



1 FACT SHEET INFORMATION VS. OPINION

OBJECTIVES OF THE CURRICULUM

DISCIPLINE AND LEVEL CONCERNED

Secondary 4 English

- Reasoned opinion;
- Know different arguments and theses on a topic or construct an opinion on a controversial topic.

TARGETED DIMENSIONS OF THE DIGITAL COMPETENCY

- Collaborate using digital technology;
- Create content with digital technology;
- Develop and mobilize your information literacy;
- Communicate with digital technology.

SUGGESTED DIGITAL TOOLS

- Word cloud app, such as Mentimeter;
- Collaborative writing app, such as Padlet, Google Docs or Microsoft Word;
- Online blogging tool, such as Wix or Blogger.

EDUCATIONAL INTENTION OF THE GUIDE

By the end of these activities, the students will be able to distinguish information from opinion. They will be encouraged to develop reading reflexes that will help them sharpen their critical skills.

OBJECTIVES OF THE ACTIVITIES

- Create a collaborative document containing excerpts from information articles and opinion articles;
- Write a blog post in which information and opinions are presented;
- Using the blog's "Comments" function, distinguish information from opinion in the other students' posts.

INTRODUCTION

In the media, on the social networks, in conversations between friends and in classrooms, information and opinion coexist. In a newspaper, information texts (reporting, news, investigations) and opinion texts (editorials, columns, blogs) can even be found on the same page! To be an informed reader and citizen, it is essential to know how to distinguish quickly between information and opinion and develop your critical skills.

SIMPLE DEFINITIONS

Information is based on verifiable facts (events, observations, knowledge, statistics, dates, testimony). You can therefore verify it yourself and conclude whether it is true or false.

Examples

- Québec pays the highest income taxes and other taxes of any territory in North America;
- The top selling album in the world in 2018 was the soundtrack of the film **The Greatest Showman**.

Opinion is a personal opinion or a belief. Because it involves a subjective look, a point of view, it cannot be determined if an opinion is true or false.

Attention: An opinion may be based on verifiable information. Many columnists are hired by the media to give their point of view on current events, for example. This information can then be verified, but not an author's opinion.

Examples

- Quebecers pay too much income tax in relation to the services offered to the population;
- The best album of 2018 was the soundtrack of the film **The Greatest Showman**.

WHY IS IT DIFFICULT TO DISTINGUISH INFORMATION FROM OPINION?

Anyone can be wrong and nobody likes to fall into a trap. It may seem complicated to make a distinction, and this can mainly be blamed on our emotions (and our brain)!

Certain information or opinions on sensitive subjects can trigger strong emotions in the reader. For example, if information displeases and angers us, our reflex is to tell ourselves that this is an opinion or that it is false. On the other hand, if an opinion seems correct and reflects our own values, our brain pushes us to believe that it is based on true information.

THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN INFORMATION AND OPINION

You can encourage students to ask some basic questions to develop their reflexes and quickly identify what pertains to information or opinion. All the necessary clues are already found in the texts. Here are some simple tips to identify them when reading.

What is it based on?

Information is based on facts or events, news, statements, statistics, studies and observations. **Opinion** is based on someone's personal judgment, values or beliefs.

Is it verifiable or not?

Readers can verify information on their own, by making their own observations, consulting a dictionary, doing research or consulting other sources. Thus, information can be revised, reviewed and corrected. An opinion cannot be verified, because it is based on someone's perception and on observable evidence. An opinion cannot be false, so it cannot be corrected (even though you can change your opinion!)

Are sources cited?

The author of an **information** video or text normally should rely on sources and cite them (but beware: this isn't always the case). The author makes people speak, includes hyperlinks, will seek expert opinions, etc. If the author has no sources or they are vague, this is suspicious. Beware of phrases that generalize too much ("Scientists say", "people report that"...).

Tone and vocabulary

The tone used in an **information** text is neutral and descriptive. The author almost never includes himself or herself in the text. Personal pronouns and the third person (one, it, he, she and they) are preferred.

The quotations that introduce information are identified with a vocabulary that is objective, descriptive and easy to identify: the person quoted confirms, reports, observes, discovers, shows.

Some examples of terms used in an information text:

- **It was learned** around midnight that the next federal government will be a minority government;
- **It is** too late to eat; this restaurant is already closed;
- "The greenhouse gas reduction target will not be reached in 2020," Québec confirms;
- **According to a study** by Concordia University, buying ecological products contributes to consumers' sense of well-being;
- "The bombing has stopped," the CBC's special correspondent **reports**.

In an **opinion** text, the author makes his or her presence and ideas felt by adopting a subjective and critical tone. The personal pronouns used refer to the author: I, me, my. Opinion texts can be addressed directly to the reader: the pronouns, you, your, we and our then will be used.

The terms used by the author convey his or her opinion: they are subjective, positive or negative.

The vocabulary used to introduce quotations that convey an opinion is objective and often tinged with emotions. The person quoted believes, suggests, guffaws, laughs, threatens, exclaims, etc.

