

8.4 Using words and syntax for tone and style

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

Total: 12 marks

Objective

Build the skills to control **tone** for a divided or resistant audience.

You must be able to:

- write in a register that neither flatters nor lectures
- use inclusive pronouns without presuming agreement
- adjust tone at a difficult point in the argument
- revise a passage whose tone works against its claim

1 Worked examples

Study these first. Each one shows the method for a task used later.

■ Between flattery and lecture

Flattery ("as intelligent readers will see") makes disagreement a failure of intelligence. Lecturing ("it must be understood that") assumes authority you have not earned. Both cost the reader's goodwill.

■ Inclusive pronouns, honestly

"We all want good schools" is safe; "we all know the reform failed" presumes the conclusion. The first names a shared value, the second smuggles in the claim.

■ Tone at the difficult point

Where the argument is weakest, lower the temperature: state the evidence plainly and let it stand. Raising the volume where the case is thin is the most common tonal error.

2 Practice

2.1 State what is wrong with "as intelligent readers will see".

[2]

2.2 Explain the difference between naming a shared value and presuming a conclusion.[2]

2.3 A writer's tone becomes most emphatic where the evidence is weakest.

(a) State the effect on a careful reader. [1]

(b) State the better strategy. [1]

3 Exam-style questions

3.1 "We all know the reform failed" is problematic because it [1]

- **A** names a shared value
- **B** presumes the conclusion
- **C** is too formal
- **D** is a concession

3.2 Where the argument is weakest, the better tonal choice is to [1]

- **A** raise the volume
- **B** state the evidence plainly
- **C** add rhetorical questions
- **D** flatter the reader

3.3 Revise for tone: "Obviously anyone who has thought about this for five minutes agrees that the current policy is indefensible." [4]

4 Go further

- work through the **8.4 Using words and syntax for tone and style** lesson on the **Learn** page;
- read the **Audience, Tone, and Sentence Craft** section of the AP English Language handout on the **Know** page.

Solutions

2.1 it makes disagreement a failure of intelligence, so a reader who disagrees is insulted rather than persuaded.

2.2 naming a shared value states something both accept; presuming a conclusion smuggles the claim in as though already agreed.

2.3 (a) they notice the mismatch and discount the claim. (b) lower the temperature and let the evidence stand.

3.1 B. the disputed claim is asserted as common knowledge.

3.2 B. plainness invites assessment rather than resistance.

3.3 removes "obviously" and the insult to dissenters; replaces assertion of consensus with an argued basis; tone suits a reader who may disagree.