

## Using Historical Documents: An Advance Organizer for Reading the Declaration of Independence

In studying history, the search for understanding relies on the use of facts and logic to reach valid conclusions. To do this, one must discover sources, separate fact from opinion, and construct logical, valid arguments. In particular, we must understand the types and value of our sources, read them critically, (that is, in a focused, probing manner), and take care to evaluate the evidence on which we draw conclusions.

### Instructions:

1. Review the section on this page titled **Fact and Opinion: What is the Difference?**
2. Read, but do not answer yet, the following questions about the Declaration of Independence:
  - a. Who is the intended audience?
  - b. When was it written and by whom?
  - c. What is its stated purpose?
  - d. What tone does it take, and why?
  - e. How many sections are described by your textbook, and what are their names and purposes?
  - f. Does the Declaration of Independence achieve its purpose?
3. Read the Declaration of Independence. While reading, use a dictionary to look up the meaning of any words you don't understand. Finally, use your reading as well as your textbook or other reference source to answer questions 2a-f on loose-leaf paper

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### Fact and Opinion: What is the Difference?

Skilled readers and writers must be able to distinguish fact from opinion.

**Fact:** neutral, unbiased information that can be proven true or false through objective evidence (physical proof or the spoken or written testimony of witnesses)

**Opinion:** interpretation, judgement or personal belief about a certain event or issue, that cannot be objectively proved true – it is open to question – debatable (like debate topics)

While bias is often unavoidable in writing, most writers try to be as objective (unbiased, impartial) as possible.

**Value word:** a word we use to express a value judgment; signals that an opinion is being expressed. Example: adjectives (ugly, best, pretty, normal, friendly, etc...)

### Other Points about Fact and Opinion

1. Statements of fact may be found to be untrue. (error vs. fact)
2. Opinions may be masked as facts.
3. Remember that value words often represent opinions. (best, worst, great, terrible, beautiful, bad, good, wonderful, lovely, etc.)
4. The words “should” and “ought to” often signal opinions.

### Facts and Opinions in Passages

- Keeping an eye out for opinion will help you to think for yourself and to question what you read.

### Informed Opinion

- The distinction between fact and opinion is not clear-cut;
- Look at information with a questioning eye
- Remember: just because something is an opinion, it doesn't mean it is invalid – look for realistic, meaningful support for opinions
- Solid support – made up of facts based on direct observation, expert opinion, and research