

## Distinguishing Fact from Opinion



Students sometimes mistakenly think that everything they read in a textbook is fact. It becomes more of a challenge for them to separate fact from opinion when authors, especially authors of history texts, weave facts, inferences, and opinions into their writing to make it more interesting.

Being able to distinguish fact from opinion requires the ability to apply critical thinking skills to text. It requires a person to make judgments about what he or she reads. But the first step in separating fact from opinion is simply knowing how to recognize each.

- A **fact** may be defined as something that can be proved or verified. Facts may be verified by observation or by information in reliable sources, e.g., textbooks, reference books, periodicals, Internet sites.
- An **opinion** may be defined as an expression based on personal belief or judgment. Opinions are open to debate. There are a number of cue words that often signal an opinion. These words include *bad, good, may, probably, believe, feel, think, greatest, worst, should, should not, best, most, least, always, never, all, none*. Opinions are not verifiable.

# Distinguishing Fact from Opinion

**To Teach** students to distinguish fact from opinion, use Selection 12 and Graphic Organizer 16. You may want to make a transparency of the graphic organizer to use as you lead a discussion of the steps in the left column.

1. Introduce students to Selection 12 and Graphic Organizer 16.
2. Have students write three opinions from the reading.
3. Ask students to give reasons or state cue words that lead them to believe the statement is an opinion.
4. Have students write three facts from the article and cite reasons for identifying those statements as fact.

## Using Context Clues to Determine Meaning

1. Read the selection.

2. Write three opinions.

What cue word(s) or reason(s) identify the statement as an opinion?

Statement of Opinion	Cue Words/Reason
1. <i>The main importance of the Election of 1860 was that it was a mandate for free soil.</i>	<i>Main importance is debatable.</i>
2. <i>This figure illustrated the overwhelming support of the people for the exclusion of slavery from the territories.</i>	<i>Overwhelming support (support of those who voted, but maybe not of all people)</i>
3. <i>With Lincoln's election, the direction of the country became clear.</i>	<i>Debatable: Direction was not clear in the eyes of everyone</i>

3. Write three facts.

What evidence supports each statement as fact?

Statement of Fact	Evidence
1. <i>Lincoln and Douglas together received 69 percent of the total popular vote.</i>	<i>Can be proved through election statistics</i>
2. <i>South Carolina voted to secede on December 20, 1860.</i>	<i>Historical record</i>
3. <i>In February, Texas joined the other six.</i>	<i>Historical record</i>

**To apply** the strategy, have students read other passages from their textbook, use Graphic Organizer 16, and repeat the process they used in the practice session.

**To extend** the strategy, have students practice writing statements of fact and statements of opinion. Encourage them to use cue words.

Have students look for statements of fact and opinion in other things they read, e.g., the newspaper, magazines, other textbooks. Have them use Graphic Organizer 17 to record their findings

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### Selection 12 - The Results of the Election of 1860

The main importance of the election of 1860 was that it was clearly a mandate for free soil. (A *mandate* is authority given to someone to perform a certain task or to apply certain policies.) Lincoln and Douglas together received 69 percent of the total popular vote. This figure illustrated the overwhelming support of the people for the exclusion of slavery in the territories. With Lincoln's election, the direction of the country became clear. The supporters of slavery realized that they would now have to find a way to turn their threat of secession into reality.

South Carolina voted to secede on December 20, 1860. Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana followed in January 1861. In February, Texas joined the other six. On February 4, 1861, delegates from the seceding states met in Montgomery, Alabama, to form a new government called the Confederate States of America.

# Graphic Organizer 16

## Distinguishing Fact from Opinion

1. Read the selection.

2. Write three opinions.

What cue word(s) or reason(s) identify the statement as an opinion?

Statement of Opinion	Cue Words/Reason

3. Write three facts.

What evidence supports each statement as fact?

Statement of Fact	Evidence

# Graphic Organizer 17

## Distinguishing Fact from Opinion

**Directions:** Use the following chart to record statements of fact and statements of opinion. Write each statement in the first column. Put a check in the Fact or Opinion column to indicate what type of statement it is. Cite your reason(s) for classifying each statement as a fact or an opinion.

Statement	Fact	Opinion	Why?