

# 8 Purpose and Tone



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There is an author—a person with thoughts, feelings, and opinions—behind everything you read. Whether this person is a cartoonist, a sportswriter, a newspaper columnist, a novelist, or a friend sending you a letter, he or she writes from a personal point of view. That point of view is reflected in (1) the *purpose* of a piece of writing—to inform, to persuade, or to entertain—as well as (2) its *tone*: the expression of attitude and feeling.

The *purpose* of the above cartoon, like all cartoons, is to entertain. Can you tell what the *tone* of each speaker is? Which one actually means what he or she is saying? Which one does not? After you have decided on your answers, read the explanation that follows.

## Explanation

The man means what he is saying. He is asking the woman to go with him on an errand he could easily do on his own, so we can assume he enjoys and desires her company. The woman, on the other hand, does not mean what she is saying. Few people would consider a trip to the drugstore a “fun date,” so we can infer she is being sarcastic, saying the opposite of what she means.

## Purpose

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Authors write with a reason in mind, and you can better evaluate their ideas by determining what that reason is. The author’s reason for writing is also called the **purpose** of a selection. Three common purposes are as follows:

- To **inform**—to give information about a subject. Authors with this purpose wish to provide facts that will explain or teach something to readers.

For example, the author of an informative paragraph about watching television might begin, “American children spend nearly as much time watching TV as they do in school.” The author may then go on to provide evidence from research studies that show how many hours children watch TV.

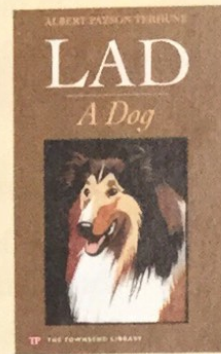
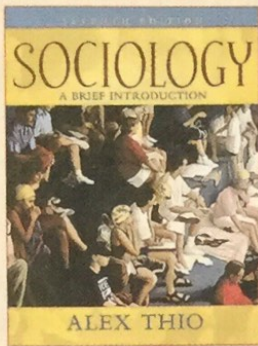
- To **persuade**—to convince the reader to agree with the author’s point of view on a subject. Authors with this purpose may give facts, but their main goal is to argue or prove a point to readers.

The author of a persuasive passage about watching TV might begin, “Parents should not allow their children to watch more than two hours of TV each day.” The author might then go on to support that main idea with details about the negative impact of such passive watching and the benefits of spending more time reading, studying, playing outdoors, and so on.

- To **entertain**—to amuse and delight; to appeal to the reader’s senses and imagination. Authors with this purpose entertain in various ways, through fiction and nonfiction.

The author of a humorous paragraph about watching TV might write, “I’m very proud to say that my family always sits down to dinner together; there are five of us, my husband and me, our son and daughter, and the TV set.”

While the cover and title of anything you read—books, articles, and so on—don’t necessarily suggest the author’s main purpose, often they do. On the next page are the covers of three books. See if you can guess the primary purpose of each of these books.



- \_\_\_ Primary purpose:  
 A. to inform  
 B. to persuade  
 C. to entertain

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As you probably concluded, the main purpose of the textbook is to inform; the main purpose of *Fast-Food Nation* is to persuade (note the subtitle: “The Dark Side of the All-American Meal”); and the main purpose of the timeless story *Lad* is to entertain.



### Check Your Understanding

Read each of the following three paragraphs and decide whether the author’s main purpose is to inform, to persuade, or to entertain. Write in your answers, and then read the explanation that follows.

1. Athletes should not earn millions of dollars a year. If they weren’t paid so much, then tickets to sports events wouldn’t have to be so expensive, and more people could enjoy sports more often. Also, more reasonable pay would make for better role models for young people, many of whom look up to sports figures.

*Purpose:* \_\_\_\_\_

2. The Bubonic plague, also called the Black Death, swept Europe, Asia, and Africa from 1346 to 1353. So deadly was this disease that it killed one-third of the population of these continents. The plague was spread by fleas infected with bacteria from diseased rats. When it resulted in pneumonia, coughing spread the bacteria directly through the air.

