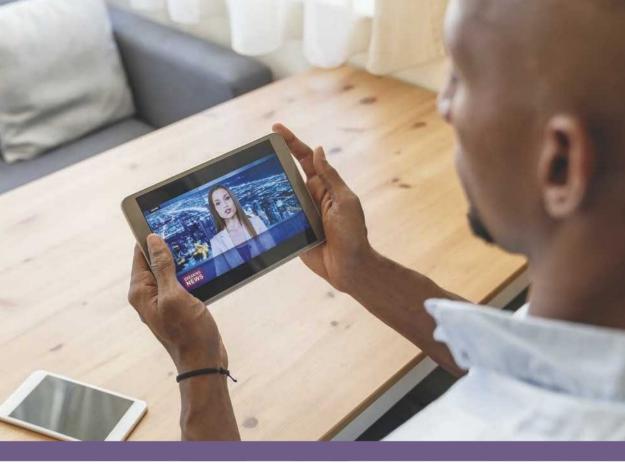# HOW CAN I DISTINGUISH BETWEEN FACTS AND OPINIONS?

People get information from a wide variety of sources. They read newspapers and magazines. They listen to radio and television broadcasts. They download podcasts. They visit websites, blogs, and social media. People are

People don't need televisions to listen to news reports. They can often find clips online.

constantly reporting news as it happens.

With so much information available, people

need to figure out which statements are

true. They can also work to figure out which

opinions are based on facts.

Journalists often interview experts while putting together news stories.

LOOK FOR THE SOURCE

People often read or hear statements

that are presented as facts. They can ask

themselves certain questions to figure out if

the statements are true. One question they

can ask is, does the statement tell where

the information came from? **Reputable**

journalists say where they got their facts.

They cite reports or experts. People can do

some independent research too. They can

search out the reports or experts noted.

They can see if the information matches up.

People can do this with any type of news

source. For example, many people on social

media aren't experts on the topics they

post about. But they may share information

anyway. People can double-check

statements they see on social media. For

example, if someone saw a Facebook post

that said, "We might have a blizzard this

week," the person could go to the National Weather Service website. He or she could also see if the local news station had any information on this. The person could check whether the statement is true.

Opinions are easy to identify if they are labeled. Journalists often put people's opinions in quotes. Sometimes they paraphrase what the person said. When this happens, the journalists still need to make it clear that it is someone's opinion.

Sometimes opinions aren't as easy to recognize. They may sound like facts. But certain words may signal that a

Legitimate news sources often have obvious tabs on their websites telling people which information is fact-based and which is opinion.

statement is an opinion rather than a fact.

Judgment words may be used. These

words can include *good*, *bad*, *better*, *worse*,

worthwhile, and *worthless*. Absolute words

such as *nobody*, *everybody*, *never*, or *always* are also signal words for opinions. For example, "The new gymnasium at the high school will cost taxpayers $24,000," is a fact that can be checked. On the other hand, "Building a new gymnasium at the high school is a good use of taxpayer money," is an opinion.

People can research opinions. An opinion such as, "My town has the best weather in the world," can't be proven. But someone could look up the weather records for the area. If the person enjoys warm temperatures and the weather in the

People may not always agree, but they can discuss their different opinions respectfully.

town averaged 70°F (21°C), he or she might

agree with the opinion.

WATCH OUT FOR BIAS

There are other questions people can ask

themselves when distinguishing between

facts and opinions. They can ask whether

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the source of the information has a **bias**.
When authors, reporters, or speakers have
biases, they tend to see things in a certain
way. This can slip into how they present
information. They may let their biases
overshadow facts. Or they may believe that
their biased opinions are actually facts.

For example, a weather reporter without
a bias on the topic might report, "The
weather today is 70°F (21°C)." Someone
with a bias in favor of cool weather might
say, "The weather today is too warm."
Another person with a bias in favor of hot
weather might say, "The weather today is

Responsible journalists do their best to keep their biases out of stories.

too cold." In this simple example, it's easy to

see that someone's opinion on the weather

is being shared.

Bias isn't always obvious. And it can be

harmful. Individuals may be biased against

certain groups of people. This can appear

in news reporting. For example, people

often protest things in society that they

don't like. There have been many protests

regarding police brutality toward people

of color. Danielle Kilgo is a professor of

journalism. She works at Indiana University.

Kilgo knows that people's opinions can be

shaped by what they see on the news. She

said, "This gives journalists a lot of power

when it comes to driving the narrative of a

demonstration."[7] Kilgo looked at how the

news treated different protests. She found

that movements focusing on Black and

Indigenous people's rights weren't as fairly

reported on as other types of protests.

Stereotypes can lead to discriminatory behavior.

They were shown as more violent and threatening. This type of reporting can shape people's opinions. It can make them believe harmful **stereotypes** about people.

Audiences can't avoid seeing bias in the media, but they can identify it. They can ask which point of view the news is reporting. Are any viewpoints getting left out? They

can also look carefully at the news report

and see if it's playing off of stereotypes. For

example, if a news outlet talks only about

Black people when referencing crime, it

may be biased against people of color.

SPOTTING STEREOTYPES

A stereotype is an oversimplified idea about a thing or person. People who believe stereotypes may think all members of a group have similar traits. Some of the most common stereotypes are based on gender, age, religion, race, and ethnicity. An example of a stereotype is, "Teenagers don't care about politics." Stereotypes are inaccurate. And they can be harmful. When reading the news, people should think critically about the information. They should pay attention to whether it uses stereotypes.

In addition, people can look at the language in a story. Are any loaded words being used? These words may show a reporter's bias. They can include terms such as *deserves*. Identifying biased opinions can stop people from adopting the same mindset. Instead, people can look up facts on their own. They can base their opinions on those.

Certain news sources have reputations for bias. For example, Fox News is known for being conservative. MSNBC is known for being liberal. One good way for readers to understand bias is to read stories

on the same topic from different sources.
How are the stories the same? How are
they different? Does one story include facts
that the other story leaves out? Do the
stories include opinions? Are they labeled
as opinions?

BE A CRITICAL THINKER

Some online news outlets and social media
creators want to keep people on their sites
for as long as possible. In order to do this,
they find out things about the reader. For
instance, many people look up information
using search engines. A computer program
notes which sites the reader chooses.

Looking critically at news outlets and the information presented can help people avoid unreliable sources.

Then the program posts more choices that

are similar to the ones the reader picked.

Because the information matches the

reader's interests, the reader stays online

longer. This may be good for the reader. It

can help her quickly find sources that she

wants. But the programs can also lead to

one-sided information. Readers need to

make sure the information they are being

given is accurate and complete.

Critical thinking is the best defense in

spotting facts and opinions. People can

go through a checklist to see whether a

source is reliable. For instance, reliable

FACT-CHECKING SITES

There are several websites that investigate news stories. They report on whether the information in the story is accurate. Examples of fact-checking sites are PolitiFact.com, FactCheck.org, and Snopes.com.

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articles often list the author. They also state the author's qualifications. Good articles typically list the date the piece was published too. In addition, readers should think critically about the content they are reading. Some articles may be disguised as news stories. They may actually be promoting products or simply trying to push opinions onto readers.

Learning to distinguish between fact and opinion is important. When people are able to analyze their news, they can come to their own conclusions. They can make the best decisions for themselves.