

Lesson 8 • Fact and Opinion

Step 1

A **fact** is a statement that can be verified in a reference source such as an encyclopedia, a dictionary, a map, or a history book. The statement “Key lime pie is a dessert made from the juice of key limes” is a fact because it can be verified.

An **opinion** is a statement that shows a personal belief or viewpoint. Statements that express that something is good or bad in some way are usually opinions. The statement “Key lime pie is the yummiest dessert on the whole planet” is an opinion. It expresses a belief that this dessert is good.

Example

Read this excerpt from a report on Benjamin Franklin. Then answer the questions.

A Very Smart Man

Of all our Founding Fathers, Benjamin Franklin was the smartest. In addition to being an influential politician, Franklin was also a writer, a printer, a scientist, and a musician. He was even Postmaster General at one point. Franklin was America’s greatest inventor ever. His many inventions include bifocals and the lightning rod. We would have never known about electricity without him. We might not have not have gained our independence either.

Circle the letter of the best answer.

- Which of these statements is a fact?
 - Of all our Founding Fathers, Benjamin Franklin was the smartest.
 - Franklin was America’s greatest inventor ever.
 - He was even Postmaster General at one point.
 - We might not have gained our independence either.
- “We would have never known about electricity without him” is an opinion because
 - it can be verified.
 - it states a personal belief.
 - it is in the encyclopedia.
 - nobody would believe this.

DIRECTIONS

Read this student’s persuasive essay on driver’s licenses. Use the Reading Guide to help you distinguish between fact and opinion. Then answer the questions on the next page.

Keep Teen Drivers Safe

① A debate is underway in our great state that will affect every teenager in it. The question is whether our state needs tougher driver’s license restrictions for teen drivers. The answer, of course, is yes.

② Currently, we do not have a “graduated driver’s license” law. Such a law would give teens certain freedoms on the road *only* as they gain more experience. Most states do have laws like this. It’s time we join them and embrace this great idea.

③ A graduated license usually has three stages. The first stage is getting a learner’s permit. Drivers with learner’s permits have to drive a certain amount of time with a licensed driver. The second stage is an intermediate license. This license lets teens drive unsupervised, but with certain restrictions. The restrictions might include not driving at certain hours of night or with young passengers. The last stage is a full driver’s license.

④ We all know that teens take risks—sometimes far too many. This applies when we’re behind the wheel, too. Who’s going to stop us from goofing off when we’re driving alone or out cruising with our friends? Who doesn’t like showing off a little and putting the pedal to the metal?

⑤ But there’s a deadly cost to our risk-taking. The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety says that car crashes are the leading cause of death among teens. According to one recent study, about a third of the people killed in accidents involving 15-, 16-, and 17-year-old drivers are the teen drivers themselves.

⑥ We cannot afford to lose our young people to loose licensing rules. I believe our state should adopt a strict three-stage licensing program. And we need to do this before it’s too late. The lives of our young people are at stake. The citizens of this state must stand up and act right now.

Reading Guide

Look for statements throughout this essay that can be verified. Those statements are facts.

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Does paragraph 2 contain all facts, all opinions, or both facts and opinions? How can you tell?

.....

Look for words throughout the essay that show what the author thinks or believes. These signal opinions.

.....

Circle four facts in this essay. Underline four opinions.

Lesson 8: Step 1

Circle the letter of the best answer.

1. Which statement from the essay is a fact?
 - A. And we need to do this before it's too late.
 - B. The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety says that car crashes are the leading cause of death among teens.
 - C. The citizens of this state must stand up and act now.
 - D. The answer, of course, is yes.
2. Which statement in paragraph 2 is an opinion?
 - A. Currently, we do not have a "graduated driver's license" law.
 - B. Such a law would give teens certain freedoms on the road *only* as they gain more experience.
 - C. Most states do have laws like this.
 - D. It's time we join them and embrace this great idea.
3. In paragraph 3, the statement "The first stage is getting a learner's permit" is a fact because
 - A. it makes a lot of sense.
 - B. everyone knows it is true.
 - C. it can be looked up and verified.
 - D. it shows a personal belief.
4. How can you tell if a statement is a fact or an opinion?
 - A. Opinions can be verified, whereas facts cannot.
 - B. Facts can be verified, whereas opinions cannot.
 - C. Both facts and opinions can be verified, so there is no difference between them.
 - D. There is no way to tell if a statement is a fact or an opinion.

