



Handy Handouts®

Free informational handouts for educators, parents, and students

Helping Students Understand and Distinguish Fact vs. Opinion

by Becky L. Spivey, M.Ed.

Children learn and are able to tell the difference between fact and opinion in school as early as kindergarten. Distinguishing fact from opinion may be especially difficult for children whose syndromes or learning disabilities affect their critical-thinking or reasoning skills.



Today's TV, radio, and printed media ads bombard our children constantly with messages filled with testimonies and personal statements as well as newscasts filled with onesided stories and personal issues, and the list goes on. How, then, do we teach children to distinguish what is factual and what is personal opinion? First children need to know the definition of a fact and an opinion.

The Difference:

A **fact** states something that:

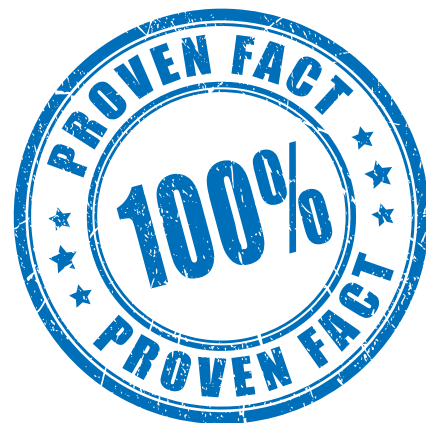


- **Happens.** (e.g., "A lunar eclipse happens when the moon aligns exactly with the earth and sun.")
- **Has happened or is certain to be true.** (e.g., "Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence.")
- **Is real or exists.** (e.g., "The sun is a star.")

An **opinion** states something:



- **Believed to have occurred.** (e.g., "The teacher gave us a pop quiz because she got mad at the class.")
- **Believed to exist.** (e.g., "The bus stop close to my house was built so I wouldn't miss the bus again.")
- **Believed to be true.** (e.g., "Grandma and Grandpa love me the most.")





Handy Handouts®

Free informational handouts for educators, parents, and students
(cont.)

Next we must teach children to recognize the language of verbalizing or writing opinions. A statement using adjectives and/or adverbs with words such as **always, never, should, all, none, most, least, greatest, good, better, best, beautiful, pretty, ugly, nice, mean, bad, worse, worst, tasty, tastier,** and **tastiest** is most likely an opinion because it represents someone's personal feelings or attitudes instead of presenting a fact that can be verified.



Because statements of fact can be confirmed, they are almost void of descriptive adjectives and adverbs like the words in bold listed on the previous page. Newspaper articles, TV, and radio reports are factual and answer the questions of *how, when, where,* and *to or with whom* something occurred. Journalists and reporters must write news reports without bias and save their opinions for editorials and other columns that allow and encourage expressing their feelings of approval or disapproval of an event or occurrence.

Advertisers write advertisements using a mixture of fact and opinion. For example, "*Denti-white Toothpaste costs less than many other brands of toothpastes, and children love the flavor!*" The first half of the statement "*Denti-white costs less than many other brands of toothpastes,*" can be proved, but "*children love the flavor*" is strictly an opinion. Not every child will love the taste. It is not always easy for children to spot a biased advertisement when a mixture of fact and opinion appear in the same statement. Remind children of the definitions of *fact* and *opinion* and also that opinions can be argued; facts cannot.

For more FREE Handy Handouts®, go to www.handyhandouts.com