

## CLASS 03

# English — Reading Tone of the Passage

April 2026 · Faculty edition

Reading the author, not just the words on the page

### WHAT THIS CLASS DOES

#### A

#### WHAT 'TONE' MEANS IN CLAT

Definition · tone vs mood vs voice vs register · the four CLAT question stems · how distractors are built · the four mistakes students keep making

12 slides

#### B

#### A WORKING TAXONOMY OF TONES

Six tone families · about twenty-five named tones · the lexical and rhetorical cues that fix each one · six anchor passages drawn from journalism, fiction, judgments and policy

18 slides

# What we covered, what we add today

We have practised reading for facts and main idea — today we read the author

## WHAT WE HAVE DONE SO FAR

RC1

Reading for stated information

RC2

Main idea and central argument

RC2

Inference vs assumption

RC2

Vocabulary in context

## TODAY — TONE OF THE PASSAGE

A1

What 'tone' actually means in CLAT prose

A2

Tone vs mood vs voice vs register

A3

How CLAT examiners frame tone questions

B1

Six families of tone, with cue words

B2

Six anchor passages drilled together

B3

The ten tones CLAT keeps coming back to

# A

PART

A

## What 'tone' actually is

*Tone is the author's attitude — toward the subject, and toward you*

Definition · cousins · question stems · cue inventory · how distractors are built · the four mistakes

FOUNDATION

# Tone, in one working sentence



*Tone is the attitude an author takes toward the subject and toward the reader — felt through word choice, sentence shape and rhythm, rather than stated openly.*

## 01 ATTITUDE, NOT TOPIC

Two writers can write on the same subject — say, the new criminal code — and one can sound approving, the other indignant. The topic is identical. The tone is the difference.

## 02 INFERRED, NOT STATED

Authors almost never write 'I am being sarcastic now.' You read tone off the texture: which adjectives are reached for, which clauses are buried, what is laughed at, what is left unsaid.

## 03 STABLE, NOT SCATTERED

Within a single CLAT passage the author usually holds one dominant tone, with at most one shift. Your job is to name the dominant tone, and to spot the shift if there is one.

DISTINGUISHING THE COUSINS

# Tone vs Mood vs Voice vs Register

Four words students conflate; CLAT examiners do not

Term	Whose feeling is it?	How it is detected	CLAT relevance
TONE	The author's attitude to the subject	Adjectives, verbs, irony, what is highlighted vs buried	Direct question — 'the tone of the passage is ____'
MOOD	The atmosphere created in the reader	Imagery, setting, sensory detail (cold, dim, hushed)	Tested in fiction passages — 'the prevailing mood is ____'
VOICE	The author's recognisable identity	Recurring habits across a writer's work	Rare in CLAT, useful for distinguishing styles
REGISTER	How formal the writing is	Diction, contractions, jargon, sentence length	Helps eliminate options — judicial prose is not 'casual'

QUESTION STEMS

# Four ways CLAT asks the same thing



*Almost every tone question on the CLAT paper is a paraphrase of one of four stems. Once you recognise the stem, the search inside the passage narrows sharply.*

## 01 DIRECT NAMING

'The tone of the passage can best be described as \_\_\_\_.' Looks easy; punishes carelessness. The four options usually include one correct tone and one near-cousin (analytical vs critical, concerned vs alarmist).

## 02 AUTHOR'S ATTITUDE

'The author's attitude toward X is most accurately described as \_\_\_\_.' X is something specific in the passage. The answer is rarely the same as the overall tone — read carefully.

## 03 SHIFT IN TONE

'There is a shift in tone between paragraph 2 and paragraph 3 from \_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_.' Train yourself to mark the paragraph where the connector turns (however, yet, that said, in contrast).

