Overview
This project diagrams and analyzes Sarah Addison Allen’s magical realism essay, “Just So You Know,” which informs readers that, just as they fall in love with books, books fall in love with them, too.

I focus on two defining features:
(1) second person point of view
(2) grammatical features from sentence structure and vocabulary

Background
Allen’s essay was originally published as a promotional feature for Barnes & Noble. This led me to wonder how the language of the essay functioned as an advertisement.

Research
Authorial Tone
Authorial tone is “the stance or attitude taken by an (implied) author towards his readers” (Leech and Short 225).

Some contributors to authorial tone are:
• “evaluative terms and evaluative inferences”
• “direct appeal to the reader through rhetorical questions”
• “generic statements and other references to a commonality of experience” (Leech and Short 227).

Second Person Narration
There is debate about readers’ ability to identify with a second person subject. Research shows that for readers to see themselves as “you,” there must be either past tense (DelConte) or “ubiquitous” present tense (Kittrell).

Methodology
I completed a full diagramming markup of each sentence in the essay. This annotation scheme diagrams:
• words’ parts of speech
• phrases and clauses (for both form and function)
• sentence type and overall structure
I also used Word and Phrase and Using English to find the Fog Index (expected grade level “readability”) and frequency ranges of the words (ranges that indicate how often words occur in the English language).

Contrasting tone and style
Allen’s essay creates a conversational tone:
• Sentences begin with coordinators (“but” & “and”)
• Fog Index (grade level readability) is 5.87
• 82% of words are Range 1 (among 500 most frequently used words in English)
• Dislocation and topic placement in sentences
• Addressing the reader creates sense of discussion

However, the heavy embedding created a complex style associated with literature.

Results: Authorial Tone
Contrasting tone and style
Allen’s essay creates a conversational tone.

Results: Second Person
The second person point of view creates a personal connection to the reader. Allen enhances this connection by:
• Acknowledging the reader’s thoughts and emotions
• Only using active verbs in past tense for “you” (e.g. “you carried it around”)
• Using present tense verbs for “you” to create a sense of knowledge of what the reader habitually does (e.g. “you fall in love with every book you touch”)

Conclusion
Allen’s essay engages readers by tapping into a communal love for literature, allowing them to indulge in their affection for books and imagine a world where their affection is returned. It offers a simple, secret magic to which readers can return time and again.

References