

# Commentary on Tone

## Four Samples of Academic Writing

The prompt to read this information appears on p. 29 of *Acting on Words*.

### *Academic Expository Tone*

“A Pace of their Own”

See Chapter 12 for information on comparison-contrast patterns used in exposition. This example uses subject-by-subject organization (Newfoundland and Montreal on one hand representing the subject of fast speech, PEI and the prairies on the other representing the subject of slow speech) as well as a consistent pattern within each paragraph of two main citations and reference to possible causes. See Chapter 19 for an explanation of how this example uses the MLA parenthetical citation method matched to the works cited list. Part of academic expository tone is the careful balancing and structuring of formal design. The main purpose of the paragraph appears to be to increase our appreciation of Canada’s linguistic diversity—to raise our awareness. More broadly speaking, it is persuasive in the sense of convincing us that the information is accurate and up to date as well as meaningful

Note that the above example uses a detached tone enabled by third person. See the introduction to Chapter 9 on the nature and effect of third person expository style.

### *Academic Analytical Tone*

“Tony and the Bard”

See Chapter 12 for information on comparison-contrast patterns; also see Chapter 14 “Critical Analysis and Evaluation,” Chapter 15 “Rhetorical Analysis,” and “Literary and Film Analysis” (the latter at the text website under Chapter 15) on various approaches to analyzing literature and film. The above example uses point-by-point comparative structure (see Chapter 12) according to points suggested by Norrie Epstein in her definition of the features of Shakespeare’s history plays. (See Chapter 19 for an explanation of how this example uses the MLA parenthetical citation method matched to the works cited list.) The paragraph writer has considered what Epstein says about the histories and realized that each of her points of definition (i.e. battlefield heroics, familial relationships, feisty characters, power politics and covert scheming) applies as well to *The Sopranos*. This represents a thoughtful use of a *secondary* source, since Epstein herself does not offer a connection to the writer’s *primary* source (*The Sopranos*). The writer makes that connection. See Chapter 18 for further discussion of primary and secondary sources. The main purpose of this analysis appears to be to increase our enjoyment of *The Sopranos* and appreciation of its underlying serious intentions—to increase awareness. In this respect, this paragraph, too, is persuasive.

### *Academic Analytical Tone with Argumentative Edge*

#### “Publish or Perish”

See Chapter 14 “Critical Analysis and Evaluation” and, in particular, the section on responding critically to the ideas in a book or essay. It could be pointed out that although the above sample paragraph expresses a firm argument, it does so primarily in the style of persuasive analysis rather than that of concession-refutation (as discussed in Chapter 16). The latter structure concedes points on the other side of the debate in question and usually addresses specific controversial recommendations or measures, such as a bill proposing major amendments to legislation governing education. See Chapter 19 for an

explanation of how this example uses the MLA parenthetical citation method matched to the works cited list. The quotation from *University Affairs* contains an ellipsis (three dots). The writer decided that part of the sentence from *University Affairs* was irrelevant to the point being made; the ellipsis indicates words omitted by the paragraph writer when integrating the quotation. Do not use this technique to remove words that challenge the interpretation you wish to give, and use this technique with restraint, since it could seem to suggest that you are cutting the original to suit your argument rather than to serve style and brevity, as was the case here. The main purpose of the above paragraph appears to be to change our thinking on a topic of concern to universities and society. The writer stops short of recommending action, but he or she clearly wishes to persuade us to think that the current situation is wrong.

### *Concession-refutation Persuasive Tone*

“Eating Your Cake: Is it True What They Say?”

See Chapter 16 for a more thorough illustration of the concession-refutation method. In this case, the writer has suited tone to his audience. Adapted to business culture, his style is more informal, relaxed, and friendly than might be typical of a graduate address to other faculties. Yet there is a careful organization to his paragraphs. He begins by a “concession” to the make-money-first side of the debate. His parents are practical and want the best for him. They advocate making money first. He acknowledges that they are respected advisors. He does not question their analogy, but what do *you* think of it? Is it a false analogy (see Chapter 3 logical fallacies)? The writer does acknowledge or “concede” their analogy, thereby giving them more “say” in the discussion. But then he mentions his grandmother’s point of view. In support of her view, he offers a specific example, not simply an abstract element of reasoning that might break down. Provoked by her argument, the writer does some research and finds a study with evidence appearing to refute his parents’ position. (See Chapter 19 for an explanation of how this example uses the MLA parenthetical citation method matched to the works cited list.)

Finally, he offers his own experience in support of not making money if it means sacrificing doing the things he likes. See Chapter 4 on “warm” and “cool” proofs. The writer’s refutation has sandwiched a cool proof between two warm ones. Tone is moderate and respectful of the other side of the matter, yet firm in explaining reasons for the position that the writer hopes might change a way of thinking among at least some of the graduating class. The purpose of the above paragraphs appears to be to change thinking and perhaps even prompt new action. The writer’s conclusion is firm enough to imply a call to action: do as I did, not as my parents recommended.

## Reviewing Basic Tones

Writing intended to raise awareness is considered **expository** and neutral in tone.

Writing intended to change thinking is considered **persuasive** in tone. Writing intended to include a call to action is considered **even more persuasive** in tone. Review the above samples again to see if this is true of the tones.