



TONE

Definition

In writing, tone is used to describe the approach in which a writer conveys a message to an audience. Tone is typically developed through word choice and sentence structure.

In technical writing, the audience should not feel any emotion beyond understanding and clarity. The purpose of technical writing is to communicate ideas in the most efficient manner, and clear tone supports clear communication. This means that tone should be straightforward and avoid slang, and writers should only use jargon within the audience's field.

Word Choice

One of the most common issues in technical writing is the overuse of unquantifiable adjectives or adverbs. An adjective is a word used to describe a noun, while an adverb is a word used to describe a verb.

Commonly overused adjectives in technical writing include: significant, substantial, and many.

Commonly overused adverbs include: greatly, very, fairly, particularly, especially, rarely, and quickly.

Using unquantifiable descriptive words changes the tone from a clear and technical voice to a more emotional, less evidence-based voice. This is due to the fact that none of these terms defines a degree or amount of the noun or the verb, so the reader is simply being asked to believe the writer rather than having the evidence provided.

That being said, the word significant is acceptable should the audience understand the limits and boundaries of the field. For example, if a number or quantity is provided, the writer may say that it is significant for one reason or another, but a reason must always be provided. The word significant is typically- used to describe findings as situated within the scope of a field.



Sentence Structure

Another common issue in technical writing is unclear sentence structure. The most important thing in technical writing is to make sure key information is defined and described first. Sentence structure, particularly the careful use of descriptive clauses, can help with this.

Technical writers should always remember to put the meaning of the sentence, the key information, at the beginning of the sentence, regardless of additional information.

For example, this sentence is unclear:

Despite the margins of error due to human error that occurred due to improper pipette cleaning, the results showed that the pH still remained acidic.

This is unclear because the beginning clause is not the main purpose of the sentence. The sentence is not describing the issues of human error, but instead discussing the pH results.

A better way to structure this sentence would be:

The results showed that the pH remained acidic, despite the margins of error due to improper pipette cleaning.