

Your Voice on the Telephone: Tone, Intonation and Emphasis

The way you use your voice on the telephone will impact on how the message is received. Tone of voice, intonation and emphatic stress all carry meaning and can affect the way the other person perceives your message.

Tone: Because there are no visual cues, a listener must rely on the tone of your voice to determine the mood and intent of the call. For example, if you are making a complaint, your tone will be serious. If you feel that your concerns are not being addressed, your tone may change to one of frustration. If you have complained about the same problem to several people, your voice will probably have an angry tone.

Intonation: Intonation refers to the way your voice goes up and down when you are speaking. It's important to vary your pitch to maintain the listener's interest. Having a monotonous or flat voice makes the conversation boring for the listener. It also sends the message that you are bored with what the other person is saying.

Emphasis: Emphasis refers to the way certain words are stressed to convey meaning. For example, in each of the following sentences different words are stressed, and the meaning of each sentence is different because of it.

*I was told **you** did the work. vs. I was told you **did** the work. vs. I was told you did the work.*



Audio 7.11: Listen to segments of eight telephone conversations. Discuss the questions below.

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| Conversation 1: | What message does the tone of the speaker convey?
Why? |
| Conversation 2: | Describe Eleni's tone. Describe Adam's tone at the end of the conversation. |
| Conversation 3 and 4: | Compare the tone in the two conversations. How are they different? |
| Conversation 5: | Describe Greg Milne's intonation. What impression of Greg would you have if you received this message on your answering machine? |
| Conversation 6: | Describe the caller's tone. What kind of impression does he make?
Would you consider ordering this product based on the sound of his voice?
Why? |
| Conversation 7, 8: | Which words are emphasized in each conversation? Why? How would you emphasize the words in Tom's sentences? |