Fact or Opinion?

Overview: This lesson looks at the distinction between fact and opinion, inviting students to recognize viewpoint, bias and value judgment in a selected piece of writing or TV broadcast.

Aim: To encourage students to analyze the distinction between fact and opinion and the ways they can be employed to support viewpoint

Objectives: At the end of this session students will be able to:

- identify the difference between fact and opinion
- use facts and opinions to support a viewpoint
- identify the variety of ways in which opinions are expressed
- distinguish tone and bias in a piece of writing or broadcast

Target group: Pre- GED & GED

Length: One two-hour session or two one-hour sessions

Materials and Resources:

- VCR and monitor
- A selection of newspaper articles
- Video clips from a news broadcast, a talk show or documentary OR a selection of controversial editorial pieces or articles from the newspaper

Activities:

1. Begin by choosing a book or a movie and writing the title on the board. Ask students to share what they know about the book or the movie and write their statements on the board, a chart or overhead transparency.

   Read each of the statements and ask students to determine whether the statement is a factor or an opinion. Can the statement be verified?

2. Brainstorm with the class the difference between fact and opinion and write the definitions on the board. Offer the class clear definitions that distinguish between the two.
A fact – a statement based on is something that is known to be true or to have happened. It is something that can be proven with evidence.

An opinion - statements that someone believes thinks or feels to be true

3 Distribute newspaper articles and ask students to work in groups of threes and underline in red the key facts in the article. They should underline the opinions in blue.

Ask each group to share two examples of each

Move on to ask each group to look for the ways in which opinions are expressed. They should look for:

- emotive words, such as outrageous or fabulous – i.e. words that express a strong feeling about the subject
- words that express a value judgment or bias – conservative, traditional, feminist
- words that convey the writer’s tone in relation to the subject – approving, warning, critical, angry, curious etc.

Ask students to share examples to illustrate these points.

4 Give students a controversial piece from a newspaper to read and ask them to identify the writer’s bias, tone and what they understand about the writer. Alternatively use a video clip from a news broadcast, a talk show or documentary to identify the point of view and bias of the broadcaster as expressed in the newscast, interview or narration.

5 Discuss responses and then ask students to individually rewrite the piece from a different standpoint. They should choose the view they want to express about the topic, but be sure to write the article from a different viewpoint from the author or broadcaster.

Discuss the rewrites as a whole group looking at the way the same story can be told from a different viewpoint. Student should then discuss how facts and opinions can be marshaled into persuasive writing.

6 Invite students to draw on this understanding of persuasive writing to express their opinions about a public issue in their local community.
Ask them to write a short persuasive piece to convince their community of their view.

**Homework:**

- Have students focus on a topical issue and create a comparative chart that identifies the similarities and differences between the coverage of the issue in the newspaper, on television and the radio. Different student groups should track the coverage in the different media.

  This activity could be further developed by inviting students to focus on the coverage of a topical issue by different TV stations i.e. PBS, Fox News or local channels or by different radio stations i.e. public radio, stations of the Pacifica Radio Foundation and commercial stations. Similarly the coverage should be compared and different student groups should take responsibility for tracking coverage by one of the stations.

  Students could also be encouraged to note where the topical issue is featured in the broadcast. Placement in TV or radio broadcasts implies importance. As such there is an implicit value judgment in this process.

**Follow up:**

- Invite students to share their findings in class and to discuss the similarities and differences in the coverage of the issue and the way they understand or “read” the placement decision in the broadcasts.