INFERENCE, NOT SEARCH

# Why tone is never spelled out

*If the author had to label every paragraph 'I am being critical now,' it would not be writing — it would be a spreadsheet*

## WHAT YOU WILL NOT FIND

- An adjective like 'critically,' 'satirically' announcing the tone
- A topic sentence that says 'this passage is ironic'
- A line at the end summarising the author's mood
- Punctuation alone — exclamation marks are not enough
- A neat keyword in every paragraph

## WHAT YOU WILL FIND

- Adjectives that lean — 'breathless,' 'feeble,' 'remarkable'
- Verbs that judge — 'concedes,' 'insists,' 'mocks,' 'laments'
- Sentence shapes — short stabs for indignation, long sub-clauses for analysis
- Quoted material the author stages without endorsing
- Connectors that hint at the author's own stance — 'tellingly,' 'predictably'

### KEY TAKEAWAY ›

*Tone is read off the texture of the prose, not retrieved from a sentence. The skill is the same skill that lets you tell a friend's joke from a friend's complaint over a single text message.*

READING THE TEXTURE

# Three layers of tone cues



*When you scan a passage for tone, you are really scanning three layers of language at once. Train the eye to move through them in order.*

## 01 LEXICAL

Word choice. 'Reform' vs 'tinkering.' 'Far-reaching' vs 'sweeping.' 'Acknowledge' vs 'admit.' The synonym the author reaches for is rarely accidental.

## 02 SYNTACTIC

Sentence shape. Long, qualified sentences with 'although,' 'whereas,' 'to the extent that' point to analysis. Short, fragmentary sentences point to urgency, anger or contempt.

## 03 RHETORICAL

Devices. Rhetorical questions, italics, scare quotes, understatement, lists of three. Each device carries an attitude — scare quotes, for example, almost always signal disagreement.

HOW OPTIONS ARE BUILT

# Why the wrong answers feel right

CLAT distractors are not random — they sit one notch away from the correct tone, in a predictable direction

## THE FOUR DISTRACTOR MOVES

- Swap the FAMILY: pair 'critical' with 'analytical' — same temperature, different attitude
- Push the INTENSITY: replace 'concerned' with 'alarmist' — same direction, dialled up
- Flip the OBJECT: pair 'sceptical of the policy' with 'sceptical of the people'
- Borrow the SUBJECT'S tone: if the passage quotes an angry minister, offer 'angry' as a trap — that is the minister's tone, not the author's

## HOW TO DEFEND

- Underline two adjectives that lean the same way — that is your evidence
- Decide the family first, intensity second — never the other way around
- Ask: whose attitude is being described in this option? Author or someone in the passage?
- If two options both fit the family, pick the milder unless the passage shouts
- Check the closing paragraph — it usually anchors the dominant tone

### KEY TAKEAWAY ›

Most tone questions are won by eliminating two options on family alone, then choosing between two cousins on intensity. Train both moves separately.

MISTAKES THAT COST MARKS

# The four errors students keep repeating



*Across years of CLAT mocks, four mistakes account for the bulk of wrong tone answers. Each one has a fix — but only if you can recognise yourself in it.*

## 01 READING THE TOPIC

Treating a passage on corruption as 'angry' just because corruption is unpleasant. The topic is not the tone; the author may be coolly analytical about something distressing.

## 02 TAKING A QUOTE'S TONE

When the author quotes a furious editorial or a scornful judge, students hand the quoted speaker's tone to the author. The author may be dispassionate while reporting heat.

## 03 OVER-NAMING

Picking 'scathing' or 'incandescent' when 'critical' would do. CLAT prose rarely earns the strongest adjective. When in doubt, pick the calmer cousin.

CLAT'S FAVOURITE TEN

# Ten tones CLAT keeps coming back to

Each row: name, one-line definition, the giveaway cues, and the tone it is most often confused with

Tone	What it is	Giveaway cues	Often mistaken for
<b>Critical</b>	Disapproving judgement, calmly stated	flawed, inadequate, falls short	Analytical
<b>Analytical</b>	Breaks an issue down without judging	examines, weighs, considers	Critical
<b>Sceptical</b>	Doubting the claim, withholding belief	questionable, alleged, so-called	Critical
<b>Persuasive</b>	Pushes the reader to act or agree	must, should, urgently, imperative	Analytical
<b>Concerned</b>	Quiet worry; problem flagged	worrying, troubling, calls for attention	Alarmist
<b>Alarmist</b>	Heightened worry; danger raised	crisis, catastrophe, looming threat	Concerned
<b>Satirical</b>	Uses humour or mock praise to attack	scare quotes, irony, exaggeration	Critical
<b>Sombre</b>	Quiet, weighty, often elegiac	loss, silence, what remains	Pessimistic
<b>Appreciative</b>	Approval; recognition of merit	remarkable, welcome, commendable	Celebratory

