ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

**author's perspective**: a writer's position on a topic; the combination of ideas, values, feelings, and beliefs that influence the way a writer looks at a topic

**tone**: attitude a writer takes to a subject, shown by the words used to describe it

HERE'S HOW

**Step 1: Identify the main idea.** Look for a topic sentence. Is a specific person, place, or thing the focus of the text? If so, that is the topic or subject. What is the author's most important message about the topic? That is the author's main idea.

**Step 2: Look for clues to the author's perspective.** Ask yourself:

- Does the author make direct statements about his or her position?
- Which people or characters does the author seem to admire or dislike? Which might be expressing the author's own views?
- How do the author's word choices express a positive or negative view?
- What tone, or attitude, does the author convey? In a persuasive essay, for example, negative words may convey an angry tone about something the author thinks is unfair. In a biography, flattering words may describe a famous person in an admiring tone.

**Step 3: Examine different clues in nonfiction or in fiction.**

- In nonfiction, examine such things as intended audience, selection of facts and their relative importance, emphasis on words or ideas.
- In fiction, look at literary elements such as setting, plot, and theme. Look at the cultural context of the characters—such as their home, work, and historical era.

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**Step 4: Consider the author's life.** An author's personal background and experiences, such as historical era, family life, and work, might affect his or her perspective. Reliable biographies and encyclopedias may give such details.

**Step 5: Describe the author's perspective.** Based on evidence in the text, or other reliable sources, summarize how the author feels about his or her topic. Be specific, but don't make assumptions that you can't support with evidence.
from Democracy in America
by Alexis de Tocqueville

No noble thought or conception above gain presided over the new settlements [of colonial Virginia]. The colony had hardly been established when slavery was introduced. That was the basic fact destined to exert immense influence on the character, laws, and future of the whole South.

Slavery, as we shall show later, dishonors labor; it introduces idleness into society and therewith ignorance and pride, poverty and luxury. It enervates\(^1\) the powers of the mind and numbs human activity. Slavery combined with the English character, explains the mores\(^2\) and social conditions of the south.

— Alexis de Tocqueville

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1. \textit{enervates}: saps; robs of energy and vitality
2. \textit{mores}: social customs
Directions: Read the boxed excerpt. Then, answer the questions that follow.

from “Song of Myself”

I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.

I loaf and invite my soul,

5 I lean and loaf at my ease observing a spear of summer grass.

My tongue, every atom of my blood form'd from this soil, this air,
Born here of parents born here from parents the same, and their parents the same,

10 I, now thirty-seven years old in perfect health begin,
Hoping to cease not till death.

Creeds and schools in abeyance,
Retiring back a while sufficed at what they are, but never forgotten,
I harbor for good or bad, I permit to speak at every hazard,
Nature without check with original energy.

—Walt Whitman

1. What is the topic of this poem?

____________________________________________________________________

2. How does the speaker describe his feelings about the present?

____________________________________________________________________

3. How does the speaker describe his feelings about the future?

____________________________________________________________________

4. In a sentence, explain the speaker's overall perspective on life.

____________________________________________________________________
Directions: Read the boxed excerpt from *Hard Times* by Charles Dickens. Then, answer the questions that follow.

[Mr. McChoakumchild] and some one hundred and forty other schoolmasters had been lately turned at the same time, in the same factory, on the same principles, like so many pianoforte legs. He had been put through an immense variety of paces, and had answered volumes of head-breaking questions, ... He knew all about all the watersheds of the world (whatever they are), and all the histories of all the peoples, and all the names of all the rivers and mountains, and all the productions, manners, and customs of all the countries, and all their boundaries and bearings on the two-and-thirty points of the compass. ... He went to work in this preparatory lesson, not unlike Morgiana in the Forty Thieves: looking into all the vessels ranged before him, one after another, to see what they contained. Say, good McChoakumchild: When from thy boiling store, thou shalt fill each jar brimful by-and-by, dost thou think that thou wilt always kill outright the robber Fancy lurking within-or sometimes only maim him and distort him?

1. What is the main idea of this excerpt?

2. How would you describe the tone of the first paragraph-the author's attitude toward his subject?

3. Analyze the figurative language in the second paragraph. What words suggest the author's perspective?

4. In one sentence, describe the author's perspective on the teaching method he describes.
Review: Author’s perspective is the combination of ideas, values, feelings, and beliefs that influence the way a writer looks at a topic. One clue to an author’s perspective is the tone, or attitude, conveyed in a work. The tone can be determined by noticing the kind of words the author uses to describe the subject.

Directions: First, read the boxed passage. Then, circle the letter of the best answer.

It is estimated that honeybees play a role in $20 billion worth of U.S. crops each year. These hard-working insects not only pollinate flowers and the fruits and vegetables we eat, but also pollinate cotton for clothing, crops for animal feed, and nuts and seeds for oils. Humans reap another especially sweet benefit of honeybee labor: honey, of course.

1. Which word best describes the tone of this passage?
   a. angry  
   b. admiring  
   c. critical

2. Which sentence best describes the author’s perspective on honeybees?
   a. Honeybee societies are a scientific wonder worth studying.  
   b. Much business and farming depends on honeybees.  
   c. Honeybees are a good role model for working hard.

3. In which work is a writer most likely to state his or her perspective directly?
   a. biography  
   b. narrative poem  
   c. play

4. Which of these best defines the term bias?
   a. expert knowledge  
   b. ignorance  
   c. prejudice

5. What does a sarcastic tone most likely suggest about the author’s perspective?
   a. The author does not take the topic seriously.  
   b. The author is afraid to state an opinion directly.  
   c. The author believes the opposite of what he or she is expressing.

6. Which of the following most clearly indicates bias?
   a. vivid descriptive language  
   b. strongly-expressed opinions  
   c. neutral language