*Purpose:* \_\_\_\_\_

3. Men don’t even notice 97 percent of the beauty efforts women make. For example, the average woman spends five thousand hours per year worrying about her fingernails. But I have never once, in more than forty years of listening

to men talk about women, heard a man say, “She has a nice set of fingernails!” Many men would not notice if a woman had upward of four hands.

Purpose: \_\_\_\_\_

### Explanation

In the first paragraph, the writer’s purpose is *to persuade* readers that “athletes should not earn millions of dollars a year.” The word *should* is a clue to the author’s persuasive intention. Words like *should*, *ought*, and *must* are often meant to convince us rather than to inform us.

The purpose of the second paragraph is *to inform*. The author is providing readers with factual details about the Black Death.

In the third paragraph, the playful and exaggerated details about the beauty efforts of women tell us that the author’s main goal is *to entertain* with humor.

## A Note about Writing with More Than One Purpose

At times, writing may blend two or even three purposes. A persuasive article on the importance of avoiding junk foods, for example, might include a good many facts and even some comic touches.

- What would you say is the main purpose of this book?
  - A. To inform
  - B. To persuade
  - C. To entertain

If you chose answer A, you’re correct—my main purpose is to inform and provide practice. But I also have other purposes at times. For example, in an earlier section, “Some Quick Study Tips” on pages 9–10, what is my main purpose?

- A. To inform
- B. To persuade
- C. To entertain

My purpose here is both to inform and to persuade you about the importance of four time-proven study hints.

You’ll notice, too, that I have included in this book a number of cartoons and amusing passages (for example, the passage on not-so-clever thieves on page 75). What is my purpose in choosing such content?

- A. To inform
- B. To persuade
- C. To entertain

While my main purpose is to inform, I do at times have a second and even third purpose—to persuade and to entertain. And that is the case for other authors as well. What you need to remember when trying to determine purpose is to ask yourself, “What is the author’s *main* purpose here?”

**PRACTICE 1**

Label each item according to its main purpose: to inform (I), to persuade (P), or to entertain (E).

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Nowadays about half of U.S. marriages end in divorce.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. American school systems should adopt a year-long schedule in order to become more competitive with schools in other countries.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Many people in my family are seafood eaters. When they see food, they eat it.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. More than one-fourth of American children now live in single-parent families.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. I read the obituaries every morning; if I don't find my name, I get dressed and go to work.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Television networks should reduce the number of commercials shown during children's programs.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. The seeds of many fruits, including cherries, apples, plums, peaches, and apricots, contain a form of cyanide that can be deadly when eaten in large amounts.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Cosmetic companies that test their products on animals don't deserve your business; please buy from cruelty-free companies instead.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. The reason that koala bears appear so calm and sleepy-eyed is that they are slightly drugged from the eucalyptus leaves they feed on.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Why do they lock gas station bathrooms? Are they afraid someone will clean them?

**PRACTICE 2**

Following are three passages, one each from a textbook, a humor book, and a collection of essays. In the spaces provided, write the letter of the best description of the purpose of each passage.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. 'To get students to read, give them books they will *want* to read. 'I have heard more stories than I can remember of school systems that have purchased books they think their students *should* read rather than books

their students *will* read. <sup>3</sup>Those books sit largely unused on dusty shelves. <sup>4</sup>I recall being asked to read *A Tale of Two Cities* in high school; I didn't want to read it, and bought a classic comic book instead to do a required book report. <sup>5</sup>That was many years ago, but even today otherwise well-meaning educators ask students to read books that are not about their lives and their worlds. <sup>6</sup>There is a famous line in *Hamlet*: "The readiness is all." <sup>7</sup>If readiness is in fact essential, most students are not ready for the likes of *A Tale of Two Cities*. <sup>8</sup>And few students are going to discover the pleasure of reading if they are forced to read material that doesn't appeal to them.