VOCABULARY DRILL

# Glossary — Tone Vocabulary, Part 1

*Twelve words you will see in question stems and option lists*

**Tone**

Author's attitude felt through word choice and rhythm

**Mood**

Atmosphere created in the reader by setting and imagery

**Voice**

An author's recognisable, consistent identity across writings

**Register**

Level of formality — casual, neutral, formal, judicial

**Stance**

Author's position on a question — supportive, opposed, neutral

**Disposition**

Author's settled inclination toward the subject

**Diction**

The specific words an author chooses from many possibilities

**Connotation**

The feeling carried by a word beyond its dictionary meaning

**Inflection**

A small turn in attitude — often shown by a connector

**Cue word**

A word whose presence reliably signals a particular tone

**Distractor**

A wrong option engineered to look almost right

**Shift**

A change in tone within a passage — usually one paragraph in

# B

PART

**B**

## A working taxonomy of tones

*Six families · about twenty-five named tones · six anchor passages*

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Disapproving · Appreciative · Analytical · Ironic · Sombre · Polemical

THE MAP

# Six families, twenty-five tones

Most CLAT tones live inside one of these six families. Name the family first, the tone second.

DISAPPROVING

06

*tones in this family*

critical, censorious, indignant, sceptical,  
denunciatory, dismissive

APPRECIATIVE

04

*tones in this family*

appreciative, laudatory, reverential,  
celebratory

ANALYTICAL

05

*tones in this family*

analytical, expository, didactic,  
dispassionate, measured

OTHER THREE

10

*across ironic, sombre, polemical*

satirical · ironic · sardonic · sombre ·  
elegiac · plaintive · polemical ·  
exhortative · admonitory · urgent

FAMILY ONE

# Disapproving tones

*The author finds fault. The question is how openly, and how harshly.*

## NAMED TONES IN THE FAMILY

- Critical — calmly disapproves of a position or actor
- Censorious — sharply disapproving, often moralising
- Indignant — angry at something perceived unjust
- Sceptical — withholds belief; treats claims as unproven
- Denunciatory — publicly condemns; the strongest cousin
- Dismissive — refuses to engage at all; treats the subject as not worth taking seriously

## TEXTUAL CUES

- Lexical — flawed, troubling, inadequate, falls short, alleged, mere, supposed
- Syntactic — short declarative sentences; lists of three faults; final clauses that bite
- Rhetorical — scare quotes around the policy's name; rhetorical questions ('How can...?')
- Concessive followed by reversal: 'admittedly... and yet...'
- Naming the actor and a verb of failure in the same line

### KEY TAKEAWAY ›

*Within this family, intensity is the test. If the passage uses 'falls short' and 'inadequate,' the author is critical, not denunciatory. Pick the calmer cousin unless the prose visibly shouts.*

ANCHOR PASSAGE 1

# A critical tone in policy commentary

ANCHOR PASSAGE

## Editorial — Indian newspaper, on a draft labour code

DISAPPROVING

*The draft code is presented as a long-overdue consolidation. In substance, it is something more modest. Forty-four central laws are folded into four; that much is true. But the protections that mattered — the right to written notice, the worker's standing in inquiry proceedings, the obligation to consult a recognised union before retrenchment — survive only as enabling clauses, to be filled in later by rules. Until those rules arrive, the code is less a reform than an outline of one. Workers, who were promised clarity, will continue to live with discretion.*

CUE WORDS

- 'something more modest' — quiet putdown
- 'survive only as' — diminishing verb
- 'less a reform than an outline of one' — a denial dressed as definition
- 'continue to live with discretion' — final image of unfreedom

VERDICT

*Critical, not denunciatory — the prose argues, it does not shout.*

FAMILY TWO

# Appreciative tones

The author approves. The question is how warmly, and what the warmth signals.

