

Knowing the difference between facts and opinions

A **fact** is a statement that can be proven true or false. An **opinion** is an expression of a person's feelings that cannot be proven. Opinions can be based on facts or emotions and sometimes they are meant to deliberately mislead others. Therefore, it is important to be aware of the author's purpose and choice of language. Sometimes, the author lets the facts speak for themselves.

The following is an example of a fact:

- With fewer cars on the road, there would be less air pollution and traffic noise; therefore, the use of mass transportation should be encouraged.

Sometimes the author may use descriptive language to appeal to your emotions and sway your thinking. The following is an example of an opinion:

- Do you like looking at a smoggy view from a congested highway? How do you feel about fighting road hugs and bumper to bumper traffic everyday? Mass transportation is the solution to all these problems.

Emotional language is neither right nor wrong, but the way in which it is used can be positive or negative; it is up to you to make reasonable judgement about the material you are reading and to draw your own conclusion.

Therefore, when you read, it is important to judge facts and opinions carefully in order to come to the right conclusion. Ask yourself, "are the facts reliable?" or "are the opinions based on the facts?" Once you answer these questions, you may be on the right track for finding and sticking to the facts; you be the judge.

Good Luck!

The Center for Humanities, Inc. (1977). Making judgments and Drawing Conclusions.
(Video)