The main purpose of this passage is to

- A. inform readers about books that are required reading in high schools.
- B. convince readers that high-school students should be given books that appeal to them.
- C. amuse readers with a story about the author's method of avoiding a reading assignment.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. <sup>1</sup>I have thought about exercise. <sup>2</sup>Read about it. <sup>3</sup>Watched it. <sup>4</sup>Even considered it. <sup>5</sup>Doctors recommend it, especially when they can't think of anything else to say. <sup>6</sup>When you're over fifty you go to the doctor and you're telling him that this hurts and that hurts and that you're tired all the time. <sup>7</sup>You know the doctor just wants to blurt out: "What the blazes do you expect? <sup>8</sup>You're o-l-d. <sup>9</sup>Old!" <sup>10</sup>But they don't say that, because they like to have you keep coming in so they can just kind of look you over and charge you three hundred bucks. <sup>11</sup>At my last checkup, I was complaining about a multitude of maladies visiting my body. <sup>12</sup>(Most have since moved in.) <sup>13</sup>And the doctor looked bored—kind of listless, like he might need a checkup himself—and said rote what he always says, "Are you getting enough exercise?" <sup>14</sup>I replied that I did not exercise at all, which I considered just about the right amount.

The main purpose of this passage is to

- A. explain the drawbacks of exercise.
- B. persuade people never to trust doctors.
- C. entertain with humorous details about aging and doctors.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. <sup>1</sup>When Julius Caesar landed on the island we now know as Britain almost two thousand years ago, English didn't even exist. <sup>2</sup>Five hundred years later, a form of English called Old English (which was so different from modern English that you and I couldn't even understand it) had emerged, and was spoken by only a few thousand people. <sup>3</sup>By the time William Shakespeare was writing his greatest plays, in the late sixteenth century, English was the native language of five to seven million British people, but was not used anywhere outside of Britain itself. <sup>4</sup>In the four hundred years since then, English-speakers such

as the Scottish, the Irish, the Americans, and many others have carried their language and culture to all parts of the globe, and English has become the most widely spoken, written, and far-reaching language in human history. <sup>5</sup>Today English is used by roughly a billion people, more than half of whom have learned it as a second language. <sup>6</sup>It has become a global language of business as well as technology, appearing in 75 percent of the world's mail and 80 percent of the information stored in the world's computers.

The main purpose of this passage is to

- A. inform readers about events in the history of the English language.
- B. persuade readers that English should replace other countries' languages.
- C. entertain readers with amusing anecdotes about the spread of English throughout the world.

## Tone

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A writer's **tone** reveals the attitude that he or she has toward a subject. Tone is expressed through the words and details the writer selects. Just as a speaker's voice can project a range of feelings, a writer's voice can project one or more tones, or feelings: anger, sympathy, hopefulness, sadness, respect, dislike, and so on. Understanding tone is, then, an important part of understanding what an author has written.

Because the purpose of a textbook is to inform, most textbooks are written in a matter-of-fact or objective tone, without any emotional appeal. A textbook author needs to convey information, rather than reveal his or her attitude toward that information. However, other kinds of writing can use any of a variety of tones.

To appreciate the differences in tone that writers can utilize, look at the following statements by employees of fast-food restaurants. Then read them aloud—in the tone of voice appropriate in each case.

"I hate this job. The customers are rude, the managers are idiots, and the food smells like dog chow." (*Tone*: bitter, angry.)

"I have no doubt that flipping burgers and toasting buns will prepare me for a top position on Wall Street." (*Tone*: mocking, sarcastic.)

"I love working at Burger Barn. I meet interesting people, earn extra money, and get to eat all the chicken nuggets I want when I go on break." (*Tone*: enthusiastic, positive.)

"I'm not excited about wearing fluorescent green polyester uniforms, but the managers are willing to schedule me around my classes, and the company offers scholarships to hard-working employees." (*Tone*: fair-minded, objective.)



### PRACTICE 3

Following are five reactions to an aggressive driver weaving his car dangerously in and out of traffic. Label each statement with the tone of voice that you think is present. Choose each tone from the following box, and use each tone only once.

A. angry  
D. sarcastic

B. cautious  
E. self-pitying

C. questioning

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. “Oh my God—I hope he doesn’t hit me. This always happens to me. No matter where I go, something like this happens.”
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. “That lousy jerk—he acts like he owns the road! He’d better not try cutting in front of me.”
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. “That man’s driving a little dangerously. I’m going to slow down so there’s some distance between his car and ours.”
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. “What makes someone drive like that? Are they on drugs? Are they in emotional pain? Are they just flat-out crazy?”
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. “Well, there’s a careful, considerate driver. I want everyone in this car to pay special attention to him, so you can learn how a mature driver acts.”

