

## 1.2 FACTS

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### Learning Objectives

- ❖ Recognize a fact as type of statement
- ❖ Identify the criteria that determine that a statement is a fact.
- ❖ Apply these criteria to identify facts in a text.
- ❖ Differentiate between simple facts based on direct observation, knowledge and experience, and complex factual information that the author creates out of specific details.
- ❖ Recognize that when authors present facts, they do so with some intention in mind.
- ❖ Start thinking about how facts are different from opinions.



**Figure 1.4:** The colours of the flag of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago are red, white and black.

## Facts

When we talk about facts, we are talking about information that authors consider to be accurate and true. Facts are based on knowledge gained from direct observation, experience or from other sources. Based on the knowledge that this author has, the information provided in Figure 1.4 is accurate and true. Authors may access the knowledge themselves or they may obtain it from other sources. When authors state a fact, by implication they are also saying that they have evidence to confirm its accuracy. Facts can be verified. The point to note about a fact, as distinct from the general pool of statements, is the issue of evidence. It is not just that the authors are communicating what is/was in a firm and unambiguous manner. There is evidence to verify that their statement of fact is accurate. Truth and accuracy are essential qualities of a fact.

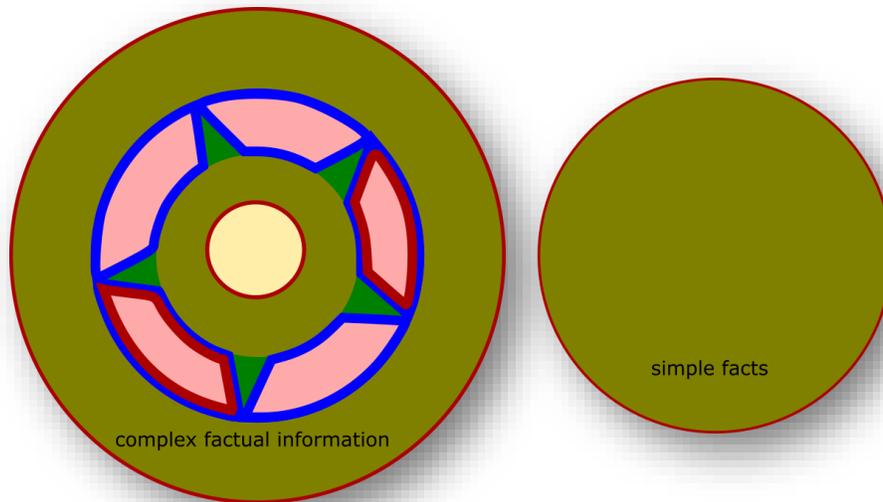
## Examples of facts

- i. *Barbados' educational system is based on the British system and schooling is compulsory to age 16.*
- ii. *The unemployment figures for the last quarter of 1999 indicate that over 13,000 persons were unemployed (Barbados Statistical Service 2000).*
- iii. *The Tobago International Cycling Classic emerged in 1986 as a local one-day race geared towards providing a new activity for the island's sporting community.*
- iv. *The oldest hotel in the Caribbean is said to be Bath Hotel in Nevis, which was established in 1778 (Nevis Tourism Authority 2014), so the region's experience with operating hotels dates back over two centuries.*

In all cases, readers would accept these statements as facts because we see them as conveying information for which the authors have supporting evidence. In some instances authors cite the source from which the fact was taken (for example, Nos. 2 and 4 above). Whether there is direct citing or not, authors would typically find a way to let their readers know that they have consulted trustworthy sources, such as historical records, research reports, the works of experts in a given field and even primary sources, such as newspaper reports, audio and video recordings and artefacts. Facts are statements that can be verified, and are therefore true.

**Go to self-check mini-test 1.2 on Course Page.**

## Simple facts vs. Complex factual information



**Figure 1.5 – Complex Factual Information vs Simple Facts**

Let's return to the two extracts at the end of Section 1.1. As we noted then, both contain statements of fact. Both meet the criteria we outlined at the beginning of this section. But even so, there are differences between the type of facts of Extract 1.1 and those of Extract 1.2.

The facts that comprise the first excerpt can be directly linked to actual events and experiences, specifically to the celebration of the Jonkunnu festival. This excerpt provides information in a manner that closely matches the experiences to which it refers. For example,

*In some cases, people spend virtually the entire year preparing their costumes and saving up for the big day, when the almighty carnival takes centre stage.*

*Spectators can be heard to cry 'Jonkunnu a' come!*

When we look at the second extract however, this is not totally so. The details of the main sentences in this paragraph do not directly link to the experiences to which they refer. For example,

*'Tourism events also generate negative sociocultural impacts  
which must be managed'*

and,

*'Major events as well as smaller localised events have  
unintended social consequences ...'*

Neither of these two sentences directly point to actual activities or experiences in a manner that the descriptions of the Jonkunnu Festival do. In the subsections that follow we will be paying closer attention to the differences between these two categories of facts.

