

Placement Testing - Reading/Writing Review

Identifying the Author's Purpose and Tone

Author's Purpose

An author always has a purpose in mind when putting words on paper. It is the reader's responsibility to analyze the information and determine what the purpose is. Readers expect the author to present materials factually and objectively in an effort to inform the reader. Most textbooks are written for the purpose of informing the reader or explaining new concepts and information. Authors can also present the facts in an effort to persuade the reader. It is up to the reader to evaluate the content. Persuasive writing is often found in editorials and advertising. A third purpose for writing is for entertainment. Examples of material written for the purpose of entertainment could include magazines, novels and any other readings done for pleasure. Something that leaves you with a smile on your face or a tear in your eye is often an example of reading for entertainment.

To determine the author's purpose it is important to analyze the...

1. Language used - look at the words the author chooses to use. Do they convey certain emotions? Is it formal or informal?
2. Development - How has the author chosen to develop his or her thoughts?
3. The audience - Who is the author speaking to? Is the vocabulary technical and specific? Is it targeted to a specific audience? Is the language easy to read and understand?
4. The author's tone - If the author was speaking to you, what would it sound like? Is the author passionate about the topic? Sarcastic? Neutral? Is the author arousing emotions? Does it evoke feelings of sympathy, anger, happiness or sadness? Looking at the author's tone can lead the reader to the overall purpose
5. The author's point of view - What is the author's attitude toward the subject?

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Author's Tone

A writer's tone reveals the attitude he or she has toward the subject. Tone is expressed through the words and details the author selects. Just as a speaker's voice can project a range of feelings, a writer's voice can project tones and feelings. The author's purpose directly affects the tone. If the purpose is to condemn, the tone will most likely be critical. If the purpose is to inform or explain, the tone will be neutral and straight forward. If the purpose is to entertain, it will most likely be humorous and light hearted. The author's tone in writing is similar to what the author would sound like reading the material aloud. Looking carefully at the author's word choices will aid the reader in determining the tone of the passage. Determining the author's attitude toward the subject will also help in determining the tone.

Some examples of how an author can depict tone are shown in the following comments.

"I hate this place. The food is gross, the servers are rude and the wait is ridiculous!" - Angry

"I know that the experiences I get flipping burgers and making milkshakes will prepare me for becoming CEO of the Microsoft Corporation." - Sarcasm

"I love this job. I have great hours, get wonderful great discounts and the people I work with are wonderful!" - Positive