## Words That Describe Tone

Below and on the next page are two lists of words commonly used to describe tone. With the exception of the words *matter-of-fact* and *objective*, the words reflect a feeling or judgment. The words in the first list are more familiar ones. Brief meanings are given in *italics* for the words in the second list. Refer to these meanings as needed to learn any words you don’t know yet.

### *Some Words That Describe Tone*

admiring	conceited	forgiving	respectful
affectionate	concerned	frightened	self-pitying
amused	critical	grateful	serious
angry	cruel	humorous	sorrowful
apologetic	curious	insulting	sympathetic
ashamed	defensive	joyous	threatening
calming	doubtful	loving	tragic
caring	encouraging	playful	warm
cheerful	excited	praising	worried



*More Words That Describe Tone—with Their Meanings*

<b>ambivalent</b>	<i>uncertain about a choice</i>
<b>arrogant</b>	<i>full of self-importance; conceited</i>
<b>bewildered</b>	<i>confused; puzzled</i>
<b>bitter</b>	<i>angry; full of hate</i>
<b>compassionate</b>	<i>deeply sympathetic</i>
<b>depressed</b>	<i>very sad or discouraged</i>
<b>detached</b>	<i>emotionally uninvolved</i>
<b>disbelieving</b>	<i>unbelieving</i>
<b>distressed</b>	<i>suffering sorrow, misery, or pain</i>
<b>hypocritical</b>	<i>false</i>
<b>impassioned</b>	<i>filled with strong feeling</i>
<b>indignant</b>	<i>angry about something unfair or mean</i>
<b>instructive</b>	<i>teaching</i>
<b>ironic</b>	<i>meaning the opposite of what is expressed</i>
<b>lighthearted</b>	<i>happy and carefree</i>
<b>matter-of-fact</b>	<i>sticking to facts; unemotional</i>
<b>mocking</b>	<i>making fun of and/or looking down upon something</i>
<b>nostalgic</b>	<i>longing for something or someone in the past</i>
<b>objective</b>	<i>not influenced by feelings or personal prejudices</i>
<b>optimistic</b>	<i>looking on the bright side of things</i>
<b>pessimistic</b>	<i>looking on the gloomy, unfavorable side of things</i>
<b>pleading</b>	<i>begging</i>
<b>prideful</b>	<i>full of pride or exaggerated self-esteem</i>
<b>remorseful</b>	<i>guilty over a wrong one has done</i>
<b>revengeful</b>	<i>wanting to hurt someone in return for an injury</i>
<b>sarcastic</b>	<i>sharp or wounding; ironic</i>
<b>scheming</b>	<i>tricky</i>
<b>scornful</b>	<i>looking down on someone or something</i>
<b>self-mocking</b>	<i>making fun of or looking down on oneself</i>
<b>sentimental</b>	<i>showing tender feelings; romantic; overly emotional</i>
<b>solemn</b>	<i>involved with serious concerns</i>
<b>straightforward</b>	<i>direct and honest</i>
<b>superior</b>	<i>looking down on others</i>
<b>tolerant</b>	<i>respectful of other views and behavior; patient about problems</i>
<b>uncertain</b>	<i>doubting</i>



## Check Your Understanding

Below are five statements expressing different attitudes about an old car. Five different tones are used:

A. angry

B. disappointed

C. humorous

D. optimistic

E. tolerant

Label each statement according to which of these five tones you think is present. (Feel free to check the list on page 337 for the meanings of any unfamiliar tone words.) Use each tone once. Then read the explanation that follows.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Unfortunately, this car is a lot less reliable than I'd like.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. It's not the greatest car in the world, but it usually takes me where I have to go.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. If car dealers weren't so dishonest, I wouldn't have bought this piece of junk for so much money.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Even though the car has a problem now and then, I bet it'll keep running forever.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. This car is so old it's eligible for an antique-vehicle license plate.

### Explanation

The first item has a disappointed tone because of the words *unfortunately* and *less reliable than I'd like*. In the second item, the phrase *usually takes me where I have to go* shows the writer's accepting attitude, giving the item a tolerant tone. The tone of the third item is angry because of the writer's clearly stated resentment of car dealers, of the car itself, and of its price tag. The bet in the fourth item that the car will "keep running forever" gives that item an optimistic tone. And finally, the obvious exaggeration in the last item imparts a humorous tone.