## NAMED TONES IN THE FAMILY

- Appreciative — recognises merit; calm approval
- Laudatory — actively praises; warmer than appreciative
- Reverential — near-awe; treats the subject as inheritance
- Celebratory — marks an occasion or achievement

## TEXTUAL CUES

- Lexical — remarkable, welcome, commendable, instructive, owes much to, pioneering
- Syntactic — long, generous sentences; lists that accumulate virtues
- Rhetorical — direct compliment; affectionate naming; quoting the subject approvingly
- Concessive used to defend, not attack: 'whatever its imperfections, the achievement is real'
- Closing line that lifts rather than judges

### KEY TAKEAWAY ›

Watch the closing sentence in this family. Appreciative prose almost always ends with a sentence that gives the subject the last word, kindly framed.

ANCHOR PASSAGE 2

# An appreciative tone in literary memoir

ANCHOR PASSAGE

## Memoir — recollection of a teacher, mid-twentieth century

APPRECIATIVE

*He never raised his voice in the classroom, and never needed to. A boy who arrived late was met with a small movement of the chin toward the empty bench at the back, and the lesson resumed without comment. What he taught us, beyond the syllabus he set down each Monday in his neat upright hand, was that attention was something you owed the room you were in. Years later, when I sat in committees that ran on noise, I would think of him, and remember that the deepest authority is the one that does not need to be heard.*

CUE WORDS

- 'never raised his voice... never needed to' — paired praise
- 'neat upright hand' — affectionate detail
- 'attention was something you owed' — values claim, gently made
- 'the deepest authority is the one that does not need to be heard' — a reverent close

VERDICT

*Appreciative leaning to reverential — the closing aphorism elevates the subject.*

FAMILY THREE

# Analytical tones

*The author is taking the issue apart, not taking sides on it*

## NAMED TONES IN THE FAMILY

- Analytical — breaks the argument into parts and weighs each
- Expository — explains a process or position without arguing it
- Didactic — teaches a lesson; addresses the reader as student
- Dispassionate — pointedly avoids emotion; the most neutral
- Measured — restrained, even when the subject invites heat

## TEXTUAL CUES

- Lexical — examines, weighs, considers, on the one hand... on the other, suggests, indicates
- Syntactic — long sentences with subordinate clauses; conditionals; numbered or labelled steps
- Rhetorical — definitions, distinctions, source citations, careful hedging ('to some extent,' 'broadly')
- Absence of strong adjectives — the giveaway in this family is what is missing
- Closing sentence offers a finding, not a judgement

### KEY TAKEAWAY ›

*If you cannot find a single adjective that leans, you are almost certainly inside the analytical family. The next question is which cousin — didactic if the reader is being taught, dispassionate if the subject is heated.*

ANCHOR PASSAGE 3

# An analytical tone in academic prose

ANCHOR PASSAGE

## Academic essay — comparative public administration

ANALYTICAL

*The two reforms, although enacted within a year of each other, rest on different assumptions about how citizens approach the state. The first treats access as the binding constraint and so widens the channels through which a grievance can travel. The second treats trust as the binding constraint and so narrows the channels in favour of a single, well-staffed one. Each has produced gains; each has carried a cost. To say that one is the correct path is to take a position not on the reforms themselves but on which constraint, in this society at this moment, is the more binding.*

CUE WORDS

- 'although... rest on different' — even-handed framing
- 'each has produced gains; each has carried a cost' — symmetry
- 'to say... is to take a position' — the writer pulls back from taking one
- Absence of any strongly leaning adjective

VERDICT

*Analytical, with a measured close — no judgement, only a finding.*

FAMILY FOUR

# Ironic and satirical tones

The author says the opposite of what is meant — and trusts you to hear the difference

