Flattering to gain advantage	Negative
timid	Showing a lack of courage	Fearful

Family 12: Ironic, Detached, and Uneasy

WORD	DEFINITION	NOTE
absurdist	Treating life as illogical	Modern
disillusioned	Disappointed in one's beliefs	After loss of faith
disquieted	Made uneasy	Mild
ironic	Saying the opposite of what is meant, or noting an unexpected reversal	Needs evidence
jaded	Weary from experience	Tired cynicism
mock-heroic	Applying epic grandeur to trivial things	Satire
sardonic	See Family 4	
satirical	Exposing folly by ridicule	Purposeful

WORD	DEFINITION	NOTE
world-weary	Bored by the world	Experienced
uneasy	Troubled	Mild
unsettled	Disturbed	Mild

That list covers more than 200 distinct words once the families are combined. The next sections show how to use them.

Part 2: Telling Near-Synonyms Apart

Most missed tone items come from choosing a word that is *close* but wrong in intensity or kind. These pairs and clusters cause the most trouble.

CLUSTER	HOW TO SEPARATE THEM
wry / sardonic / sarcastic / scathing	Wry is dry and amused, often gentle. Sardonic is grimly mocking. Sarcastic is personal, cutting verbal irony. Scathing is severely critical in a sustained way. Order of intensity: wry, sardonic, sarcastic, scathing.
melancholy / mournful / despairing	Melancholy is a reflective, almost pleasant sadness. Mournful names a specific loss. Despairing has given up hope.
wistful / nostalgic / yearning	Wistful is soft, vague longing. Nostalgic is longing for a specific past, with affection. Yearning is active and intense wanting.
detached / indifferent / clinical	Detached is distance as a stance. Indifferent is lack of care and is often a misread. Clinical is coldly analytical. A narrator can be detached without being indifferent.
skeptical / cynical	Skeptical doubts claims and awaits proof. Cynical assumes bad motives. Cynical is the stronger, more extreme word.
ironic / sarcastic	Irony is the gap between statement and meaning; sarcasm is irony used to wound. Austen's narrator is ironic; Mr. Bennet at his sharpest is sarcastic.
reverent / sentimental	Reverent respects what it honors. Sentimental overstates feeling beyond what the situation earns.
resigned / defeated / stoic	Resigned accepts. Defeated has lost. Stoic endures without showing feeling.
ambivalent / ambiguous	Ambivalent describes mixed feeling in a person; ambiguous describes unclear meaning in a text.

CLUSTER	HOW TO SEPARATE THEM
earnest / solemn / grave	Earnest is sincerely committed. Solemn is formal and serious. Grave is weighty, with serious consequences.
indignant / resentful / bitter	Indignant reacts to injustice in the moment. Resentful carries the grievance. Bitter has soured over time.
apprehensive / anxious / foreboding	Apprehensive fears a specific coming event. Anxious is general worry. Foreboding is the atmosphere of coming bad news.
didactic / moralizing / preachy	Didactic teaches. Moralizing lectures about right and wrong. Preachy is criticism of heavy-handed moralizing.
amused / bemused	Amused finds something funny. Bemused is puzzled, sometimes with mild humor.
proud / arrogant / smug	Proud may be deserved. Arrogant exaggerates its right. Smug is self-satisfied without noticing a problem.
elegiac / melancholy	Elegiac is mournful about a specific loss, with the shape of an elegy. Melancholy is general pensive sadness.

A working procedure for any tone question:

1. Mark the loaded words in the passage (verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and any word you would not use in plain speech).
2. Decide the valence: positive, negative, neutral, or mixed.
3. Decide the intensity: mild, moderate, or strong.
4. Choose the word in the right family at the right intensity.
5. If the answer is a pair, check that *both* words are supported. One defensible word and one wrong word makes the pair wrong.

Part 3: Paired Adjectives (the MCQ Pattern)

College Board-style tone and characterization items frequently use two-word answers, such as “affectionate and amused.” The structure of these items follows consistent rules.

How the choices are built. The key is typically the only choice in which *both* words hold. Distractors usually have one defensible word and one wrong word, or both words are in the wrong family entirely. The adjacent-but-too-strong trap (scathing for wry) appears frequently.

