

DISTINGUISHING FACT FROM OPINION

by Marne Ventura





© 2022 BrightPoint Press
an imprint of ReferencePoint Press, Inc.
Printed in the United States

For more information, contact:
BrightPoint Press
PO Box 27779
San Diego, CA 92198
www.BrightPointPress.com

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

No part of this work covered by the copyright hereon may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means—graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, web distribution, or information storage retrieval systems—without the written permission of the publisher.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Names: Ventura, Marne, author.

Title: Distinguishing fact from opinion / Marne Ventura.

Description: San Diego, CA : BrightPoint Press, 2022. | Series: Media literacy | Includes bibliographical references and index. | Audience: Grades 7-9

Identifiers: LCCN 2021012602 (print) | LCCN 2021012603 (eBook) | ISBN 9781678201944 (hardcover) | ISBN 9781678201951 (eBook)

Subjects: LCSH: Media literacy--Juvenile literature.

Classification: LCC P96.M4 V46 2022 (print) | LCC P96.M4 (eBook) | DDC 302.23--dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021012602>

LC eBook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021012603>

CONTENTS

AT A GLANCE	4
INTRODUCTION	6
SEARCHING FOR FACTS AND OPINIONS	
CHAPTER ONE	14
WHAT ARE FACTS AND OPINIONS?	
CHAPTER TWO	28
WHAT IS THE HISTORY OF FACTS AND OPINIONS IN THE MEDIA?	
CHAPTER THREE	42
WHAT ARE EXAMPLES OF FACTS AND OPINIONS?	
CHAPTER FOUR	56
HOW CAN I DISTINGUISH BETWEEN FACTS AND OPINIONS?	
Glossary	74
Source Notes	75
For Further Research	76
Index	78
Image Credits	79
About the Author	80

AT A GLANCE

- A fact is information that can be proven true. An opinion is a person's view or judgment.
- To figure out whether something is true, people can look at primary sources. Some people might use the scientific method to test a hypothesis. Others might rely on empirical data. These things help people establish whether something is a fact.
- Opinions can't be proven. But everyone has opinions. They're often formed by people's views of the facts.
- Starting in the late 1900s, some TV news networks began to broadcast content all day. In addition to fact-based reporting, they also had shows featuring people's opinions.
- In news stories, good reporters explain where their facts came from. They also clearly quote people's opinions.

WHAT ARE FACTS AND OPINIONS?

A fact is something that can be proven true. For instance, it's a fact that NASA landed a **rover** on Mars in 2021. People can verify this by checking NASA's website. They can see pictures the rover took on Mars. They can watch the landing video. They can even hear audio taken from the planet's surface.



In 2021, the Mars rover Perseverance took high-resolution photos of the planet's surface.

An opinion is a judgment or view about a situation. “It was a waste of money to send a rover to Mars” is an opinion. “Getting a rover to Mars is the most amazing thing humans have ever done” is also an opinion.



People often discuss their opinions with others.

It's important for people to know how to distinguish between facts and opinions. That way, people can better understand the information they read or hear. Knowing the difference between facts and opinions helps people make informed decisions in their everyday lives. People can prove something is a fact by using empirical data, reliable

sources, and the scientific method. People cannot prove that opinions are true. But they can evaluate them and see whether they're supported by facts. Daniel Patrick Moynihan was a US senator from New York. He once said, "Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not to his own facts."¹

USING DATA AND SOURCES

People sometimes use empirical data to figure out whether information is true or false. Empirical data is information people get through observation. They see, hear, feel, smell, or taste the world around them. Football fans know the final score of the



Microscopes allow scientists to study and get data from things they would not otherwise be able to see.

game because they watched the event. The chef knows the milk is spoiled because it smells sour.

However, people can't always be present to observe whether information is true or

false. For example, people who want to know more about history can't go back in time. They must rely on other sources of information, such as primary sources.

Primary sources are firsthand accounts of something. They can also be direct evidence of a situation or event. Imagine someone wants to learn more about Abraham Lincoln. She can't talk to the late president. To learn more about him, she needs to do research. One way to do this is to visit the Library of Congress website. It is run by the US government. It posts speeches and letters that were written by

Lincoln. These are primary sources. The information is reliable. The words in the documents come directly from the former president. Secondary sources can also be useful. These sources interpret or analyze a situation or event. Authors of reliable secondary sources often use primary sources to write their text. A book or an encyclopedia article about Lincoln is a secondary source.

THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD

Reliable facts also come from experts. For instance, to learn about space a person might get information from NASA scientists.



Museums often have primary sources on display, such as letters, newspapers, and photos.

These experts gather factual information and write reports. They do this by using the scientific method.

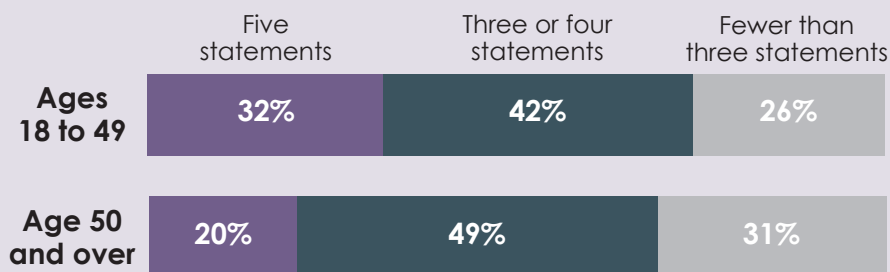
The scientific method is a system. It is used to find answers to scientific questions. Researchers use certain steps to study and learn things. First, they define a question. Next, they form a guess. This is also known as a hypothesis. Scientists then test the