Step 2

It is important to tell the difference between facts and opinions when evaluating texts. You have learned that a fact can be verified in reference sources whereas an opinion cannot be.

Another way to tell if something is not a fact, but an opinion, is to look for key words that express personal feelings or beliefs, such as *think* and *believe*. Words that make comparisons or judgments, such as *beautiful*, *horrible*, and *best*, also signify opinions. Study these opinion words:

Opinion Words	
Personal feeling words	<i>think, believe, suggest, perhaps, probably, usually, typically, should, must</i>
Judgment words	<i>good, bad, best, worst, most, least, always, never, all, none, fantastic, terrible, amazing, awful</i>

Example

Now read the following passage. Look for facts and opinions.

The Hindenburg

It was the worst disaster in aviation history. Ninety-seven people were bound to the United States from Frankfurt, Germany, aboard the German zeppelin LZ 129 *Hindenburg*. They arrived at their destination of Lakehurst, New Jersey, on May 6, 1937. At 7:25 P.M., while the 804-foot aircraft was landing, the rear of the ship caught fire and burst into flames. People on the ground watched helplessly as thirty-six people perished in a fiery ball that came crashing to the ground.

The zeppelin's makers had used hydrogen, which is flammable, as the lift gas instead of helium, which is not flammable. They never should have flown the aircraft using hydrogen. The *Hindenburg* disaster marked the saddest day in all of the 1930s.

Graphic organizers can help you distinguish fact from opinion. In this graphic organizer, list facts and opinions from this passage. Then underline all words that indicate an opinion.

Facts	Opinions

DIRECTIONS

Read this newspaper article about a recent space mission. Use what you have learned about fact and opinion to answer the questions. Make a graphic organizer on a separate sheet of paper to organize your thoughts.

A New Look at Mercury

A NASA spacecraft recently took surprising new photos of the planet Mercury. One image, taken by the space probe *Messenger*, resembles a giant spider in the middle of a huge crater, NASA scientists said.

The spider image is “unlike anything we’ve seen anywhere in the solar system,” mission chief scientist Sean Solomon of the Carnegie Institution of Washington told the Associated Press (AP).

The closest planet to the sun, Mercury is often considered similar to Earth’s moon. But the new images show some differences, such as areas of red and blue. “Mercury doesn’t look like the moon,” scientist Louise Prockter of Johns Hopkins University, which runs the *Messenger* mission for NASA, told the AP.

Robert Strom, a retired planetary scientist who was part of the *Messenger* team, had a strong reaction to the new photos. “What I saw was astounding to me,” Strom told the AP. Strom had earlier worked on the *Mariner 10* spacecraft, which photographed Mercury in 1974 and 1975. “This is a whole new planet we’re looking at,” Strom said.

The *Messenger* probe took 1,213 photos of Mercury. It is expected to fly by the planet again in the future and take additional pictures.

1. How does planetary scientist Robert Strom feel about the new images of Mercury?

HINT: You can read his exact words inside quotation marks.

2. List two statements from this article that are facts.

HINT: A fact is a statement that can be looked up and verified.

3. List two opinions from this article. List at least two words that signify opinions.

HINT: In newspaper articles, these are almost always found inside quotation marks.

Step 3

DIRECTIONS

Read this shampoo advertisement from a magazine. Then answer the questions.

Tame Your Hair With Tamezol!

- ① Does your hair have a bad attitude? Have you had enough trying to tame that frizzy, dry, messy mane that just won't do what you tell it?
- ② Well, say goodbye to bad-behaving hair forever. Tamezol shampoo's unique new formula turns unmanageable hair into hair that obeys. Tamezol's ingredients include lemon peel extract, orange fruit juice, potato starch, and eucalyptus leaf. These give your hair that slick, stylish sophistication you've been searching for.
- ③ Use just a small dab of Tamezol and feel its moisturizing agents working at once. When you rinse, your hair will feel its silkiest, smoothest, shiniest, and sleekest. It will be soft to the touch and dazzling to the eye.
- ④ Tamezol comes in six luscious fragrances: Citrus Garden; Raspberry Bouquet; Caramel Chai Latte; Grapefruit Smoothie; Apple Strudel Delight; and Wild About Walnuts.
- ⑤ It's sold in drug stores, grocery stores, and other retail outlets. Look for the florescent orange bottle wherever fine hair-care products are shelved. Try Tamezol once, and your hair will never misbehave again!

