Tones in Reading Comprehension

The focus of RC Passages in the CAT exam over the last few years has been on relatively short passages, but those which require you to 'infer' the answer. This means that the candidate needs to understand the passage holistically, including its many nuances, as the answer will not be found directly in the passage. The candidate is expected to exercise his mind and work out what the author is actually trying to convey, what his attitude or tone is towards the issue being discussed etc. This post will give an idea about some commonly used TONES for rc passages.

Firstly, what is really meant by TONE?
The 'tone' refers to the feelings or emotions expressed by the author towards an issue. It could also encompass his style of writing. What sentiment does the author express towards the subject? That is the tone.

SOME COMMONLY USED TONES FOR RC PASSAGES:

Acerbic   :Harsh/ severe; bitter

Aggressive :Forceful

Apathetic :Emotionless; not interested;unresponsive

Apologetic :Expressing remorse, regret

Belligerent:Aggressively hostile

Biased   :Favouring one thing/person/group over another for personal reasons.

Dogmatic   :Asserting opinions in an arrogant manner; dictatorial

Emotional :Easily affected by feelings actuated by experiencing love, hate, fear

Ethical   :Dealing with principles of morality; honesty

Sarcastic :Harsh, bitter derision; taunting

Grandiose :More complicated/ elaborated than necessary; pompous

Humanistic :Evincing keen interest in human affairs, nature, welfare, values

Humorous   :Funny and amusing

Introspective: Consider one's own internal state of feelings

EXAMPLE TO GET YOU STARTED:
Identify the tone of the passage 1

All registered cyclists have passed an examination covering traffic rules and safety. Those interested in the new BikeShare Program must register their bicycles and provide a major credit card to ensure payment. Call 555-1212 for more information.
(A) argumentative

(B) sentimental

(C) idealistic

(D) informative

(E) caustic

Answer:D informative

The passage is straightforward, giving you information without evaluating the content. Choice (D) is a perfect fit. Do you know the meaning of Choice (E)? A caustic tone drips acid all over the reader. You may hear a caustic tone during some arguments.

Identify the tone of the passage 2

On hot summer nights his family drove to the local ice cream stand, where, for just a few minutes, nothing mattered but the cold, sweet treat. No dessert, before or since, was as delicious as a double-dip cone eaten while he balanced on a log behind the parking lot.

(A)   nostalgic

(B)   biting

(C)   irreverent

(D)   cynical

(E)   satirical

Answer:A nostalgic

You're strolling down a memory lane here, with no potholes in sight. Therefore, nostalgic (yearning for a happy moment in the past) is your answer. Take a second for vocabulary: a biting tone cuts and hurts, an irreverent one mocks something considered holy, and a cynical tone is distrustful and bitter. You've probably seen satirical comedy shows that specialize in ridicule.

LETS PRACTICE:

Iguacu Falls, which sit on the border between Argentina and Brazil, are said to make Niagara look like a leaky faucet. The great cataracts stretch for two and a half miles across lushly foliaged rocky outcroppings before plunging a staggering two hundred and thirty feet into the river below.The falls region is densely forested, and is home to a wide variety of plants and animals, including a number of endangered ones. It is a paradise where parrots dive and swoop through the spray,butterflies cavort among the tropical plants and coatis, and giant otters and anteaters amble through the trees. The foliage itself varies between tropical and deciduous with orchids blushing in the shade of pines and ferns nodding gracefully in the shadow of fruit trees.

The author's attitude toward Iguacu Falls can best be described as which of the following?

A. Overweening pride.
B. Positive appreciation.
C. Mild acceptance.
D. Apathetic objectivity.
E. Cautious optimism.

First, try to identify words with positive or negative connotations, or identify phrases that reveal the author's attitude toward the falls. The first sentence reveals the author's reverence for the falls; if the Iguacu Falls make Niagara look like a 'leaky faucet,' they must be pretty impressive. Further, notice the adjectives "great," "lush," and "graceful," the positive noun "paradise," and the verbs "swoop," "amble," and "cavort," which evoke an Edenic portrait of the natural landscape.

The author's attitude, in short, is purely positive. Thus, we can quickly eliminate C, D, and E. We can also eliminate A for a different reason. It would be wrong to say that the author is "proud" of Iguacu Falls; after all, he doesn't take credit for its beauty. B is the best answer.

When it comes to RC, it is important to understand the words written on the page, but also to pay attention to the author's tone. Often questions concerning tone won't ask you to regurgitate information, but rather to make a classification of the author's opinion. When such questions arise, understanding the author's tone helps you a ton.
At the end of the day, you must read a number of passages on different topics on a daily basis. There is no short-cut for RC, and it requires sustained effort-it is advised that you read around 5-6 passages every day while preparing for CAT.