## A Note on Irony

One commonly used tone is irony. When writing has an **ironic** tone, it says one thing but means the opposite. Irony is found in everyday conversation as well as in writing.

Following are a few examples of verbal irony (also known as **sarcasm**); notice that the quotation in each says the opposite of what is meant.

- If the price tag on a shirt you like is double what you'd expect, you might mutter, "What a bargain."
- After sitting through the first session of what is clearly going to be a very boring class, you say to a classmate, "I only hope I can stand all the excitement."
- If someone is unusually attractive and talented, we might remark, "Poor Laura. She's got absolutely nothing going for her."
- After seeing your favorite basketball team play its worst game ever, you might comment, "I knew they wouldn't disappoint me."
- Your sister comes home from a blind date, saying, "It was great once I understood the rules. You see, his job was to talk about himself 100 percent of the time, and my job was to nod."

As you can see, irony is a useful tone for humor and can be used to imply exactly the opposite of what is said or what is done.

Irony also refers to situations in which what happens is the opposite of what we might expect. We would call it ironic, for example, if the arsonist responsible for a string of fires turned out to be a city firefighter, or if a bank is robbed by two guards that were hired to protect it. And in the cartoon below, it is ironic that the father who expects his son to clean his room permits himself to have a very messy environment.



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Here are a few more examples of this type of irony:

- An expensive computer system is installed to help a company manage its files. Several weeks later, it crashes, and all the files are lost.
- A doctor tells a man that he'd better exercise if he wants to stay healthy. So the man begins jogging. One day while jogging across a street, he is hit by a truck and dies instantly.



### Explanation

Note the contrast in tone within the cartoon:

1. In the first box, the tone of the words is straightforward—the speaker is serious.
2. What is said in the second box is ironic—it says the opposite of what the speaker really means. For instance, the speaker does not mean, “That’s a great idea.” The speaker is really saying, “That’s a terrible idea.”
3. The words on the right in the third box continue the irony by suggesting that causing deliberate pain is as good an idea as challenging the boss’s decision.



### PRACTICE 4

- A.** Below are five statements expressing different attitudes about going on a blind date. Five different tones are used:

**A. angry**

**B. enthusiastic**

**C. ironic**

**D. pessimistic**

**E. self-pitying**

For each statement, write the letter of the tone that you think is present. Use each tone once.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. I just know I’m going to hate this guy my mother’s making me go out with. These things never work out.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Me go on a blind date? Oh sure, I’ve always wanted to meet Dracula’s daughter.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. No way I’m going on a blind date! You’ve got a lot of nerve trying to set me up. What do you think I am—desperate?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. I’d love it if you’d fix me up with your cousin from out of state. It sounds like a lot of fun.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Oh, I suppose I’ll go on a blind date. That’s probably the only kind of date I can get.

- B.** The following conversation between an office worker and his boss involves five of the tones shown in the box below. For each statement, write the letter of the tone that you think is present. Five tones will be left over.

A. apologetic	B. contented	C. impatient	D. indignant
E. lighthearted	F. optimistic	G. sarcastic	H. self-mocking
I. sentimental	J. threatening		

- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. "You're working too slow, Wilson! Where's that report? I'm tired of waiting for it!"
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. "Oh, I *am* sorry, Mr. Henderson. I can't imagine why I haven't finished the report in between the hours and hours of filing and typing you've asked me to do today, not to mention the two cross-town errands you've sent me on."
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. "Wilson, if you don't get that report done today, I'm going to fire you!"
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. "That's it, Mr. Henderson. I've taken all the stupid abuse I'm going to take. Your big mouth is making my life miserable! You can't fire me—because *I quit!*"
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. "Please, Wilson, don't be hasty. I fly off the handle sometimes and say things I don't mean. Listen—I'll clear your schedule tomorrow so you can finish the report."



### PRACTICE 5

Each of the following selections illustrates one of the tones in the box below. In each space, put the letter of the one tone that best applies. Don't use any letter more than once. Three tones will be left over.

