

# L · E · S · S · O · N

## THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FACT AND OPINION

# 4

### LESSON SUMMARY

In order to make sense of what you read, you have to be able to tell whether you're reading fact or opinion. This lesson tells you how to distinguish what someone knows for certain from what someone believes.

**W**hat's the difference between fact and opinion, and what does it matter, anyway? It matters a great deal, especially when it comes to reading comprehension.

During your life, you'll be exposed to a wide variety of literature, ranging from analytical articles based on cold hard facts to fictional novels that arise wholly from the author's imagination. However, much of what you read will be a mixture of facts and the author's opinions. Part of becoming a critical reader means realizing that opinions are not evidence; for opinions to be valid, they must be supported by cold, hard facts:

- Things *known* for certain to have happened
- Things *known* for certain to be true
- Things *known* for certain to exist

Opinions, on the other hand, are:

- Things *believed* to have happened
- Things *believed* to be true
- Things *believed* to exist

**Answers**

How did you do? Was it easy to distinguish between the facts and the opinions? Here's what your marked-up passage should look like. The facts are underlined and the opinions are in boldface type.

There are many different ways to invest your money to provide for a finan-  
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**PRACTICE 3**

To strengthen your ability to distinguish between fact and opinion, try this. Take a fact, such as:

**FACT:** *Wednesday is the fourth day of the week.*

Now, turn it into an opinion. Make it something debatable, like this:

**OPINION:** *Wednesday is the longest day of the week.*

Here's another example:

**FACT:** *People insured by an HMO can only choose from doctors on that HMO plan.*

**OPINION:** *People insured by HMOs should be able to choose any doctor they wish.*

Now you try. Some suggested answers come after the questions.

6. **FACT:** *In the United States, you must be at least 21 years of age to drink alcohol.*

**OPINION:**

7. **FACT:** *There have been many proposals recently for a flat income tax.*

**OPINION:**

8. **FACT:** *Affirmative action programs have recently been eliminated.*

**OPINION:**

9. **FACT:** *Many companies have dress-down days on Fridays.*

**OPINION:**

10. **FACT:** *Several states have recently raised their highway speed limits from 55 miles per hour to 65 miles per hour or more.*

**OPINION:**

All people who earn more than \$100,000 a year should have a flat tax of 25 percent; people who earn less should not be taxed at all.

8. Affirmative action was a terrific program that should not have been eliminated.

It's about time we got rid of affirmative action.

9. Dress-down days improve employee morale. Dress-down days make workers less productive. Companies should allow their employees to dress however they wish.

10. Speed limits should remain 55 miles per hour. There should be no speed limit at all.

### Answers

There are, of course, many opinions you could form from these subjects. Here are some possible answers:

6. The legal drinking age should be 18.  
There should be no age requirement for drinking alcohol.  
You should not be able to drink alcohol until you're 25.
7. There should be a flat income tax of 20 percent.  
A flat income tax rate would be disastrous.

### SUMMARY

Being able to differentiate between fact and opinion is a very important skill. Like a detective, you need to know the difference between what people *think* and what people *know*, between what people *believe* to be true and what has been *proven* to be true. Then you will be able to see whether writers support their opinions, and, if they do, how they do it. Then you will be able to judge for yourself the validity of those opinions.

#### Skill Building Until Next Time

- Listen carefully to what people say today and try to determine whether they are stating a fact or expressing an opinion. When they offer opinions, do they support them?
- As you come across facts and opinions today, practice turning them into their opposites; make facts out of opinions and opinions out of facts.