

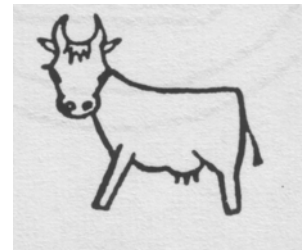
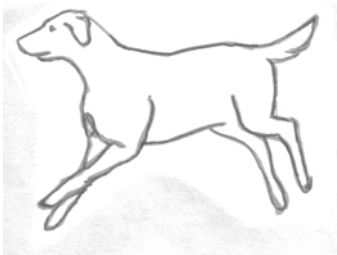
## The skill of distinguishing fact from opinion

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[Article published in *Resources* April 2004]

From an early age, our pupils should be educated to distinguish between a fact and an opinion. Ways and means of achieving this objective can be various, ranging from written to oral modes of learning. 'True and False' exercises may be used, starting with items that are **clearly** facts and others that are **clearly** opinions. Consider the following example, which is appropriate for the very young.

*Show the children a picture of a dog, then ask them what it is. They will definitely tell you it is a dog. Your next step is to say something like this: "Yes, of course it is a dog; it is **not** a mouse, and **not** a cow; it is a fact that it is a dog and we all agree about this."*



You have to explain that although the dog has some characteristics, which are similar to those of a mouse or of a cow, it is neither one nor the other. It is important to help your pupils grasp the concept of what constitutes a FACT. In your examples start with facts that are very simple and common, such as names of animals, of toys, of tools or of pieces of clothing. Most probably you will find yourself dealing with nouns and asking questions starting with "What". Our learners will come to realise that facts do not normally bring about any disagreements because there is a general consensus that, for example, a book is a book, a daffodil is a daffodil, a ball is a ball and a doll is a doll.

At this stage, the pupils are ready for the next step. Show them two pictures and ask them which is the most beautiful. The chances are that some will choose one, while the rest will choose the other. The teacher should then make the point that there is disagreement, simply because of the fact that what is beautiful is a matter of opinion. Several examples will have to be given to make sure that the children internalise the concept of what is an opinion. As always, drawing examples from everyday life will surely help, for example asking children what type of game is the most interesting, whether it is football or basketball.

As they grow older, children will have to strengthen their ability to differentiate between a fact and an opinion. The following exercise can help teachers assess their students' acquisition of this particular skill.

Read each of the following statements.		
If the statement is a fact, circle the F.		
If the statement is an opinion, circle the O.		
1 Dun Karm Psaila wrote Malta's National Anthem.	F	O
2 Malta's National Anthem is the most beautiful anthem ever written.	F	O
3 The Maltese are friendlier than the Sicilians.	F	O
4 Gozo is the second biggest island of the Maltese archipelago.	F	O
5 Shakespeare was born in England.	F	O
6 Adventure films are more interesting than thrillers.	F	O
7 Mathematics is easier than English.	F	O
8 It's more advantageous to live in a flat than in a terraced house.	F	O
9 A whale is a mammal.	F	O
10 Red is one of the primary colours.	F	O