FACTS CAN CHANGE

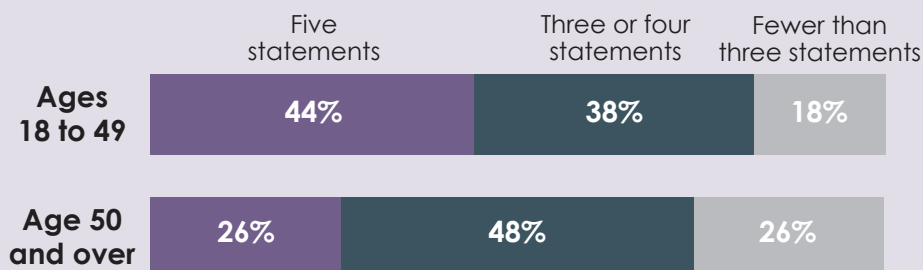
Facts can change over time. One example is the minimum hourly wage set by the US government. This rate is the least amount that employers can pay their workers. In 1956, the federal minimum wage was \$1.00. In early 2021, it was \$7.25. Scientific facts can change too. This knowledge evolves as researchers gather more evidence. They may draw updated conclusions based on new evidence.

TELLING FACTS FROM OPINIONS

Percentage of people who were able to correctly identify factual statements



Percentage of people who were able to correctly identify opinion statements



Source: Jeffery Gottfried and Elizabeth Grieco, "Younger Americans Are Better Than Older Americans at Telling Factual News Statements from Opinions," Pew Research Center, October 23, 2018. www.pewresearch.org.

In 2018, the Pew Research Center did a survey. It gave participants five opinion statements and five factual statements. People had to distinguish between them. It found that people ages eighteen to forty-nine were better at determining facts from opinions compared with older adults.

GLOSSARY

bias

a prejudice that influences one's opinions and beliefs, sometimes unfairly

climate change

the human-caused change in Earth's weather and climate patterns

fossil fuels

fuel sources made up of animal and plant remains from millions of years ago

pandemic

an outbreak of a disease that spreads across the globe

renewable energy

energy from sources that can't be used up, such as solar and wind

reputable

to have a good standing and be trusted by many people

rover

a vehicle that explores the surface of another planet or moon

stereotypes

widely held but simplified ideas and images of people or things

SOURCE NOTES

CHAPTER ONE: WHAT ARE FACTS AND OPINIONS?

1. Quoted in “An American Original,” *Vanity Fair*, October 2010.
www.vanityfair.com.

2. Quoted in Neil deGrasse Tyson, “The Good Thing About Science Is That It’s True Whether or Not You Believe in It,” *Twitter*, June 14, 2013.
<https://twitter.com>.

CHAPTER THREE: WHAT ARE EXAMPLES OF FACTS AND OPINIONS?

3. Quoted in Daniel Victor, Lew Serviss, and Azi Paybarah, “In His Own Words, Trump on the Coronavirus and Masks,” *New York Times*, October 2, 2020. www.nytimes.com.

4. Quoted in Tara McKelvey, “Coronavirus: Why Are Americans So Angry About Masks?” *BBC*, July 20, 2020. www.bbc.com.

5. Quoted in Holmes Lybrand and Tara Subramaniam, “Fact-Checking the Texas Energy-Failure Blame Game,” *CNN*, February 19, 2021.
www.cnn.com.

6. Quoted in Lybrand and Subramaniam, “Fact-Checking the Texas Energy-Failure Blame Game.”

CHAPTER FOUR: HOW CAN I DISTINGUISH BETWEEN FACTS AND OPINIONS?

7. Danielle Kilgo, “Riot or Resistance? The Way the Media Frames the Unrest in Minneapolis Will Shape the Public’s View of Protest,” *Nieman Lab*, May 30, 2020. www.niemanlab.org.

FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

BOOKS

Robin Terry Brown, *Breaking the News*. Washington, DC: National Geographic Kids, 2020.

Lisa A. McPartland, *The Importance of Good Sources*. New York: PowerKids Press, 2019.

R. L. Van, *Identifying Fake News*. San Diego, CA: BrightPoint Press, 2022.

INTERNET SOURCES

“‘Fake News,’ Lies and Propaganda: How to Sort Fact from Fiction,” *University of Michigan Library*, January 12, 2021.
<https://guides.lib.umich.edu>.

“How to Be an Expert Fact-Checker,” *National Geographic Kids*, n.d.
<https://kids.nationalgeographic.com>.

Kaiser Moffat, “The Importance of Media Literacy,” *Young Leaders of the Americas Initiative*, n.d. <https://ylai.state.gov>.

INDEX

- Abbott, Greg, 53
- bias, 64–65, 67–69
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 44–45, 47–48
- climate change, 6, 8–10, 25
- COVID-19, 44–50
- critical thinking, 13, 41, 55, 68, 72–73
- debate, 24
- decision, 13, 16, 73
- empirical data, 16–17, 24
- fossil fuels, 9–10, 27, 52, 54
- Gutenberg, Johannes, 30
- Harris, Benjamin, 31
- hypothesis, 22–23
- judgment, 15, 61
- Kilgo, Danielle, 66
- labeled, 12, 34, 60, 70
- masks, 44–48, 50–51
- Moynihan, Daniel Patrick, 17
- NASA, 10, 14, 20
- Pew Research Center, 26, 40, 47
- primary sources, 19–20
- printing press, 30, 35
- prove, 11, 14, 16–17, 24–25, 62
- quotes, 60
- renewable energy, 27, 52–54
- reputable, 59
- scientific method, 17, 21–24
- secondary sources, 20
- social media, 40–41, 56, 59, 70
- stereotypes, 67–68
- telegraph, 32, 35
- Texas snowstorm, 51–55
- theory, 24
- Trump, Donald, 46, 48
- Tyson, Neil deGrasse, 23
- wind turbines, 52, 55