Typical choice sets (original examples):

- *Tone of a narrator describing a pompous clergyman:* (A) admiring and respectful (B) amused and critical (C) bitter and furious (D) detached and clinical. Key: (B). The narrator mocks gently but sees clearly.
- *Speaker’s attitude toward a childhood home:* (A) nostalgic yet uneasy (B) joyful and carefree (C) contemptuous and dismissive (D) indifferent and bored. Key: (A) if the speaker’s fond memories are shadowed by something withheld.

- *Diction of a formal letter:* (A) elevated and formal (B) colloquial and playful (C) terse and hostile (D) sensuous and emotional.

Strategy for pairs.

1. Test each word separately against the passage. Eliminate any choice with a word you cannot support.
2. If two choices share one word, the decision turns on the other word.
3. Look for the pair that reflects the passage's complexity. If the passage moves from one attitude to another, the pair often names both ("hopeful but wary," "tender yet critical").
4. Be suspicious of two words that are synonyms. Choices like "sad and mournful" rarely capture a complex attitude.

Common valid pair patterns for "complex" attitudes:

PATTERN	EXAMPLES
Warm + critical	affectionate yet critical; admiring but wary; tender and exasperated
Longing + acceptance	wistful and resigned; nostalgic but accepting
Fear + fascination	fascinated and apprehensive; awed and uneasy
Pride + doubt	proud yet uncertain; confident but anxious
Grief + relief	mournful and relieved; sorrowful but freed
Humor + pain	wry and sorrowful; bitter and amused
Reverence + irony	respectful but ironic; reverent yet questioning

Part 4: Words for Shifts in Tone

Because "from ___ to ___" stems are standard, you need vocabulary for movement. Use these pairs as models, and notice that every pair names a real change in attitude.

FROM	TO	WHERE IT HAPPENS
playful	serious	A joke gives way to an unexpected admission
admiring	critical	Praise is undercut by a "but"
anxious	calm	A storm passes; the speaker accepts
nostalgic	bitter	Memory sours when the present intrudes
despairing	hopeful	A sonnet's turn, as in Sonnet 29
confident	doubtful	A boast collapses in the final lines
detached	involved	A narrator's observation becomes personal
reverent	disillusioned	Faith meets evidence

FROM	TO	WHERE IT HAPPENS
mocking	sympathetic	Satire softens toward its target
ironic	sincere	A speaker drops the mask

When you write about shifts, name the *evidence of the change*: a punctuation shift, a change of tense, a new image, a change in diction, or a conjunction like “but.”

Part 5: Diction and Style Descriptors

MCQ stems also ask you to describe diction, syntax, or style. These are not tone words, but they appear in the same paired format.

WORD	MEANING
elevated	Formal, lofty vocabulary
colloquial	Conversational, everyday
idiomatic	Using natural expressions
folksy	Down-to-earth, rustic
ornate	Elaborately decorated language
plain	Simple and unadorned
austere	Severely simple and unadorned
sensuous	Appealing to the senses
erudite	Showing great learning
esoteric	Understood by a select few
precise	Exact
verbose	Using too many words
concise	Brief and clear
stilted	Unnaturally formal
lyrical	Musical, expressive
connotative	Rich in suggested meaning
abstract	Dealing with ideas, not concrete things
concrete	Dealing with physical details
fragmented	Broken into pieces
flowing	Smooth and continuous

WORD	MEANING
staccato	Short and abrupt
periodic	Holding the main idea until the end of the sentence
cumulative (loose)	Main idea first, with details added after

Part 6: Practice, 30 Short Quotations

Read each quotation and choose the tone word from the choices that best fits. Every passage is in the public domain or original (marked "original"). Quotations are short on purpose; in a real passage you would use more context. Answers and explanations are in the key.

