



## INSTRUCTOR'S GUIDE



### Teaching Technique 12

# Fact or Opinion

#### ACTIVITY TYPE

- Active/Engaged Learning
- Writing

#### TEACHING PROBLEM ADDRESSED

- Surface Learning

#### LEARNING TAXONOMIC LEVEL

- Application: Analysis & Critical Thinking
- Learning How to Learn

# Fact or Opinion

*Fact or Opinion* encourages students to critically evaluate information by questioning what they read.



1

Clarify your teaching purpose and learning goals for using *Fact or Opinion*

2

Identify the learning task's underlying problem and craft the prompt

3

Set assignment parameters for completing the prompts

4

Develop a plan for learning assessment or grading

5

Communicate assignment instructions to students

6

Implement the technique

7

Reflect upon the activity and evaluate its effectiveness

# Step-By-Step Instructions

In this section we provide you with guidance on each of the seven steps involved as you consider this technique.

## STEP 1: CLARIFY YOUR TEACHING PURPOSE AND LEARNING GOALS

In today's world of information overload, it can be challenging for students to distinguish between what is fact and what is opinion. This technique, *Fact or Opinion*, has students practice this skill. This is a flexible technique that can be used across many different disciplines and fields. It could be used in conjunction with a reading assignment, video, lecture, or other content-based activity.

This technique provides students with opportunities to critically question what they read or hear. *Fact or Opinion* helps students to become critical readers and to construct arguments when informed proponents or opposing points of view are not available. It also aids students in seeing how scholarly articles and other assigned readings are voices in a conversation rather than something that is set in stone and believed without question. It provides students with the opportunity to see their responsibility to actively participate as they read. This also allows students to evaluate an author's thesis, reasons, and evidence, which helps them become better learners over time.

*Fact or Opinion* can be a useful learning assessment technique. You can assess student ability to formulate critical questions as well as their ability to write about the subject at hand. It can help you gauge the extent to which students understand what is fact and what is not. It can provide you with insights into where students are in their developmental processes by identifying which students see an issue from one side only or whether they are able to recognize that there can be different perspectives on a given issue. It also provides students with a glimpse into their learning, thus serving as an instrument of self-assessment.

## STEP 2: IDENTIFY THE LEARNING TASK'S UNDERLYING PROBLEM AND PROMPT

The problem is inability to distinguish fact from opinion. Choose a prompt that asks students to identify facts and opinions from a reading, video, lecture, or other assignment of our choice.

## STEP 3: SET ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS

- Determine whether you ask individuals, pairs, or groups to complete the assignment.
- Determine whether they will complete the work out of class or in class.
- Determine how long students will have to complete the assignment.
- Determine whether students will be submitting a product.

# Step-By-Step Instructions (CON'T)

## **STEP 4: DEVELOP A PLAN FOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT OR GRADING**

If you want to use the activity as a grade, consider whether it would work best as part of a participation or engagement grade. To score, when a student responds, you can use a simple plus, check, or minus to gauge for accuracy of responses.

## **STEP 5: COMMUNICATE ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS TO STUDENTS**

For this technique, consider developing a handout that provides a set of statements from the assignment. Have students indicate whether each statement is fact or opinion. Alternately consider a handout with two columns, one for facts and one for opinions, and ask students to create their own lists.

## **STEP 6: IMPLEMENT THE TECHNIQUE**

- Find an article, newspaper story, or excerpt from a larger text that has a mixture of facts and opinions.
- Review the text, making your own list of all the facts and all the opinions to ensure sufficient content and to make assessment of responses more efficient.
- Determine the parameters of the assignment, such as how many statements students should identify, how long student responses should be, and whether they should be bullet points or complete sentences.
- Explain to students that they are to read the text, making a sincere and conscious attempt to identify factual statements as well as those statements that are the author's opinions, feelings, or values.
- Share the text, and ask students to create a list of facts and opinion. Provide students with time to respond.
- Take up their responses, and score each item as correct or incorrect (plus or minus). Consider responses in each category.
- Consider holding a class discussion to correct any misconceptions.