Remember that the tone of a selection reflects the author's attitude. To find the tone of a paragraph, ask yourself what attitude is revealed by its words and phrases.

A. admiring	B. bewildered	C. critical	D. hopeful
E. matter-of-fact	F. playful	G. tolerant	H. uncertain

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. He prayed—it wasn't my religion;  
 He ate—it wasn't what I ate;  
 He spoke—it wasn't my language;  
 He dressed—it wasn't what I wore;  
 He took my hand—it wasn't the color of mine.  
 But when he laughed—it was how I laughed,  
 and when he cried—it was how I cried.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. <sup>1</sup>People's behavior is hard to understand. <sup>2</sup>To put it bluntly, every single one of us knows that every other one of us is going to die someday. <sup>3</sup>Our friends, our enemies, our family members, our classmates, our neighbors, our teachers, the guy who serves us our hamburger at McDonald's, ourselves, everybody. <sup>4</sup>Not only are we all aware of our own mortality, but we also know that every human being is dealing with painful, difficult realities of life every day. <sup>5</sup>We're all hurting; we're all struggling in some way or another. <sup>6</sup>Knowing all this, you'd think that people would go out of their way to be as kind and gentle to one another as they possibly could. <sup>7</sup>I mean, we're not here for very long—why not try to be a comfort to each another? <sup>8</sup>Instead, day after day, we beat each other up. <sup>9</sup>We do it on a personal level, on a community level, and certainly on a global level. <sup>10</sup>Why? <sup>11</sup>What is it we think we're gaining by being cruel to one another? <sup>12</sup>Can anyone explain this to me?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. <sup>1</sup>Much of the time I look back at this nation's history and think to myself, "Only in America." <sup>2</sup>Only in America could a rag-tag bunch of colonists rise up and defeat the power of the mighty British Empire. <sup>3</sup>Only in America could Abraham Lincoln, a poor boy born in a log cabin, use the power of the presidency to end the horror of slavery. <sup>4</sup>Only in America could endless numbers of immigrants come with almost nothing but the clothes on their backs and then despite hard times go on to achieve happy lives for themselves and their families. <sup>5</sup>And only in America could a young senator with the unlikely name of Barack Hussein Obama be elected president, rising above the prejudices and fears in the land to unite a glorious but fractured country. <sup>6</sup>Only in America could our President ride in triumph up Pennsylvania Avenue, passing hotels, theaters, and restaurants where his black ancestors could have entered only as servants. <sup>7</sup>Only in America!
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. <sup>1</sup>Erik Erikson developed the dreary psychological theory that, from the moment of birth, life consists of a number of stages, each characterized by an issue to be resolved and a "virtue" to be obtained. <sup>2</sup>The task for newborns, to begin with, is to resolve the issue of "basic trust versus mistrust," though probably all they want to do is sleep, eat, and gurgle. <sup>3</sup>Toddlers are supposed to concentrate not on their teddy bears but on working out the issue of "autonomy versus shame and doubt"; preschoolers must take up the task of "initiative versus guilt." <sup>4</sup>And so it goes. <sup>5</sup>Erikson will not even let us die in peace. <sup>6</sup>Old folks, who might prefer just to put their feet up and relax after eighty years of confronting their dismal chores, are expected to resolve "integrity versus despair" before departing this world. <sup>7</sup>Erikson maintains that if we fail a task at any stage, we are in for serious trouble during the next, so those of us who manage to perish before completing this final task will have to face wrath in the afterlife.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Clay comes out to meet Liston  
 And Liston starts to retreat.  
 If Liston goes back any further,  
 He'll end up in a ringside seat.  
 Clay swings with a left; 5  
 Clay swings with a right.  
 Look at young Cassius  
 Carry the fight.  
 Liston keeps backing  
 But there's not enough room. 10  
 It's a matter of time.  
 There, Clay lowers the boom.  
 Now Clay swings with a right.  
 What a beautiful swing.  
 And the punch raises the bear, 15  
 Clear out of the ring.  
 Liston is still rising
- And the ref wears a frown,  
 For he can't start counting,  
 Till Sonny comes down. 20  
 Now Liston disappears from view.  
 The crowd is getting frantic,  
 But our radar stations have picked  
 him up.  
 He's somewhere over the Atlantic.  
 Who would have thought 25  
 When they came to the fight  
 That they'd witness the launching  
 Of a human satellite?  
 Yes, the crowd did not dream  
 When they laid down their money 30  
 That they would see  
 A total eclipse of the Sonny!