- "I wandered lonely as a cloud / That floats on high o'er vales and hills." (Wordsworth) (A) bitter (B) serene and reflective (C) frantic (D) sarcastic
- "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife." (Austen) (A) earnest (B) wry and satiric (C) grieving (D) ominous
- "Death, be not proud, though some have called thee / Mighty and dreadful." (Donne) (A) defiant (B) submissive (C) nostalgic (D) bemused
- "To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield." (Tennyson, "Ulysses") (A) detached (B) resolute and determined (C) amused (D) indifferent
- "I am his Highness' dog at Kew; / Pray tell me, sir, whose dog are you?" (Pope) (A) reverent (B) mocking and witty (C) mournful (D) timid
- "Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow, / Creeps in this petty pace from day to day." (Shakespeare) (A) hopeful (B) weary and despairing (C) jubilant (D) mischievous
- "Ah, Love! could thou and I with Fate conspire / To grasp this sorry Scheme of Things entire." (FitzGerald) (A) yearning and rebellious (B) smug (C) indifferent (D) cheerful
- "Because I could not stop for Death, / He kindly stopped for me." (Dickinson) (A) terrified (B) calm and quietly ironic (C) furious (D) boastful
- "The world is too much with us; late and soon, / Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers." (Wordsworth) (A) approving (B) critical and regretful (C) playful (D) neutral
- "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? / Thou art more lovely and more temperate." (Shakespeare) (A) affectionate and admiring (B) hostile (C) resentful (D) clinical
- "My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains / My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk." (Keats) (A) ecstatic (B) languid and sorrowful (C) sarcastic (D) matter-of-fact
- "Water, water, every where, / Nor any drop to drink." (Coleridge) (A) anguished and ironic (B) cheerful (C) smug (D) tranquil
- "Out, out, brief candle! / Life's but a walking shadow." (Shakespeare) (A) hopeful (B) bleak and resigned (C) playful (D) reverent

14. "I have measured out my life with coffee spoons." (Eliot, 1917) (A) triumphant (B) weary and self-mocking (C) fervent (D) boastful
15. "My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings; / Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!" (Shelley, inscription) (A) humble (B) arrogant and commanding (C) mournful (D) tentative
16. "Nothing gold can stay." (Frost) (A) elegiac (B) boastful (C) angry (D) silly
17. "I'm Nobody! Who are you? / Are you—Nobody—too?" (Dickinson) (A) mournful (B) playful and conspiratorial (C) furious (D) formal
18. "Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness, / Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun." (Keats) (A) appreciative and sensuous (B) bitter (C) dismissive (D) anxious
19. "Mr. Collins was not a sensible man, and the deficiency of nature had been but little assisted by education or society." (Austen, paraphrased closely) (A) reverent (B) coolly critical and ironic (C) adoring (D) apprehensive
20. "The sea is calm to-night. / The tide is full, the moon lies fair." (Arnold, opening of "Dover Beach") (A) agitated (B) calm and quietly watchful (C) scornful (D) exuberant
21. "(original) She counted the spoons twice, as she did every evening, and pretended the number surprised her." (A) detached and wry (B) joyful (C) furious (D) reverent
22. "(original) He thanked them all for their kindness, and each thank-you left a smaller room inside him." (A) bitter and resigned (B) elated (C) boastful (D) flippant
23. "(original) The committee, having considered the question for six years, concluded it required further consideration." (A) earnest (B) satiric and dry (C) tender (D) frantic
24. "(original) The lake lay like a coin somebody had meant to come back for." (A) wistful (B) caustic (C) jubilant (D) clinical
25. "(original) 'How kind,' she said, 'of you to remember. After all these years, I mean.'" (A) gratefully warm (B) sarcastic, with a controlled edge (C) elated (D) timid
26. "(original) The old man spoke of the war as though it were a bad winter: a thing endured, not understood." (A) stoic and subdued (B) jocular (C) ecstatic (D) contemptuous
27. "(original) Every night the house made small noises, and every night she told herself they were only the house." (A) apprehensive but self-soothing (B) triumphant (C) indifferent (D) playful
28. "(original) The orator bowed, adjusted his cuffs, and began to explain, at length, what everyone already knew." (A) admiring (B) gently mocking (C) horrified (D) wistful
29. "(original) I do not say I forgive him; I say only that the anger has grown too heavy to carry upstairs." (A) ambivalent and weary (B) jubilant (C) vengeful (D) smug
30. "(original) Here is the field where we lost nothing, and here the creek where we lost nothing, and here the road." (A) cheerful (B) elegiac and ironic (C) clinical (D) boastful

Part 7: Using Tone Words in Your Writing

Avoid the following weak patterns and use the stronger alternatives.