# Step-By-Step Instructions (CON'T)



## **STEP 7: REFLECT UPON THE ACTIVITY AND EVALUATE ITS EFFECTIVENESS**

When reflecting on the activity and how effective it was, consider the following questions:

- Did the technique match the course learning goals and objectives?
- Did it meet my goals for this learning module?
- Was it appropriate for the students?
- Did the technique keep the students engaged?
- Did it promote student learning?
- Did it provide me with information about student understanding?

If you answer yes to all or most of these questions, next consider how you might improve the activity for the next use.

# Support Materials



The materials in this section are intended to help you with the process of implementing this technique.

## **SUPPORTING CONTENT: SAMPLE HANDOUT**

Consider the following sample handout on page 7 to help you implement, review, and assess student responses to *Fact or Opinion* in your classroom.

## FACT OR OPINION SAMPLE HANDOUT

Read the statement from the Mean's et al (2010) article on online learning below. Indicate with a checkmark in one of the columns to the right whether you believe this statement is a fact or an opinion.

STATEMENT	FACT	OPINION
1.) Online learning has roots in the tradition of distance education, which goes back at least 100 years to the early correspondence courses.		
2.) Online learning—for students and for teachers—is one of the fastest growing trends in educational uses of technology.		
3.) With the advent of the Internet and the World Wide Web, the potential for reaching learners around the world increased greatly, and today's online learning offers rich educational resources in multiple media and the capability to support both real-time and asynchronous communication between instructors and learners as well as among different learners.		
4.) Classes with online learning (whether taught completely online or blended) on average produce stronger student learning outcomes than do classes with solely face-to-face instruction.		
5.) The field lacks a coherent body of linked studies that systematically test theory-based approaches in different contexts.		

Name \_\_\_\_\_

# Online Adaptation

This section is intended to help you with the process of implementing and assessing *Fact or Opinion* in your online class.

## HOW TO GET STARTED

- Find a text that has a mixture of facts and opinions and use it to create a list of statements.
- Create a quiz in your Learning Management System prompting students to identify the text statements as facts or opinions and submit their answers.
- If a significant percentage of students are unable to accurately differentiate fact from opinion, consider implementing a follow-up discussion forum.
- As an alternative to the quiz, you can download a handout in our free templates to be used in an assignment.
- In your LMS instruction pane, provide directions, expectations, and your handout for students to fill out and submit.



# Technique Template

Following are two templates to assist you as you think through how you might implement this technique in your own class. The first is a completed template, providing an example of how Claire Major adapted *Fact or Opinion* in her course, *Reading Research in Higher Education*. The second is a blank template for you to fill out to tailor this technique for your course.

# Technique Template

Sample *Fact or Opinion* Completed Technique Template:

Content from Claire Major

## *Reading Research in Higher Education*

Course Name

### **COURSE CHARACTERISTICS**

What are the situational factors that impact this course? For example, is it on campus or online? How many students? Is it lower division or graduate? Are there student attributes such as attitudes, prior knowledge, reasons for enrolling, and so forth that should be taken into account as you consider this technique?

*This is a graduate level research course that we offer as part of an executive EdD in Higher Education Administration. The course has approximately 15 students enrolled each term. The program is an accelerated one, and this is one (1) of four (4) research courses they take prior to writing their dissertations.*

### **STEP 1: CLARIFY YOUR TEACHING PURPOSE AND LEARNING GOALS**

Why are you choosing this technique? What do you hope to accomplish?

*In this course, students read research articles to become familiar with research design, methods, writing conventions, and so forth. Over time, I have noticed that they sometimes have difficulty distinguishing between information authors cite as fact and what they are sharing as opinion. In their writing, students write about everything in the article as if it is fact, rather than identifying that the author argues or concludes something. I'm choosing this technique to give them practice with this important skill.*

## STEP 2: IDENTIFY THE LEARNING TASK'S UNDERLYING PROBLEM AND PROMPT

What is the question you want learners to address, or problem you want them to solve?