## NAMED TONES IN THE FAMILY

- Ironic — gentle gap between what is said and what is meant
- Satirical — irony aimed at a target; intends to wound
- Sardonic — dry, bitter irony; usually personal
- Mock-heroic — inflates the trivial to laugh at it

## TEXTUAL CUES

- Lexical — adjectives whose praise is too much: 'efficient,' 'remarkable,' 'visionary'
- Syntactic — sentence rhythm of solemn praise on a frivolous subject
- Rhetorical — scare quotes, italics, exaggerated lists, faux-formality
- A real verdict tucked into a clause that pretends to be an aside
- Closing line that seems to celebrate but actually deflates

### KEY TAKEAWAY ›

Satire is often misread as appreciative because the surface is praising. Read the third or fourth adjective — when the praise gets disproportionate, the author has stopped meaning it.

ANCHOR PASSAGE 4

# A satirical tone in opinion writing

ANCHOR PASSAGE

## Opinion column — on a recently launched government app

IRONIC / SATIRICAL

*The launch was, by all accounts, a triumph. Three ministers spoke at length, two sub-ministers spoke at greater length, and a 'live demonstration' was conducted in which the application opened on the first try, displayed the home screen, and was applauded. Citizens, who had not been invited, will encounter the application later, in their own homes, where it will offer them four languages, none of which is the one they wished to use, and a customer-care number which will, in time, also become an application.*

CUE WORDS

- Scare quotes around 'live demonstration'
- 'opened on the first try... and was applauded' — staging praise to mock
- 'will, in time, also become an application' — the closing deflation
- Absence of any direct adjective of disapproval — the irony does the work

VERDICT

*Satirical — the prose praises with a straight face and lets the absurdity arrive.*

FAMILY FIVE

# Sombre and elegiac tones

*The author is grieving — not loudly, not theatrically, but unmistakably*

## NAMED TONES IN THE FAMILY

- Sombre — heavy, quiet, weighed down
- Elegiac — mourning a loss; often a person, sometimes an era
- Plaintive — softly sorrowful, almost pleading
- Melancholic — settled sadness; often without a single cause

## TEXTUAL CUES

- Lexical — loss, silence, what remains, the last, no longer, in the years that followed
- Syntactic — slow, balanced sentences; pauses where a livelier prose would push on
- Rhetorical — naming small concrete things — a chair, a kettle, a footpath — to stand in for the larger absence
- Use of past tense even when describing present scenes
- Closing image rather than closing argument

### KEY TAKEAWAY ›

*Sombre prose rarely uses the strong adjectives of grief ('tragic,' 'heart-breaking'). The grief is in the rhythm. If the prose has slowed visibly, you are in this family.*

ANCHOR PASSAGE 5

# A sombre tone in literary fiction

ANCHOR PASSAGE

## Short fiction — a small town after a factory closes

SOMBRE / ELEGIAC

*The siren had stopped sounding the previous winter. For a few weeks the men still rose at the same hour out of habit, made their tea, and waited for it; when it did not come they sat with the cup in both hands and listened, instead, to the dogs on the colony road. The shops on the main street kept their old names a little longer, painted faintly above the new ones, and then they did not. By the time of the second monsoon there were children in the colony who had not heard the siren at all, and to whom its absence was simply how the morning was.*

CUE WORDS

- 'had stopped sounding the previous winter' — first sentence is a loss
- 'sat with the cup in both hands' — small, concrete gesture of waiting
- 'painted faintly above the new ones' — image of fade
- 'simply how the morning was' — closing image, not a verdict

VERDICT

*Sombre, with an elegiac close — the loss is named only by its consequences.*

FAMILY SIX

# Polemical and persuasive tones

*The author wants you to do something, or believe something, by the end of the passage*

## NAMED TONES IN THE FAMILY

- Persuasive — argues toward a recommendation
- Exhortative — urges action; the strongest cousin
- Polemical — picks a fight openly; takes a side
- Admonitory — warns; raises a finger
- Urgent — driven by a sense that time is short

