Distinguishing Fact from Opinion

Learning the Skill

When you read about events, you must distinguish what actually occurred—the facts—from an individual’s opinion or judgment about those events. A fact is something that can be proven true by reliable evidence. Opinions, in contrast, often express a point of view involving what a person thinks, feels, or believes. Opinions cannot be proven.

Follow these guidelines to help you distinguish fact from opinion:

• Evaluate the sources for all information.
• Read carefully for word clues. Does the writer use positive or negative descriptions of people or events? Some words indicating opinions are I believe, I think, should, best, worst, all, everyone, and hardest.
• Question whether the event being described could be observed or must be implied. For example, is the description a statement or a thought?
• Compare multiple sources about the same event, and note how they are the same and how they are different. These differences may indicate opinions.

Practicing the Skill

Directions: Read the information below, and then answer the questions that follow.

Chechnya is a republic of Russia located in the Caucasus region. During World War II, Joseph Stalin believed the Chechens were aiding the German enemy. He ordered the Chechen population moved to Kazakhstan and Siberia. During the move, about 250,000 Chechens died. Those who survived were not allowed to return to their home region until 1957, after Stalin died. It is not surprising that the people of Chechnya want to be free from Russian rule.

From 1991 to 1994, the Chechens tried to become independent, forcing hundreds of thousands of Russians to leave the region and murdering many others. Russian troops entered Chechnya in 1994. For two years, the Russian army tried but failed to subdue the Chechens. In 1996 a cease-fire was called. The fighting began once again in 1999, however, and continued into the twenty-first century. The whole situation is worse than anything that has happened in Russian history.

1. Listing What are two important facts presented in the information?
Critical Thinking Skills Activity
continued

2. Distinguishing Fact from Opinion  What are two opinions presented in the information?

✓ Applying the Skill

Directions: Read the following statements. Fill in the blank with an “O” or an “F” to indicate whether the statement is an opinion or a fact.

___ 1. When the Soviet Union existed, there was no freedom of the press.

___ 2. When the Soviet Union collapsed, a strong move toward freedom occurred.

___ 3. Recently, the government has again clamped down on TV stations and newspapers.

___ 4. This seems to occur when the press disagrees with the government.

___ 5. At midnight on January 21, 2002, the Russian government shut down TV-6, the last remaining national independent television station in Russia.

___ 6. People who were watching at the time reported that the station suddenly went off the air, and the programming was quickly replaced with sports shows or ballet.

___ 7. The government spokesperson stated that the government was forced to pull the station off the air because it could not make money.

___ 8. It is well-known that the station often disagreed with the government.

___ 9. Many people think that President Putin decided to stop the station.

___ 10. Shutting down TV-6 came only a year after the government took control of NTV, Russia’s largest independent station.

___ 11. These acts are an outrage against free speech.