WEAK	WHY IT FAILS	STRONGER VERSION (ORIGINAL MODELS)
"The tone is negative."	Valence only, no attitude	"The speaker's tone sours from fond to accusing as the memories turn specific."
"The author feels sad."	Name of an emotion, not an attitude toward a subject	"The speaker's sorrow is edged with resentment toward the person she mourns."
"The tone is sarcastic."	Often too strong, unsupported	"The narrator's irony is gentle: she admires Emma's confidence while exposing its blindness."
"The mood is dark."	Vague	"The imagery builds a mood of dread: 'lowering,' 'unlit,' and 'hushed' withhold any relief."
"He is angry."	A bare label	"His anger is controlled, expressed in clipped sentences that suppress what he cannot say."

Tone plus evidence plus function. A complete tone sentence has three parts: the precise word, the evidence for it, and what it does for the argument.

The narrator's tone is wry rather than scornful: the phrase "a truth universally acknowledged" flatters the reader's assumptions before the sentence quietly exposes them, so that Austen's satire works by letting the reader join the joke rather than be its target.

That sentence names the tone, quotes the evidence, distinguishes it from a near-miss, and says what it accomplishes.

Answer Key

Explanations are brief and show the reasoning a reader should apply.

1. **(B)** "Lonely as a cloud" is quiet and self-observing; the image is serene, and the speaker reflects on his own state.
2. **(B)** The sentence announces a "truth" that is plainly a social assumption; the gap between grand phrasing and petty content is the irony.
3. **(A)** The speaker addresses Death directly and challenges its power.
4. **(B)** The four parallel infinitives build to a refusal ("not to yield"); the attitude is resolute.
5. **(B)** The couplet's pointed question reverses the usual humility of a dedication into a joke.
6. **(B)** The repetition and the "petty pace" convey exhaustion and a loss of meaning.
7. **(A)** The speaker wants to "conspire" with Fate to remake the world, which is both longing and rebellion.
8. **(B)** The speaker treats Death as a polite escort ("kindly"), a calm surface with ironic undertones.

9. **(B)** "Lay waste our powers" condemns modern habits, with regret in "late and soon."
10. **(A)** The rhetorical question praises the beloved with warmth.
11. **(B)** "Aches," "drowsy numbness," and "pains" are languid and sorrowful.
12. **(A)** The paradox of being surrounded by undrinkable water produces anguished irony.
13. **(B)** The metaphors diminish life; the speaker accepts that it is meaningless.
14. **(B)** The image reduces a life to trivial units, with a self-mocking edge.
15. **(B)** The inscription is boastful and commanding; the irony (the ruined statue) belongs to the poem, not to the king's own tone.
16. **(A)** The statement is brief, regretful, and accepting.
17. **(B)** The conspiratorial question and light diction are playful.
18. **(A)** Sensuous, affectionate address to the season.
19. **(B)** The narrator states the criticism with polite precision, which is ironic understatement.
20. **(B)** The opening is quiet and watchful; the poem's turn comes later.
21. **(A)** The mock surprise is dry, and the narrator's stance is detached but wry.
22. **(A)** The sentence moves from gratitude to a diminishing image; bitterness is muted into resignation.
23. **(B)** The six years of "further consideration" is a bureaucratic joke.
24. **(A)** The coin "somebody had meant to come back for" carries longing.
25. **(B)** "How kind" is politeness with a barb; "After all these years, I mean" is the edge.
26. **(A)** "Endured, not understood" is stoic; the comparison to winter understates the horror.
27. **(A)** The repeated reassurance exposes the fear it tries to calm.
28. **(B)** The comic detail ("adjusted his cuffs") and "what everyone already knew" gently mock.
29. **(A)** The speaker neither forgives nor continues to rage; the anger is "too heavy," which is weariness mixed with mixed feeling.
30. **(B)** The repetition of "lost nothing" is ironic: the field and creek are named because they are where the loss occurred. The tone is elegiac, with a bitter irony.

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