

## Tutorial



### DISTINGUISHING FACTS FROM EXPERT OPINIONS

#### EDITORIAL READING

#### MEDICAL CARE THAT'S NOT EVEN FIT FOR A HORSE MARGARET WENTE

## Understanding the Task

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- People don't often read editorials critically, believing the writer may know more about the subject than they do.
  - 'Well, if it is in print, it must be true'
- In fact, much of what is written is a SHADE of the truth. If you learn to read editorials critically, you will be able to detect BIAS and insufficient evidence.
- One way to improve your critical reading skills is to learn to distinguish between FACT and OPINION.

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## Getting Ready

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- Think of an editorial as a prosecutor's case. The prosecutor (writer) presents a proposition and builds a case around this proposition.
- Members of the jury (readers) decide if the evidence is sufficient to support this proposition.



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## Propositions

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- An effective editorial contains a proposition backed up by facts and the expert opinions of others.
- The proposition is a thesis statement: it tells the reader the writer's position on the subject of the essay.
- It can be located anywhere in the editorial, but usually it is near the beginning.
- Occasionally, the proposition is IMPLIED rather than stated outright.

× Can you find a clear proposition in 'Medical Care That's Not Even Fit for a Horse'?

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## Proposition

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- The proposition is the writer's JUDGMENT about something. A judgment is different from a preference, which is based on one's tastes:
  - I like Gino's pizza better than Ricardo's
- A judgment is an expression of belief backed up by objective evidence.
- Most editorial writers do not just present the facts; they also interpret those facts. *Like prosecution lawyers, they only present the facts that support their case.* They encourage their readers/listeners to agree with their judgment.

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## Recognizing Facts and Opinions

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- Editorial writers use facts as evidence for their points of view.
- A statement of fact can be shown to be true or false.
- Unlike opinions, facts can be checked to see if they are correct.
  - Critical readers will check to see if the writer is full of baloney/bologna.
- Read the following sentences and decide whether they are facts or opinions:

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## Facts or Opinions?

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- It was a perfect evening: cool, calm, and clear. **Opinion**
- Paris is the capital of France. **True Fact!**
- Metropolitan Toronto has the largest population of any Canadian city. **Stated as a fact, but incorrect.**
- The wonderful thing about e-mail is that you can save on long-distance telephone bills. **Opinion that happens to be true.**

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## Facts and Opinions

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- Opinions are sometimes easy to recognize because they use qualifier words that express VALUES, FEELINGS, and JUDGMENTS.
- Some examples of qualifier words are:
  - Perfect
  - Wonderful
  - Best
  - Most
- Other words to look for which indicate opinions:
  - Probably, May, Might, Would, Could

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## Recognizing Expert Opinions

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- Expert opinions are opinions of people who are considered authorities in their field. How do you know someone is an expert? Experts should have the following characteristics:
  - They should have authority because of their:
    - Position
    - Education
    - Experience
  - They should be knowledgeable about the topic.

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## Recognizing Bias

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- No matter how many facts they cite to support a proposition, editorials are seldom free from bias.
- A BIAS is a tendency to look at things in one way, ignoring other points of view.
  - Like Coffin insisting (despite evidence to the contrary) that the Leafs are the NHL's best.
- When you read an editorial, ask yourself about other points of view on the issue. Imagine what an opposing editorial would say.
  - In 'Medical Care', what might the health minister's proposition be?

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## Recognizing Bias

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- One way to recognize bias is to look for LOADED WORDS, which are words that trigger an emotional response (AKA rhetoric).
- Notice how the words in the following two sentences create different impressions. Which one is biased?
  - The lawyer cunningly avoided the reporter's questions.
  - The lawyer walked past the reporters on her way to a meeting.
- The first one makes judgments about the lawyer's behavior. The second one is unbiased since it doesn't make a judgment.
  - Where are the biases in 'Medical Care'?

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## Distinguishing Facts from Expert Opinions

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- Can the facts be shown to be true or false; that is, can they be verified?
  - If not, they are expert opinions.
- Do the opinions use qualifier words?
  - Probably, May, Might, Would, Could, Perfect, Wonderful, Best, Most
- Does this expert have authority based on position, knowledge, education, or experience?
- Would this person's authority be generally recognized in the community?

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