Some examples of terms used in an opinion text:

- **I am certain** that people must stop buying poor-quality clothing;
- "Canada has the best Olympic athletes," the coach of the national gymnastics team **proudly exclaimed**;

In 10 years, we will have confirmation that this law was a bad idea;

Justin Trudeau is a **good** Prime Minister.

Suggested activity: Have the students read a common text and ask them to highlight the words/expressions that pertain to an **opinion**. Use a word cloud app, such as Mentimeter, to identify these words during the reading and share them online with the class. Produce another word cloud for words /expressions pertaining to **information**.

Debatable or not?

We can't debate true **information**, because it is established. Therefore, we can't call it into question, even if it displeases us. An **opinion** can be debated, challenged and criticized. We can agree or disagree with an opinion and argue our own point of view.

EXERCISES

EXERCISE 1

These opinion texts are based on current events. Identify the excerpts that pertain to information and the excerpts that pertain to opinion.

- 1.1** A study by the World Health Organization (WHO) concludes that four out of five adolescents do not exercise enough. This isn't surprising, because don't you find that young people spend too much time on their cell phones? In addition, according to the author of the study, a large part of this result is due to the "digital revolution" and the screens omnipresent in their everyday lives. I am convinced that this statistic will only get worse in the next ten years.
- 1.2** The end of the work on the new Samuel-De-Champlain Bridge has been delayed several months, particularly due to the crane operators' strike. The crane operators' demands deserve to be heard quickly.
- 1.3** I learned yesterday that several remote Québec communities still don't have a high-speed Internet connection. Nowadays a good connection to the Web gives access to important academic resources, news, works of art, etc. The Internet also allows us to communicate with each other and be aware of what is happening in the world. This access, which we all take for granted, should be considered a fundamental right

Other suggested activity: The students can now go onto the Agence Science-Pressé website and find articles to identify passages pertaining to information and others pertaining to opinion. For this purpose, the teacher can make a collaborative document available to the students (using tools such as Padlet, Google Docs or Word), where each learner can paste information and opinion excerpts in the relevant column.

EXERCISE 2

In the following fictitious excerpts, identify the quotations that convey information and those that convey an opinion.

- 2.1** "Fewer and fewer youths are enrolling in drama courses in Québec secondary schools," Christiane Dubé recently revealed. Ms. Dubé is Principal of the École des Arts de Montréal, one of the only secondary schools in Québec that offers a concentration in arts for secondary school students. "These figures are worrying for us and for the survival of our school," she added.
- 2.2** "It has been proved that the presence of pets in Canadian homes reduces anxiety and stress," Catherine Kassar, Chief Veterinarian of the Shawinigan animal emergency clinic, recently revealed. "Why not allow the presence of pets in the workplace?" she asked. "The effects would probably be similar."
- 2.3** "I don't know where I'd be without my wife. She is the most courageous and tolerant person I know," the new Prime Minister declared in concluding his speech. "She founded two organizations to help newcomers, wrote a children's book and is currently heading the new refugee assistance program," he enumerated.

EXERCISE 3

Encourage the students to invent their own texts containing information and opinions. To do this, it could be interesting to have them write a blog post (class or personal post) on a platform such as Wix or Blogger. Inspired by a current events topic of their choice, the students would have to write a short article. It would be up to their peers to distinguish information from opinions by using the "Comments" function of the post in question.

ANSWER KEY

1.1

Information:

- A study by the World Health Organization (WHO) concludes that four out of five adolescents do not exercise enough.
- According to the author of the study, a large part of this result is due to the “digital revolution” and the screens omnipresent in their everyday lives.

Opinion:

- This isn't surprising, because don't you find that young people spend too much time on their cell phones?
- I am convinced that this statistic will only get worse in the next ten years.

1.2

Information:

- The end of the work on the new Samuel-De-Champlain Bridge has been delayed several months, particularly due to the crane operators' strike. The crane operators' demands deserve to be heard quickly.

Opinion:

- The crane operators' demands deserve to be heard quickly.

1.3

Information:

- I learned yesterday that several remote Québec communities still don't have a high-speed Internet connection. Nowadays a good connection to the Web gives access to important academic resources, news, works of art, etc. The Internet also allows us to communicate with each other and be aware of what is happening in the world.

Opinion:

- This access, which we all take for granted, should be considered a fundamental right.

2.1

Information:

- “Fewer and fewer youths are enrolling in drama courses in Québec secondary schools.”

Opinion:

- “These figures are worrying for us and for the survival of our school!”

2.2

Information:

- “It has been proved that the presence of pets in Canadian homes reduces anxiety and stress.”

Opinion:

- “Why not allow the presence of pets in the workplace? The effects would probably be similar.”

2.3

Information:

- “She founded two organizations to help newcomers, wrote a children's book and is currently heading the new refugee assistance program.”

Opinion:

- “I don't know where I'd be without my wife. She is the world's most courageous and tolerant person. I admire her!”