



DISTINGUISHING FACT FROM OPINION

SKILL LESSON

One of the keys to evaluating what you read and hear is the ability to distinguish fact from opinion. A fact is something that can be proved true. Facts can be counted, measured, or verified in some way. Opinions, on the other hand, are personal beliefs about what is true. Because people often use facts to support their opinions, it is important to know how to distinguish between the two. Once you have learned this skill, you will be better able to evaluate the information you read and hear on a daily basis.

HOW TO DISTINGUISH FACT FROM OPINION

1. **Determine if the information can be proved.** You can begin to identify facts by asking the same questions a journalist uses to write a good newspaper article. If the information answers the questions *Who? What? When? Where? Why? and How?* it probably contains facts. Next, determine if the facts can be documented, perhaps in sources such as almanacs or encyclopedias. Facts can be checked and verified, but opinions cannot.
2. **Pay attention to how the facts are used.** Note that a single word often can change a statement from fact to opinion. Certain phrases, such as "I think that . . .," "I believe that . . .," and "In my judgment . . .," are a clear signal that the writer or speaker is about to give an opinion.
3. **Identify "loaded" words.** Loaded words are words that contain an emotional appeal. Examples of loaded words are *exciting, beautiful, boring, and extremely*. These descriptive words signal an opinion because they express the writer's or speaker's personal point of view. Do not permit loaded words to influence your judgment of the facts.

PRACTICING YOUR SKILL

To practice your skill, examine the election campaign flier below. Then answer the questions that follow.

TERESA ORTEGA for CITY COUNCIL

Teresa Ortega is determined to make our city a better place to live. If elected, Ortega will

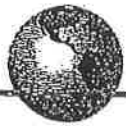
- Guarantee that our city taxes are fair and reasonable. Over the past 10 years, our city taxes have been increased four times.
- Expand the number of city buses available during rush hour. Currently, 25 percent of our public buses do not operate during rush hour.
- Add to and improve facilities for older citizens. At present, more than 200 of our older citizens are waiting to participate in city-run programs.

Teresa Ortega knows our city well. She is a dedicated, hardworking educator who has served successfully on the school board for more than 10 years.

ELECT TERESA ORTEGA

She will make our city a better place to live.

1. Identify the loaded words in the following sentence: "She is a dedicated, hardworking educator who has served successfully on the school board for more than 10 years." How might these loaded words influence people's interpretation of the facts?
2. Imagine that you are a journalist for a local newspaper. Which facts from the campaign flier would you include in your news article?



DISTINGUISHING FACT FROM OPINION

SKILL WORKSHEET

APPLYING THE SKILL I

Read each of the statements below. Then in the space provided, write *F* if the statement is a fact and *O* if the statement is an opinion.

- _____ 1. Abraham Lincoln was the sixteenth president of the United States.
- _____ 2. Joining the Peace Corps is the best way for someone to help people in need.
- _____ 3. Mayan pottery is the most beautiful pottery ever made.
- _____ 4. The two major U.S. political parties are the Democratic Party and the Republican Party.
- _____ 5. Patriotism is the strongest emotion people can feel.
- _____ 6. The best movies were produced during the 1970s.
- _____ 7. Albert Einstein developed the special theory of relativity.
- _____ 8. Congress adopted the final draft of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776.
- _____ 9. The United States was right to participate in the Persian Gulf War.
- _____ 10. Lee Harvey Oswald was arrested for the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

APPLYING THE SKILL II

For each topic listed below, write one statement based on fact and one statement based on opinion. Consult your textbook, a reference book, or your class notes, if needed.

1. China's geography

Fact: _____

Opinion: _____

2. Chinese Dynasties

Fact: _____

Opinion: _____

3. Chinese Daily Life

Fact: _____

Opinion: _____

4. Chinese History

Fact: _____

Opinion: _____