Circle the letter of the best answer.

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|---|---|
| <p>1. Which statement is a fact?</p> <p>A. It will be soft to the touch and dazzling to the eye.</p> <p>B. Tamezol's ingredients include lemon peel extract, fruit juice, potato starch, and eucalyptus leaf.</p> <p>C. Well, say goodbye to bad-behaving hair forever.</p> <p>D. Does your hair have a bad attitude?</p> | <p>3. The adjectives <i>silkiest</i>, <i>smoothest</i>, <i>shiniest</i>, and <i>sleekest</i> in paragraph 3 signal opinions because they</p> <p>A. make comparisons and judgments.</p> <p>B. can be believed by everybody.</p> <p>C. can be checked in a reference source.</p> <p>D. can be proven true or false.</p> |
| <p>2. One opinion about Tamezol is that</p> <p>A. it comes in a florescent orange bottle.</p> <p>B. it is sold in drug stores, grocery stores, and other retail outlets.</p> <p>C. it comes in six fragrances.</p> <p>D. if you try it once, your hair will never misbehave again.</p> | <p>4. Which word in paragraph 5 indicates an opinion?</p> <p>A. sold</p> <p>B. never</p> <p>C. wherever</p> <p>D. misbehave</p> |

DIRECTIONS

Read this speech by French physicist, chemist, and Nobel laureate Marie Curie. Use the Reading Guide for tips to distinguish fact from opinion. Then answer the questions on the next page.

adapted and excerpted from

“On the Discovery of Uranium” (1921)

by Marie Curie

① I could tell you many things about radium and radioactivity. But I shall only give you a short account of my early work. Radium is no more a baby. It is more than 20 years old. But the conditions of the discovery were somewhat peculiar. So it is always of interest to remember them and explain them.

② In 1897, I was working on uranium rays, which had been discovered two years before. I thought there should be some unknown element having a much greater radioactivity than uranium. I wanted to find and separate that element. It took many years of hard work.

③ The special interest of radium is in the intensity of its rays. They are several million times greater than uranium rays. The most important property of the rays is the production of physiological effects on human cells. These effects may be used to cure several diseases. Particularly important is the treatment of cancer.

④ For medical use, it is necessary to get the element in sufficient quantities. America produces many grams of radium every year. But the price is still very high. The radium is more than a hundred thousand times dearer than gold.

⑤ We must not forget that when radium was discovered, no one knew that it would prove useful in hospitals. The work was one of pure science. Scientific work must not be considered from the point of view of its direct usefulness. It must be done for itself, for the beauty of science. Then there is always the chance a scientific discovery will also benefit humanity.

⑥ The scientific history of radium is beautiful. The properties of the rays have been studied very closely. We know that particles are expelled from radium with a very great velocity near to that of light. We know that the atoms of radium are destroyed by expulsion of these particles. We know that radioactive elements are constantly disintegrating, and they produce at the end ordinary elements, principally helium and lead.

⑦ There is always a vast field of experimentation remaining. Some of you should carry on this scientific work and make a permanent contribution to science.

Reading Guide

Skim the passage for opinion words. Underline them. How many do you find?

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Which statement in paragraph 1 is a fact and can be verified?

.....

What is the one opinion stated in paragraph 4?

.....

What does the word *must* signal throughout paragraph 5?

.....

Do the words “we know that” in paragraph 6 indicate fact or opinion?

Circle the letter of the best answer.

1. Which of these statements from the passage is a fact?
 - A. Scientific work must not be considered from the point of view of its direct usefulness.
 - B. America produces many grams of radium every year.
 - C. The radium is more than a hundred thousand times dearer than gold.
 - D. There is always a vast field left to experimentation.