## TEXTUAL CUES

- Lexical — must, should, the time has come, we cannot afford, the answer is
- Syntactic — direct address ('we,' 'you,' 'the reader'); imperatives; short closing sentences
- Rhetorical — repetition for force ('not only... but also...'); rhetorical questions inviting agreement
- Concessive used briefly, then dismissed: 'critics may say... but the truth is...'
- Closing line is a recommendation or a call

### KEY TAKEAWAY ›

*Persuasive prose almost always ends in a recommendation. If the closing sentence tells the reader what to do or to think, you are in this family.*

ANCHOR PASSAGE 6

# A persuasive tone in legal commentary

ANCHOR PASSAGE

## Legal commentary — on the appointment process for senior judges

POLEMICAL / PERSUASIVE

*The objection that the present method is settled, and so should not be disturbed, is the weakest of the objections; settled does not mean sound. A process which produces good appointments by accident is not a process — it is a custom whose results we have learned to live with. The case for change does not rest on any single bad appointment; it rests on the absence of a way to explain, to a citizen who asks, why this judge and not another. Until that explanation can be offered, reform is not a luxury. It is owed.*

CUE WORDS

- 'the weakest of the objections' — verdict declared early
- 'settled does not mean sound' — aphorism that closes a door
- 'is not a process — it is a custom' — distinction used to wound
- 'reform is not a luxury. It is owed.' — closing imperative in two beats

VERDICT

*Persuasive with a polemical edge — the closing two sentences are the recommendation.*

VOCABULARY DRILL

# Glossary — Tone Vocabulary, Part 2

*Twelve more words; each one has appeared in past CLAT option lists*

**Censorious**

Severely critical; carries moral weight

**Indignant**

Angry at something perceived unjust

**Denunciatory**

Publicly condemning; the loudest disapproval

**Dismissive**

Refuses to take the subject seriously

**Laudatory**

Actively praising; warmer than appreciative

**Reverential**

Marked by deep respect, near awe

**Didactic**

Teaching; addresses the reader as a student

**Dispassionate**

Pointedly free of feeling; calmly impartial

**Sardonic**

Dry, bitter irony; often personal

**Plaintive**

Softly sorrowful, almost pleading

**Exhortative**

Urging the reader to act

**Admonitory**

Warning; raising a cautioning finger

SYNTHESIS

# How to attempt a tone question in CLAT

*A repeatable five-step routine for every tone question, in under sixty seconds*

## READING THE PASSAGE

- First pass — note what the passage is about, in your own words
- Underline two adjectives that lean the same way
- Mark any connector that signals a turn (however, yet, that said)
- Read the closing sentence once more — it usually anchors the tone
- Decide the family before you look at the options

## ATTACKING THE OPTIONS

- Eliminate any option from a different family
- Of the survivors, ask: same intensity as the prose, or louder?
- Pick the milder cousin unless two cue words shout
- Re-check the option against the closing sentence
- Mark, move on — do not return unless time permits

### KEY TAKEAWAY ›

*Five steps inside the passage, five against the options. Practise the routine on three editorials a day for a week and the question becomes a fifteen-second answer.*

# KEY TAKEAWAYS

*Eight things to remember from Class 03*

01

Tone is the author's attitude — toward the subject, and toward you. It is felt, not stated.

02

Tone, mood, voice and register are four different things. CLAT tests all four; do not blur them.

03

Almost every CLAT tone question is a paraphrase of one of four stems. Recognise the stem first.

04

Read three layers — lexical, syntactic, rhetorical. Each leaves its own fingerprint.

05

Distractors sit one notch from the right answer. Decide family first, intensity second.

06

Six families cover most of CLAT — disapproving, appreciative, analytical, ironic, sombre, polemical.

07

Pick the calmer cousin unless the prose visibly shouts. CLAT prose rarely earns the strongest adjective.

08

Every closing sentence anchors the tone. Train yourself to read it twice before you mark.



CLAT GURUKUL

# THANK YOU.

*That wraps Class 03 — Tone of the Passage.*

01

## ATTEMPT

40-MCQ Practice Sheet (48 minutes)

02

## REVISE

Re-read this deck within 24 hours

03

## READ

One Hindu / IE editorial daily — name the tone