

Distinguishing Fact From Opinion

Grade Level: 6-12
Time: 45-90 minutes

Objectives:

- Be able to pick up clues in the wording of a sentence to determine if it is factual.
- Be able to explain the difference between statements of fact and opinion and their role in news reporting.

Curricular Connections: Journalism, Language Arts, Media Studies

Materials/Resources: Newspapers, a list of facts and opinions that can be presented as a quiz in which the student can mark whether it is one or the other by marking it either with an "O" or an "F".

Procedure:

- 1) Have students divide a journal page or piece of paper into two columns. Write "fact" at the top of one column and "opinion" at the top of the other. Students then list 3 facts and 3 opinions about a current event from the news. Create a similar chart on the board. After five minutes or so ask students to share an item from their list.
- 2) Discuss:
 - What is the difference between a fact and an opinion?
 - Are all facts true for everyone?
 - Can opinions also be true?
 - Which fact on the board could be an opinion and which opinion could be a fact?
 - What is the purpose for the editorial section of a newspaper? Why would different opinions be as important as unbiased reporting?
 - How does a breaking news story differ from a feature story? Why does the time of the reporting make a difference to how the story is reported?
 - When you watch, listen to or read news reports, what facts and details do you expect the story to include? What specific details and facts should the story cover (e.g. location, people involved, impact, etc.)? How are opinions expressed?
 - Is it important to consult news sources from more than one country or region about specific news topics or in general? Why or why not?
- 3) Divide the class into small groups, and assign each group a different paragraph of a news article or editorial. Give each group a piece of poster board or construction paper and a marker, and have each group select a sentence from the paragraph (the more complex, the better). The "secretary" of the group should write this sentence clearly at the top of the paper. Then, as a group, students answer the following questions, writing their responses below the sentence (written on the board for easier student access):
 - Is this statement an opinion or a fact, or does the sentence contain some elements that are fact and others that are opinions? Identify each. Are

there elements in the statement that are neither fact of opinion? If so, what are they?

- What elements in the sentence do you feel are unsubstantiated (unsupported)? What would a reporter need to do to substantiate these claims to include the sentence in a news article?
- Does the sentence address events or issues in the past, the present, or the future? What does this tense tell you about how factual or speculative the statement is?

Reflection:

- Students discuss differences between fact and opinion and the ramifications of misinterpreting opinion as fact, or fact as opinion.
- Students can look for instances of misinterpretation and respond in their journals.
- Students can write their own letter to the editor on a topic addressed in the news article.

Assessment:

1. Design another list of facts and opinions and give it as a quiz.
2. Discussion to gauge understanding of and ability to identify facts and opinions.
3. Students can be evaluated on journal entries and thoughtful completion of letters to the editor.