



HOW IS INFORMATION CONSTRUCTED?



3

FACT SHEET INFORMATION VS. OPINION

OBJECTIVES OF THE CURRICULUM

DISCIPLINE AND LEVEL CONCERNED

Elementary Cycle 3 English

Read a variety of texts

- Identify some characteristics of texts that illustrate information or ideas;
- Identify some characteristics of explanatory texts;
- Identify some characteristics of texts that seek to convince or call to action.

TARGETED DIMENSIONS OF THE DIGITAL COMPETENCY

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

SUGGESTED DIGITAL TOOLS

- Padlet;
- Mentimeter or Wooclap;
- Google Docs or Microsoft Word.

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

- Distinguish opinion from information in various excerpts from articles;
- Explain why it may be a problem to present an opinion as information;
- Write some quotations that present information and others that present opinions in order to learn how to tell the difference between them.

BEFORE STARTING: QUESTIONNAIRE

- Ask the students to find the “Opinion” or “Column” section in the newspaper or on an information website. What do they do to identify it?
- Ask the students if they think opinions are always identified in the media, on the Internet and on social media.

DEFINITION: INFORMATION

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

Examples

- Since its creation, the TikTok app has gained massive popularity. It often outperforms YouTube in the rankings of most downloaded apps.
- In Canada, each province decides on the date of the new school year and the date the school year ends.

DEFINITION: OPINION

An **opinion** is a judgment, a personal point of view or a belief. Because it involves a point of view, it can't be true or false.

An opinion may be based on verifiable information. Several columnists are hired by the media to give their point of view on current events, for example. This information then can be fact-checked, but the author's opinion can't be verified.

Examples

- TikTok is a much better video platform than YouTube;
- The school year started much earlier this year in Alberta. This is unfair, because students in British Columbia started the school year later.

WHY MUST YOU KNOW HOW TO DISTINGUISH INFORMATION FROM OPINION?

In newspapers, on the Internet, in conversations between friends, or even in the classroom, information and opinion mingle and coexist. It's important to know how to identify them.

Information calls on logic and rationality, while in the case of an opinion, emotions and beliefs are mainly involved.

Example

- Miriam wants to buy a green and grey jacket that she found at the mall. She hesitates for two reasons:
 - Her friend gave her opinion: she finds the jacket's colours are ugly;
 - Her father told her she already has a green and grey jacket. If she buys the new one, she will have two very similar jackets in her wardrobe.

She decides not to buy it because:

- Her friend's opinion is very important to Miriam. She trusts her taste in clothing and wants to please her.
- The information provided by her father is based on a verifiable observation. When she got home, Miriam went to confirm it. She already had a grey and green jacket. She decided she didn't need a second jacket in the same colours.

THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN INFORMATION AND OPINION

Sometimes it may seem difficult to tell the difference between information and opinion. In fact, the brain greatly complicates this task because it's very vulnerable regarding certain subjects, especially those that trigger strong emotions.

For example, if people are displeased or angered by information, they may reflexively believe that it's false or that it's an opinion. On the other hand, if an opinion appears to be true and reflects people's values, their brain may lead them to believe that the information is true.

There is a short list of questions people should ask themselves when considering a statement. They will help students know if they are dealing with information or an opinion.

What is my reaction?

First, take time to understand your own reaction letting yourself be influenced by a statement. Are you annoyed? Sad? Happy?

Opinions often are expressed with the goal of making us react. When people are experiencing emotions, they often forget that a distinction exists between information and opinion.

What am I reading? What am I watching?

Here's the second thing to do when you want to verify if a statement is information or opinion. Check if it appears on social media, in a newspaper, on a website...

The reason is very simple: the serious media make a clear distinction between the "Opinion" sections and the rest of their content. See whether the statement that interests you is found in an "Opinion", "Editorial", "Open Letter" or "Letters to the Editor" section, for example.

However, things aren't indicated that clearly on social media, or even in our everyday discussions. Now let's go to the third question.

Can I verify the statement?

In case of doubt, we must ask ourselves whether the statement could be verified, either on our own or by a more experienced person. If it's information, it is based on verifiable facts. If it's an opinion, it can't be true or false. The way the sentence is formulated can reveal whether it's a statement that could be verified by research.

Example

- The school newspaper publishes that the cafeteria menu will cost more this year. Damien decides to call the principal to check the statement. The principal confirms that it's true.
- Damien's friend tells him the cafeteria menu is too expensive. He can't check the statement, because everyone has a different idea of what's "too expensive".

What vocabulary does it use?

Are we troubled by a text or a video? Here are some clues as to whether we are dealing with an opinion or information. The first clue: the pronouns used.

In an information article, the tone is neutral and descriptive. Third-person personal pronouns are preferred: he, she, they.

In an opinion piece, the personal pronouns used often refer to the author, who presents his or her own point of view on a subject: I, me, my. Opinion pieces can also be addressed directly to the reader, using the pronouns you, your, we, us or our.

However, someone may express an opinion in an information article. For example, the journalist will ask a person what he thinks of an event that just occurred. When this is the case, look at the vocabulary used to introduce the quotations of the people interviewed.

Quotations that introduce information are identified by an objective, descriptive and easily identifiable vocabulary, such as: it is confirmed, it is reported, it is observed, it was discovered, it was shown, etc.

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.

EXERCISES

EXERCISE 1

These three fictitious texts mix information and opinion. Ask the students to identify the excerpts that are information and those that are opinion.

1. Last month, an 11-year-old boy was hit by a car while returning home on his skateboard. Last Thursday, a 16-year-old girl fell off her skateboard while crossing on a red light Skateboards are dangerous! I propose banning them from our neighbourhood streets once and for all.
2. A study by the World Health Organization (WHO) concludes that four out of five adolescents don't 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.
3. Bike for sale! Beautiful red bicycle, almost new, with horn. The wheels were changed last year. Space to attach a basket. This is the perfect bike for little cyclists who want to travel in style! Priced low at \$250!

EXERCISE 2

Some people try to pass off their opinion as information. Ask the students to explain if this is a problem and why?

EXERCISE 3

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

1. The presence of their pets during exams allowed several students to calm their anxiety last year at Niagara Falls School. "The pass rate increased by 15% because two dogs were present during the tests," said the elementary school's principal, Mary Mackenzie. "I believe that pets should be present in all schools," she continued.
2. University of Vancouver researchers have discovered a new seaweed rich in iron and protein. "Vegetarians will love it, because it's full of nutrients normally found in meat. It's very tasty," said René Wilson, who heads the research team. "We'll market it next year. It will be very popular," added his colleague, Virginia Martin.

ANSWER KEY

1.1

Information

- Last month, an 11-year-old boy was hit by a car while returning home on his skateboard.
- Last Thursday, a 16-year-old girl fell off her skateboard while crossing on a red light

Opinion

- Skateboards are dangerous!
 - I propose banning them from our neighbourhood streets once and for all.
-

1.2

Information

- A study by the World Health Organization (WHO) concludes that four out of five adolescents don't 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.
-

1.3

Information

- Red bicycle, almost new, with horn;
- The wheels were changed last year;
- Space to attach a basket;
- \$250.

Opinion

- Beautiful bicycle;
 - This is the perfect bike for little cyclists who want to travel in style!
 - Priced low!
-

3.1

Information

- "The pass rate increased by 15% because two dogs were present during the tests."

Opinion

- I believe that pets should be present in all schools."
-

3.2

Opinion

- It's very tasty;
- It will be very popular;
- Vegetarians will love it.

Information

- It's full of nutrients normally found in meat.
- We'll market it next year.