Nick, the narrator, says this:

And, after boasting this way of my tolerance, I come to the admission that it has a limit. Conduct may be founded on the hard rock or the wet marshes but after a certain point I don’t care what it’s founded on. When I came back from the East last autumn I felt that I wanted the world to be in uniform and at a sort of moral attention forever; I wanted no more riotous excursions with privileged glimpses into the human heart. Only Gatsby, the man who gives his name to this book, was exempt from my reaction—Gatsby who represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn. If personality is an unbroken series of successful gestures, then there was something gorgeous about him, some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life, as if he were related to one of those intricate machines that register earthquakes ten thousand miles away. This responsiveness had nothing to do with that flabby impressionability which is dignified under the name of the “creative temperament”—it was an extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness such as I have never found in any other person and which it is not likely I shall ever find again. No—Gatsby turned out all right at the end; it is what preyed on Gatsby, what foul dust floated in the wake of his dreams that temporarily closed out my interest in the abortive sorrows and short-winded elations of men.

- Why does Fitzgerald contrast “hard rock” with “wet marshes”? What does he mean?

- In the third sentence, note the metaphor and explain Fitzgerald’s choice of this particular metaphor.

- Explain the two conflicting attitudes the narrator has toward Gatsby. What is the effect of this paradox?

- Look at the last sentence. Identify the three dependent clauses. What is the effect of these three clauses, one following the other?

- Basically this paragraph contains two pairs of contrasting ideas. Identify them. What do they have in common?
**The Great Gatsby**—Study of Tone  
From Chapter 1—the two women on the couch

We walked through a high hallway into a bright rose-colored space, fragrilely bound into the house by French windows at either end. The windows were ajar and gleaming white against the fresh grass outside that seemed to grow a little way into the house. A breeze blew through the room, blew curtains in at one end and out the other like pale flags, twisting them up toward the frosted wedding cake of the ceiling—and then rippled over the wine-colored rug, making a shadow on it as wind does on the sea.

The only completely stationary object in the room was an enormous couch on which two young women were buoyed up as though upon an anchored balloon. They were both in white and their dresses were rippling and fluttering as if they had just been blown back in after a short flight around the house. I must have stood for a few moments listening to the whip and snap of the curtains and the groan of a picture on the wall. Then there was a boom as Tom Buchanan shut the rear windows and the caught wind died out about the room and the curtains and rugs and the two young women ballooned slowly to the floor.

Scott Fitzgerald was a master at creating atmosphere in prose. In this lesson, you will determine and discuss the ways that he enriches our sense of the mood in this hotel room where Gatsby, Tom, Nick, Daisy, and Jordan are spending a hot afternoon in New York City.

What are **mood** and **tone**, and how do they differ?

**Mood** and **tone** are defined differently by different authorities, and for once we will not consult *A Handbook to Literature* because its definitions may be confusing. For our purposes, **mood** is the emotional feeling the reader gets when reading a passage. **Mood** is not intellectual but emotional. A very young reader can hear or read the first paragraph of Edgar Allan Poe’s short story “The Fall of the House of Usher” and know that this is going to be a scary, foreboding story indeed.

**Tone,** however, is more intellectual and is created by the author through deliberate use of language. An author will manipulate all the devices of language you have been studying to create tone: figurative language, imagery, diction, details, syntax, etc. **Tone** is technically the author’s or narrator’s attitude toward the subject. Discussing tone means determining how the author uses language to show that attitude. One could say that the first paragraph of “The Fall of the House of Usher” *is* scary and foreboding, the same words used to describe mood. But an alert and well-trained student will be able to explain how Poe uses diction, long sentences with dashes, and other elements to create this tone.
Diction
Highlight the colors in this passage, determining how the colors create a certain effect. Particularly note the repetition of “white” and the idea of “white,” and consider connotative meaning.

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Figurative Language
Note the figures of speech, identify what particular type each example is, and connect to the tone of this passage. You should identify seven figures of speech.

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**Imagery**
Choose two images which particularly appeal to you and help you to imagine this scene in your mind. Explain how Fitzgerald creates a certain mood and tone with these images.

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**Sound Devices (especially onomatopoeia)**
Give examples of sound devices and connect to tone.

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**Syntax**
Note the polysyndeton in the last sentence. The repeated “and’s” simulate the wind dying down, as objects slowly settle in the room. This device creates the sense that the time it took for everything to settle back down and deflate after Tom shut the window was drawn out and long.

Now look at another syntactical pattern Fitzgerald uses—loose/cumulative sentences. This passage contains no periodic sentences, which develop a sense of tension as the reader waits for the main idea, the independent clause, by the period, at the end of the sentence. Every sentence in this passage is loose/cumulative, except for the last sentence which is a series of balanced independent clauses.

