

# PARENT TEACHING TIPS

*... on Fact vs. Opinion: A critical Reading Skill*

By Bill Welker, EdD

Parents, many of your children believe that what has been published or seen on the social media must be the “gospel truth.” Basically, they lack the critical thinking skills to know the differences between fact vs. opinion. With that said, let’s get right down to explain what can be considered as factual material and what can be questioned as an opinion. The following are clues that demonstrate the difference between fact and opinion.

## *Factual Clues*

If a statement concerns facts, it will pass one of the following three tests of truthful information:

1. Can it be observed?

Example: Last Saturday, it rained all day.

2. Has it been established by use over the years?

Example: A car will stop when it runs out of gas.

3. Can it be tested?

Example: Water will boil at 212-degree F or 110-degree C.

It is also important to note that factual material is usually concise and devoid of unnecessary descriptive words. Likewise, facts can not be argued and rarely evoke emotional responses. Finally, factual statements tend to be supported by data.

## *Opinion Clues*

There are always some indicators on the printed page or spoken that help to expose opinionated statements. Consider the following:

1. Opinionated materials often evoke passionate or emotional feedback.

Example: Capital punishment should not be outlawed in the United States.

2. Unlike factual material, statements of opinion can be argued.

Example: There is no doubt intelligent life exists in other worlds.

3. Opinionated accounts are frequently comprised of highly descriptive words (e.g., most, greatest, best tremendous, outstanding, worst, finest, strangest, etc.).

Example: You will lose pounds *forever* with our diet program.

4. Always be on the lookout for “buzzwords” that suggests an author’s opinions. (e.g., think, believe, assume, imagine, feel, surmise, may, contend, conjecture, suppose, etc.)

Example: George Washington is *believed* to have slept in this farmhouse.

5. Opinionated materials hint that what is in print is true for everyone (e.g., all, none, every, no, only, nobody, everybody, always, never, etc.)

Example: *All* people love to eat hot dogs and hamburgers.

After studying the above, let’s see how well you can determine the differences between factual and opinionated statements. Yes, you are now going to be tested. Below are six statements about snakes. Three are factual and three are opinionated. See if you can tell the difference. The answers are at the end of the column.

1. All individuals believe that snakes are harmful and dangerous creatures.

2. Snakes are cold-blooded animals, which means their body temperature is the same as the air around them.
3. A snake's life is centered around three basic needs: food, water, and warmth.
4. Rats and other small rodents would probably overrun the countryside if there were no snakes to keep them under control.
5. People imagine that a snake's skin is wet and slimy to the touch.
6. There are more than 100 kinds of snakes in North America, but only four are poisonous.

You can help your child better understand the critical reading skills regarding factual and opinionated material. And it's actually in your home – the newspaper. News stories are factual writings, whereas editorials are based on the columnist's views or opinions. Share this information with your child while reading such articles in the newspaper. This should more vividly demonstrate to your son or daughter that how fact differs from opinion in their daily lives. In essence, you are their critical reading teachers at home. Go for it!

(Answers: 1. Opinion; 2. Fact; 3. Fact; 4. Opinion; 5. Opinion; 6. Fact)

#### Parent Proverb

*“The bravest sight in the world is to see a great man struggle against adversity.”*

- Seneca

Next Month's Column: “Motivating Students to Write”

(Editor's Note: Dr. Bill Welker is a retired reading specialist who was a K-12 classroom teacher for 40 years. He was selected as a “Teacher of the Year” by the Wheeling Area Chamber of Commerce. Most recently, Dr. Welker was inducted into the West Virginia

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