

Basics

Many texts will contain a mixture of both facts and opinions. You need to pay particular attention to this when reading, because you need to be able to separate the two and understand the differences. This can be very difficult sometimes, so it's important that you develop some techniques for assessing whether a statement in a text is a fact or an opinion.

The academic context

The separation between fact and opinion is even more important when you are reading for academic study. Most academic texts contain facts, but they can also often include some opinions. It is expected that when personal opinions are presented in academic texts, the author will make this clear to the reader.

Key features

These are the main things to remember when separating facts and opinions.

Facts

- Facts can be proved either by written documents or sometimes oral statements from reliable people who saw the event. There must be proof.
- Factual statements are often specific and use numbers such as dates or percentages.
- Facts will often refer to an outside reference. *According to the United Nations ...*
- Here are some facts:
I bought my brand new car on 21 December.
My brother works very late every Thursday.
English is the most widely-spoken second language in the world with over 600 million speakers, according to Professor David Crystal.

Opinions

- Opinions often use descriptive words such as adjectives. *The profits are enormous.*
- Opinions are often general or less clear than facts. *People are always buying new clothes.*
- Opinions often use expressions such as *I think ...* or *I believe that ...*

Challenges / difficulties

Sometimes a fact can be changed to become an opinion. And in some cases, authors add an opinion to a fact and it is hard to distinguish between the two. This is why you need to read carefully.

For example, here are the facts from above with an **opinion** added:

*I bought my brand new car on 21 December. **So it will run well for years.***

*My brother works very late every Thursday. **That's why he's not here.***

*English is the most widely-spoken second language in the world with over 600 million speakers, according to Professor David Crystal. **So it must be an easy language!***

How can I develop this skill?


As well as analyzing as many texts as possible, to separate the facts and opinions, you can also think about your own writing and even speaking. Think about these questions:

- When do you use facts and when do you use opinions?
- Do you make it clear which is which?
- Are there certain words or phrases you use when you're referring to facts, or to opinions?

Learning outcomes

Once students have learnt this skill, they will be able to show they can separate fact and opinion in reading texts.

Theory to practice

 **Work in pairs to make the phrases into sentences, either fact or opinion. Mark them with F for fact or O for opinion.**

Example:

Cats make great pets. O

Pizzas are _____

Tokyo is the world's _____

William Shakespeare was _____

President Obama is _____

Tom Hanks is _____

After Russia and Canada, the USA is _____

Discuss your sentences with another pair of students.

Ways to get more practice

Every time you read any sort of text, see if you can separate some facts from opinions. Look carefully!