What is the effect of Fitzgerald’s use of these loose/cumulative sentences? Write several sentences as explanation.
Shift
Determine where a shift in tone occurs in this passage. What/who causes the shift? How do diction, syntax, and sound devices change after the shift? Explain in several sentences.
The Great Gatsby
From Chapter 1—Tom Buchanan

He had changed since his New Haven years. Now he was a sturdy, straw-haired man of thirty with a rather hard mouth and a supercilious manner. Two shining, arrogant eyes had established dominance over his face and gave him the appearance of always leaning aggressively forward. Not even the effeminate swank of his riding clothes could hide the enormous power of that body—he seemed to fill those glistening boots until he strained the top lacing and you could see a great pack of muscle shifting when his shoulder moved under his thin coat. It was a body capable of enormous leverage—a cruel body.

His speaking voice, a gruff husky tenor, added to the impression of fractiousness he conveyed. There was a touch of paternal contempt in it, even toward people he liked—and there were men at New Haven who had hated his guts.

How does Fitzgerald characterize Tom Buchanan?

Look at how Fitzgerald uses syntax.

- Note the type of sentences he tends to write (simple, compound, complex, compound-complex).
- Note the length of the sentences.
- Note his use of the appositive.

Look at how Fitzgerald uses diction.

- Look up the words “supercilious” and “fractiousness.”
- Find a pattern in the diction.

Look at how Fitzgerald selects details.

- What does he choose to describe?
- Is there a certain order to his description?
This is the opening paragraph of this chapter:

*About half way between West Egg and New York the motor-road hastily joins the railroad and runs beside it for a quarter of a mile so as to shrink away from a certain desolate area of land. This is a valley of ashes—a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens, where ashes take the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke and finally, with a transcendent effort, of men who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air. Occasionally a line of grey cars crawls along an invisible track, gives out a ghastly creak and comes to rest, and immediately the ash-grey men swarm up with leaden spades and stir up an impenetrable cloud which screens their obscure operations from your sight.*

- How is personification used in the first sentence?
- What are the connotations of the phrase “valley of ashes”?
- What is the effect of the alliterative “fantastic farm” and the fact that this area is even called a “farm”?
- What is the effect of the simile in the second sentence? Why would Fitzgerald choose this particular thing with which to compare the ashes?
- What is the effect of the polysyndeton?
- How are the “men” portrayed in this paragraph?
- What color predominates in this paragraph?
- What is Fitzgerald implying about the men by his use of the verb “swarm”?
- What two totally opposite things is Fitzgerald contrasting in this paragraph? How does this contrast help develop one of the main themes of this novel?
The Great Gatsby
From Chapter 3—Gatsby’s parties

This is the opening paragraph to chapter 3:

There was music from my neighbor’s house through the summer nights. In his blue gardens men and girls came and went like moths among the whisperings and the champagne and the stars. At high tide in the afternoon I watched his guests diving from the tower of his raft or taking the sun on the hot sand of his beach while his two motor boats slit the waters of the Sound, drawing aquaplanes over cataracts of foam. On week-ends his Rolls-Royce became an omnibus, bearing parties to and from the city, between nine in the morning and long past midnight, while his station wagon scampered like a brisk yellow bug to meet all trains. And on Mondays eight servants including an extra gardener toiled all day with mops and scrubbing-brushes and hammers and garden shears, repairing the ravages of the night before.

Every Friday five crates of oranges and lemons arrived from a fruiterer in New York—every Monday these same oranges and lemons left his back door in a pyramid of pulpless halves. There was a machine in the kitchen which could extract the juice of two hundred oranges in half an hour, if a little button was pressed two hundred times by a butler’s thumb.

At least once a fortnight a corps of caterers came down with several hundred feet of canvas and enough colored lights to make a Christmas tree of Gatsby’s enormous garden. On buffet tables, garnished with glistening hors d’oeuvre, spiced baked hams crowded against salads of harlequin designs and pastry pigs and turkeys bewitched to a dark gold. In the main hall a bar with a real brass rail was set up, and stocked with gins and liquors and with cordials so long forgotten that most of his female guests were too young to know one from another.

How does Fitzgerald enrich our sense of Gatsby’s parties?

- What syntactical device is Fitzgerald using in the second sentence? What is the effect?

- In this same sentence, how does Fitzgerald manage to use imagery that affects several senses? What is the effect?

- What is the effect of the simile in the second sentence? Consider the connotations of the word “moths.”

- How does Fitzgerald help you to imagine just exactly what the two motor boats look like, going through the Sound?

- What is the effect of the simile in the sentence beginning “On week-ends”?

- What is the effect of the polysyndeton in the last sentence of the first paragraph?
• Why would Fitzgerald choose to use a dash in the first sentence of the second paragraph? How does the dash link the two halves of this sentence?

• What is the connotation of “corps” in the third paragraph?

• What is the effect of the alliteration in the sentence beginning “On buffet tables”? 