2. In paragraph 1, the statement “So it is always of interest to remember them and explain them” is an opinion because
 - A. it can be verified in a reference source.
 - B. it can be proven true or false.
 - C. it is the viewpoint of the writer.
 - D. nobody agrees with it.

3. Paragraph 4 provides
 - A. only facts about radium.
 - B. only opinions about radium.
 - C. both facts and opinions about radium.
 - D. neither facts nor opinions about radium.

4. What is the one opinion stated in paragraph 6?
 - A. That particles are expelled from radium with a very great velocity.
 - B. That the atoms of radium are destroyed by expulsion of these particles.
 - C. That radioactive elements are constantly disintegrating.
 - D. That the scientific history of radium is beautiful.

5. What two words in paragraph 7 signal opinions?
 - A. *always* and *should*
 - B. *field* and *experimentation*
 - C. *scientific* and *work*
 - D. *permanent* and *contribution*

DIRECTIONS

Read this student report on cartoon collector Art Wood. Then answer the questions on the next page.

Cartoon Collector

① When J. Arthur Wood, Jr. was a child, he started collecting cartoons anywhere he could find them. Sixty years later, he had 36,000 of them!

② Born in 1927, Wood always had a passion for cartoons. From a very young age, he practiced drawing cartoons by copying the styles of his favorite cartoonists. He even wrote to these artists and asked them to send him new cartoons. Many obliged and gave Wood their original artwork.

③ At age 16, Wood (who is known as “Art”) went to work as an elevator boy and hatrack attendant at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. He did this so he could have access to the library’s books on cartoon and caricature.

④ Wood was exceptionally talented and later became an award-winning editorial cartoonist himself. But he never stopped collecting other artists’ works. After three decades of collecting, in 1995, he opened the National Gallery of Caricature and Cartoon Art in Washington, D.C. It was the coolest gallery in town. Unfortunately, it closed in 1997 due to insufficient funding.

⑤ Wood then turned to his former employer, the Library of Congress. Today the library’s Art Wood Collection of Cartoon and Caricature contains approximately 36,000 original cartoon works by more than 2,800 artists. It is the largest private collection of original cartoon art in the world. It is the most treasured jewel in the library.

⑥ The cartoons in the collection are the funniest in the world. They include political cartoons, comic strips, and caricatures. There are even drawings from animated cartoons, such as Walt Disney’s 1937 “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs.”

⑦ Some of the pieces date back to the 1740s. Others are by contemporary cartoonists, such as Lynn Johnston, who created the “For Better or For Worse” comic strip, and Charles Schulz, creator of “Peanuts.” Several Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonists are represented as well. They are the most amazing cartoonists in the whole collection.

Circle the letter of the best answer.

1. The facts in this report
 - A. express a viewpoint about Art Wood.
 - B. describe the insides of the Library of Congress.
 - C. give information about Art Wood and his cartoon collection.
 - D. tell how the author feels about editorial cartoons.

2. The facts in this report can be verified by
 - A. asking a friend about Art Wood.
 - B. getting your teacher's viewpoint on Art Wood.
 - C. looking up newspaper articles about Art Wood.
 - D. looking for signal words.

3. What is the author's opinion about Art Wood's cartoon drawing abilities?
 - A. That he was a bad cartoonist as a young boy.
 - B. That he never should have become a professional cartoonist.
 - C. That his cartoons are worse than the ones in his large cartoon collection.
 - D. That he is a very talented cartoonist.

4. What word signals an opinion?
 - A. collection
 - B. funniest
 - C. world
 - D. cartoons

5. The statement "Some of the pieces date back to the 1740s" in paragraph 7 is a fact because
 - A. everyone knows it is true.
 - B. it can be checked and verified.
 - C. it expresses a personal belief.
 - D. this writer never lies.

6. Which of these is NOT a fact about Art Wood's collection?
 - A. It is the most treasured jewel in the library.
 - B. It contains approximately 36,000 original cartoon works.
 - C. It contains political cartoons, comic strips, and caricatures.
 - D. It contains pieces by contemporary artists.

7. On a separate sheet of paper, rewrite the last paragraph of the report, adding three more opinions.