*The problem is inability to distinguish fact from opinion, and so the prompt is just that: In this research article, identify 5 statements that are opinions and 5 statements that are facts.*

## STEP 3: SET ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS

What are the assignment logistics? For example, will this be assigned individually or is it group work? How long will the assignment take? Will students be submitting a product? What materials, resources, or additional information do you anticipate needing?

*I will assign this technique with a reading homework assignment. I will ask students to complete it individually. In the next class session, I will put students into pairs and ask them to discuss and revise their statements. I will ask them to turn in their lists so that I can gauge the accuracy of their work.*

## STEP 4: DEVELOP A PLAN FOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT OR GRADING

If you decide to assess learning, how will you determine that learning has occurred? For example, will you use a simple +/check/- grading system? If you use a rubric, will you use an existing one or create one? What will be your criteria and standards?

*To assess, I'll use a simple check/minus system. I will use this as evidence of classroom engagement and include it as part of their participation/engagement grade.*

## STEP 5: COMMUNICATE ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS TO STUDENTS

How will you communicate assignment parameters to students? For example, through a handout? A prompt on a presentation slide? Assignment instructions in your online course?

*For this activity, I'll use a handout asking students to compile a list of facts and a list of opinions.*

## STEP 6: IMPLEMENT THE TECHNIQUE

How will you adapt steps/procedures for your students? Are there any additional logistical aspects to consider?

*I will follow this procedure as indicated, assigning an article and then asking students to identify facts and opinions. I'll vary it by adding in paired discussion prior to a full class discussion of what they found.*

## STEP 7: REFLECT UPON THE ACTIVITY AND EVALUATE ITS EFFECTIVENESS

Note: This step will be completed after you have implemented the technique.

Did this technique help you accomplish your goals? What worked well? What could have been improved? What might you change if you decide to implement the activity again?

*The success of this activity will depend on how much it changes the way students write about a research article. If I notice a change in practice, I will deem it a success and continue to include it. I will also ask students if they gained any insight into the difference between fact and opinion from the technique. If they believe they did, that is another indicator to continue using it.*

# Technique Template

This template is intended for use when planning to implement **Fact or Opinion** in your class. Fill in the blanks below, and use the information provided elsewhere in the Instructor's Guide to assist you in your thinking.

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**Course Name**

## **COURSE CHARACTERISTICS**

What are the situational factors that impact this course? For example, is it on campus or online? How many students? Is it lower division or graduate? Are there student attributes such as attitudes, prior knowledge, reasons for enrolling, and so forth that should be taken into account as you consider this technique?

## **STEP 1: CLARIFY YOUR TEACHING PURPOSE AND LEARNING GOALS**

Why are you choosing this technique? What do you hope to accomplish?

## **STEP 2: IDENTIFY THE LEARNING TASK'S UNDERLYING PROBLEM AND PROMPT**

What is the question you want learners to address, or problem you want them to solve?

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How will you adapt steps/procedures for your students? Are there any additional logistical aspects to consider?

## STEP 7: REFLECT UPON THE ACTIVITY AND EVALUATE ITS EFFECTIVENESS

*Note: This step will be completed after you have implemented the technique.*

Did this technique help you accomplish your goals? What worked well? What could have been improved? What might you change if you decide to implement the activity again?

# References and Resources

## PRIMARY SOURCE

Content for this download was drawn primarily from “Learning Assessment Technique 12: Fact or Opinion” in *Learning Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty* (Barkley & Major, 2016), pp. 153–157. It includes material that was adapted or reproduced with permission. For further information about this technique, including examples in both on campus and online courses, see the primary source:

Barkley, E. F., Major, C. H. (2016). *Learning Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

## CITATIONS AND ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

- Barkley, E. (2010). Believing and doubting. In *Student engagement techniques: a handbook for college faculty* (pp. 195–198). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Bean, J. C. (2009). *Engaging ideas: The professor’s guide to integrating writing, critical thinking, and active learning in the classroom* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., pp. 142–143, 156–157). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

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