

Understanding News Media: Fact vs. Opinion

News articles are factual and often answer the questions of who, what, where, when, why and how. A writer's opinion should not appear in a news article and professional journalists make every effort to write news objectively.

◆ Fact ◆

Something known to exist or to have happened; something true or real.

However opinions are found in newspapers in editorial pages and columns, letters to the editor, book, movie and music reviews and political/editorial cartoons. In these forms of communication, writers often mix fact and opinion. So it is not always easy to tell whether something is based on verifiable information or someone's particular viewpoint. For example, a well written editorial uses several facts to back up the expressed opinion.

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The easiest way to tell the difference between a fact and an opinion is to ask if the statement can be proven. For example, "the apple is in the basket" is a fact. It can be proven by simply looking at it. On the other hand, "apples taste good" is an opinion. Many people, even most, might agree that apples do indeed taste good - but not everyone, all the time.

◆ Opinion ◆

A belief or judgment that rests on grounds insufficient to produce complete certainty or a personal view, attitude, or appraisal.

It is important to learn how to recognize the difference between fact and opinion in what you read. But if you read carefully with a questioning mind, you're sure to know and understand what is fact versus opinion.

Next installment: *Who's Telling the Story?*

Newspaper Activities:

- ◆ Remember that editorials contain both facts and opinions. Go through an editorial with a red pen or marker and circle every fact. Then go through with another color and underline opinion.
- ◆ As a class select an issue or topic you feel requires change. As a class, brainstorm some possible solutions to this problem. Write a letter or a blog post to the editor summarizing the thoughts of your class.
- ◆ Look at a news article and find the who, what, where, when, why and how. Does the article offer additional interesting details? Are these details facts or opinions? How can you tell the difference?