

# Lesson 8

## Fact Vs. Opinion and News Analysis



### GUIDING QUESTIONS

- 1 How do we distinguish between fact and opinion?
- 2 Why should we analyze our news?
- 3 What is the role of journalism?

### PURPOSE

When consuming news, it is important to distinguish between fact-based news reporting and commentary. A healthy democracy requires journalists to keep those in power accountable and to inform citizens.

In this lesson, students learn how to distinguish between fact and opinion, before analyzing news articles. In the *Consolidation* activity, they review the role of journalism in democracy. Under *Extended Learning*, an election scrapbook activity is suggested to consolidate this learning and research for the election.

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the lesson, students can:

- understand the difference between fact and opinion;
- distinguish between fact-based news reporting and opinion-journalism;
- analyze a news article;
- explain the role of journalism in democracy.

## Tips For Teachers

- Please use the activities and combine them in a way that is appropriate for your class.
- To assist with the *Election Scrapbook* activity, consider sharing news articles with students on a regular basis. Or implement a 'News of the Day' schedule where one student brings in an article each day to summarize and post on a news wall. The rest of class can choose to include it in their election scrapbook.
- Supplies/Needs: Slide Deck 8, 'What Is Journalism and Why Does It Matter?' video, copies of 8.1, 8.2, 8.3, and copies of 8.4 and 8.5 (if desired)
- Any videos, slide decks, handouts and activity sheets in Word can be found at: [studentvote.ca/canada](http://studentvote.ca/canada).

## Starter

1. Initiate a class discussion about a debatable topic and invite students to share their views (e.g., cats are better than dogs, uniforms should be mandatory at school, smartphones should be banned from schools).
2. Using Slide Deck 8 or independently, review key terms:
  - A **fact** is a statement that can be proven or checked (e.g., Canada has the longest coastline of any country in the world at 243,977 km).
  - An **opinion** is a statement based on individual viewpoints or beliefs. It cannot be proven or checked (e.g., video games are too violent).
3. Ask students to determine which of the eight fictional statements provided are fact-based or opinion-based and why (Activity 8.1).

## Activities

1. As a class, have a preliminary discussion about news and information. Questions to prompt discussion:
  - Do you follow the news? Why or why not?
  - Do you think you will be more interested to follow the news later in life? Why or why not?
  - What type of news interests you the most and why?
2. Using Slide Deck 8, review the idea of professional journalism. Journalism consists of gathering, evaluating, presenting and/or commenting on news and information to the public.
3. Explain to students that journalism includes reporting on a variety of topics (such as politics, sports, entertainment) but the most important distinction to make is whether a story is fact-based or opinion-based.

- **Fact-based news** journalism focuses on reporting of events, issues or developments with the purpose of informing people. While it may include analysis, it is based on facts and not opinion. It is also referred to "news coverage" or "straight reporting."
  - **Opinion journalism** provides a viewpoint about an event, issue or development. The purpose can vary, sometimes it is meant to criticize, praise, interpret or persuade. It may not be impartial or be balanced, and it is usually impacted by existing beliefs or opinions. Examples include editorials, columns and commentary.
4. Examine a print or digital newspaper as a class to distinguish fact-based news reporting from opinion journalism. What signals are there to mark opinion journalism as different from fact based news coverage? (e.g., labels, photos of columnists, different sections of the newspaper)
  5. Provide or ask students to find one article that is opinion-based and one article that is fact-based on the same subject, and to compare them by underlining all the facts in each piece.
    - How many facts did you underline in the news report vs the opinion piece?
    - How were the facts in the opinion piece used? Did they support the author's argument? Did you find them persuasive?
    - For the opinion piece, how might you go about checking the facts presented to you?

## Consolidation

1. Give students time to work in pairs to describe the term "journalism", and identify roles/characteristics, examples and non-examples (Activity 8.2). Students can also use images to communicate their thinking.
2. Prior to the next step, have students become familiar with key terminology associated with journalism by matching terms with their definitions (Activity 8.3).
3. Review the function of journalism in democracy by watching the video 'What Is Journalism and Why Does It Matter?'
4. Create a class definition for the term "journalism." Students can also add to their worksheet (Activity 8.2) to include additional roles, examples and non-examples.

## Extended Learning

The *Election Scrapbook* (Activity 8.4) has been created to consolidate the learning from this lesson and to help students improve news literacy skills and habits during the election campaign. Students will research the political parties, candidates and issues while also evaluating news articles and sources. To support this activity, students will need access to various newspapers and technology for online media.

This assignment can be used as a summative assignment at the end of the Student Vote program. This ongoing activity should begin once students have become familiar with the parties and the electoral process.

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

**Journalism** consists of gathering, assessing, presenting and/or commenting on news and information.

Journalists play a critical role in our democracy. They hold government and other sources of power to account, help inform citizens about events and developments, foster debate about issues and give people a voice.

During an election, journalists provide news and perspectives about the parties, candidates and issues, fact-check the statements of leaders and candidates and place the campaign's events in context. Without journalists, citizens would miss an invaluable resource to help them decide when politicians are telling the truth or acting in the public's best interests.

Journalism can take different forms and have different purposes. It is helpful to analyze the purpose so that we can assess credibility and potential bias.

**Fact-based journalism** focuses on the reporting of events, issues or developments with the goal of informing people. While it may include analysis or assessment, it is based on facts and not opinion.

**Opinion journalism** provides a viewpoint about an event, issue or development. The purposes of opinion journalism can vary; sometimes it is meant to critique, praise, interpret or persuade. Examples include editorials, columns and commentary. Columnists at professional news organizations are paid to put current events into perspective in order to help readers form their own opinions. This type of journalism is not meant to be impartial – it is based on the values and beliefs of the individual presenting the information.

Distinguishing between fact and opinion is a fundamental skill of news and information literacy. When we mistake opinion for news reporting, it can impact how we understand issues and events.

Not all stories that look like journalism are real journalism. To determine which news we can trust, we need to look to the practice of fact-based journalism. It involves research, assessment and verification where the central goal is to produce an accurate and fair representation of the facts.