

Fine Details Creating Tone

The prompt to read this information appears on p. 54 of *Acting on Words*.

Commentary

Paragraphs A, B, and C on pp. 53- 54 of *Acting on Words*, excerpted from longer pieces, reflect variations of tone. Paragraph A comes from “The Other Canadians and Canada’s Future,” Reader, p. 417; Paragraph B comes from the Reith lecture broadcast of May 17, 2000, which you might try finding online; and Paragraph C comes from “The Lure of the Body Image,” Reader, p. 449. To complete the practice exercise given on p. 53, you might find it helpful to read the complete pieces, but that is not necessary. The exercise asked you to identify the dominant supporting detail and dominant tone (warm, neutral, cool) in each paragraph. The exercise asked you to explain why you believe the supporting details express the tone you have suggested. In response to these questions, here are some thoughts on each of the three paragraphs.

Comments on Paragraph A

Paragraph A uses the extended example of a particular person to help support its claim about the effects of multiculturalism. This type of support is considered “warm” because it presents information with a specific human face. An article about poverty will gain in persuasive impact if the writer portrays people struggling to survive on little income in one or two descriptive examples. On the other hand, exclusive use of individual cases can be considered unreliable and even manipulative. Our sympathies for the personalized subjects may outweigh other judgments we should make. In addition, you must be careful about drawing general conclusions from one or two specific cases, no matter how compelling they seem. Salloum could certainly not rest his thesis simply on the experience of Mr. Abughoush. But this example does draw us into the discussion; it adds “warmth.” Another way of expressing this is to say that this form of proof appeals to

pathos. This, in turn, encourages us to follow the logic of other appeals to logos that are intended to make the same point as does the appeal to pathos.

Comments on Paragraph B

Paragraph B uses three separate examples of activities—specific interactions between humans and nature—but without an involved person as presented in sample paragraph one. We can easily recognize the activities Prince Charles refers to, but they are presented as generalized, known facts, creating more emotional distance for us as readers than we feel when a specific case, with descriptive human detail, is used. The principles presented in this paragraph clearly appeal to ethics. Some of us we may still have, at some level, a lingering connection to the idea of divine right of monarchs (God’s appointed); this discussion of ethics is tied to ethos, and who better to speak to it than an appointed representative of right? Less mysteriously put, the Prince’s socially assigned role is to discuss rights and wrongs rather than politics; he has deep traditional backing to “do good” and “speak good,” yet keep a proper distance. His style and purpose are matched to that position, reflected in the nature of his supporting details.

Comments on Paragraph C

The data used for support in paragraph C come from a study. To determine the reliability of that study, we would need to consider the context of the study (was it biased?), and examine what procedures the researchers followed, including what statistical evaluation methods they used to determine significance. Assuming these methods were sound, the study represents the most empirical (objective) of the three forms of support illustrated in these sample paragraphs. The behaviour and attitudes of people are presented again through percentages. Instead of a human face, we are presented with an abstraction representing a map of a collective situation. This approach to investigating experience and arriving at a position is considered the most scientific, or empirical, of the three examples above. Data from studies may be considered “cool” support in that they are detached from individuals and rendered through established logical procedures. Such support is strongly tied to an appeal to logos. Despite this paragraph’s appearing as the most empirical of the three examples, a question you might consider further is whether

the writer's use of data in "The Lure of the Body Image" would satisfy the expectations of a scholarly review (the article is from *Maclean's* magazine, not a scholarly or professional journal). Why and/or why not?