*(Recited by Cassius Clay, later known as Muhammad Ali, before his first fight with Sonny Liston)*



## PRACTICE 6

Read the following short essay by noted science and science-fiction author Isaac Asimov (1920–1992). Then answer the questions about purpose and tone that follow.

*KP* (1): work with the “kitchen police,” soldiers who assist the army cooks

*bents* (2): tendencies

*oracles* (3): messages from the gods

*foist* (4): force

*arbiter* (4): judge

*indulgently* (6): done to go along with someone's wishes

*raucously* (6): loudly

*smugly* (6): in a self-satisfied way



## What Is Intelligence, Anyway?

- 1       What is intelligence, anyway? When I was in the Army, I received a kind of aptitude test that all soldiers took and, against a normal of 100, scored 160. No one at the base had ever seen a figure like that, and for two hours they made a big fuss over me. (It didn't mean anything. The next day I was still a buck private with KP° as my highest duty.)
- 2       All my life I've been registering scores like that, so that I have the complacent feeling that I'm highly intelligent, and I expect other people to think so, too. Actually, though, don't such scores simply mean that I am very good at answering the type of academic questions that are considered worthy of answers by the people who make up the intelligence tests—people with intellectual bents° similar to mine?
- 3       For instance, I had an auto repairman once, who, on these intelligence tests, could not possibly have scored more than 80, by my estimate. I always took it for granted that I was far more intelligent than he was. Yet, when anything went wrong with my car, I hastened to him with it, watched him anxiously as he explored its vitals, and listened to his pronouncements as though they were divine oracles°—and he always fixed my car.
- 4       Well then, suppose my auto repairman devised questions for an intelligence test. Or suppose a carpenter did, or a farmer, or, indeed, almost anyone but an academician. By every one of those tests, I'd prove myself a moron. And I'd *be* a moron, too. In a world where I could not use my academic training and my verbal talents but had to do something intricate or hard, working with my hands, I would do poorly. My intelligence, then, is not absolute but is a function of the society I live in and of the fact that a small subsection of that society has managed to foist° itself on the rest as an arbiter° of such matters.
- 5       Consider my auto repairman, again. He had a habit of telling me jokes whenever he saw me. One time he raised his head from under the automobile hood to say, "Doc, a deaf-and-dumb guy went into a hardware store to ask for some nails. He put two fingers together on the counter and made hammering motions with the other hand. The clerk brought him a hammer. He shook his head and pointed to the two fingers he was hammering. The clerk brought him nails. He picked out the sizes he wanted, and left. Well, Doc, the next guy who came in was a blind man. He wanted scissors. How do you suppose he asked for them?"

- 6 Indulgently°, I lifted my right hand and made scissoring motions with my first two fingers. Whereupon my auto repairman laughed raucously° and said, "Why, you dumb jerk, he used his *voice* and asked for them." Then he said, smugly°, "I've been trying that on all my customers today." "Did you catch many?" I asked. "Quite a few," he said, "but I knew for sure I'd catch you." "Why is that?" I asked. "Because you're so goddamned educated, Doc, I *knew* you couldn't be very smart."
- 7 And I have an uneasy feeling he had something there.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. In paragraph 4, the author refers to himself with a(n)  
A. egotistical tone.  
B. tragic tone.  
C. humble tone.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. When discussing his auto repairman, the author generally uses a(n)  
A. loving tone.  
B. admiring tone.  
C. doubtful tone.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. In referring to those who determine what intelligence is (in the last sentence of paragraph 4), the author uses a  
A. confused tone.  
B. lighthearted tone.  
C. critical tone.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. In paragraph 6, the comments of the repairman have a  
A. straightforward tone.  
B. angry tone.  
C. superior tone.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Asimov's main purpose in this reading is to  
A. inform readers of the traditional view of intelligence tests.  
B. persuade readers that the traditional view of intelligence is inadequate.  
C. entertain readers with several colorful anecdotes.