

Tone

Consider:

Certainly we must face this fact: if the American press, as a mass medium, has formed the minds of America, the mass has also formed the medium. There is action, reaction, and interaction going on ceaselessly between the newspaper-buying public and the editors. What is wrong with the American press is what is in part wrong with American society.

Is this, then, to exonerate the American press for its failures to give the American people more tasteful and more illuminating reading matter? Can the American press seek to be excused from responsibility for public lack of information as TV and radio often do, on the grounds that, after all, “we have to give the people what they want or we will go out of business”?

— Clare Boothe Luce, “What’s Wrong with the American Press?”

Discuss:

1. What is Luce’s attitude toward the American press?
2. How does the use of rhetorical questions help express this attitude? In other words, how do the rhetorical questions help set the tone?

Apply:

Write an answer to the rhetorical questions in the passage. Adopt a tone of sneering derision as you express the attitude that the American press can indeed be excused from responsibility in order to make more money. Use at least one rhetorical question in your reply. Share your answer with the class.