### Simple facts

In these study materials, we are using the term 'simple facts' to refer to factual information that points directly to some phenomenon, be it an activity, event, object, experience or idea. As noted earlier, the description of the Jonkunnu Festival meets that criterion.

However that type of content is more the exception than the rule in academic text. Even when authors of academic text are dealing with simple facts, those facts are built on ideas and concepts that are embedded in the body of knowledge that authors are writing about. Thus, even though some of the terms used may not be familiar to the reader, the statement itself still qualifies as a simple fact if it can be seen as being directly linked to an actual event, situation, activity and/or experience. Here is the first of two examples:

*Federal and unitary systems of government also exist within the archipelago where St. Kitts and Nevis are federated and Trinidad and Tobago and Antigua and Barbuda are unitary states.*

This is a basic fact about two types of governmental systems in the English-speaking Caribbean. The expression 'federal and unitary systems of government' may be unfamiliar to some readers but in the context of this segment of text, it is typical of the language that applies in this area of knowledge.

Here is the second:

*For most of these BOTs (British Overseas Territories), tourism and offshore financial*

*services are the primary economic drivers.*

Here again, this is a simple fact, drawn from a trustworthy source, and which can be directly linked to the actual real-world situation. The terms 'BOTs', 'offshore financial services' and 'economic driver' are all typical of the language in this field. Readers must continuously aim to expand their knowledge of the vocabulary of their various areas of study to ensure that terms such as the ones just mentioned do not serve as obstacles to their understanding of the information being conveyed.

### Complex factual information

Beyond simple facts, authors often see the need to bring together single pieces of information and merge them under the umbrella of a broader more inclusive word or phrase. They may do this for one reason or another. For example, authors may consider that a listing of all the individual elements may be too lengthy; thus, they may opt to use a broad term that adequately summarises all of them.

Alternatively, a broader more inclusive overarching term would bring to the fore a core characteristic that is reflected in all the elements and which authors may wish to highlight, given their overall purpose for constructing the text. Whatever the reason, their intention is to produce a concise summary that captures the essence of some important facts without going into all the details of those facts.

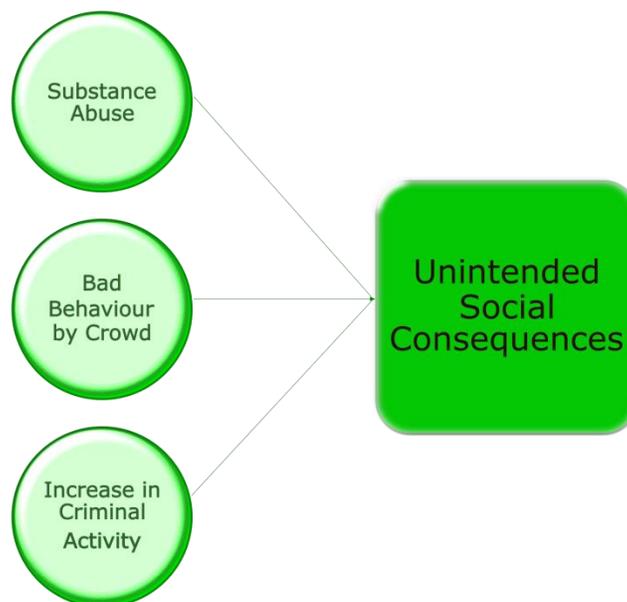
Let us return to the selections from Extract 1.2. The phrase '*negative sociocultural impacts*' embodies specific details which, at this point of the text, the authors have decided not to identify. Rather, they use this broader, more inclusive expression, most likely to highlight an important characteristic of the details that have been removed. The phrase '*unintended social consequences*' serves a similar purpose and appears to reinforce the ideas embodied in the first.

Very often authors expect their readers to use cues provided in other parts of the text to flesh out the inner meanings of these broad complex factual statements. In this instance however, the details that are embedded in both these statements have been included in the same paragraph making it relatively easy for the reader to make the connection. The individual elements that give meaning to both these more complex expressions are the more concrete behaviours of *substance abuse*, *bad behaviour by crowds*, and *increase in criminal activity*.

It should be noted though that it is not always the case that the specific details are so close to the complex term to which they are linked. Readers need to be

always on the alert to locate the specifics out of which the broader idea was developed.

When readers encounter these more complex, abstract ways of presenting factual information, they need to explore the rest of the text to ensure that the writer has provided opportunity for them to locate, or at least come up with ideas about the more concrete details that are subsumed within these broad abstractions. Readers must be able to delve into and unpack the words and phrases that authors use to condense those details, so that they can get a deeper understanding of the more complex factual information presented.



**Figure 1.6 – Details of simple facts embedded in more inclusive expression of complex factual information.**

**Go to self-check mini-test 1.3 on Course Page.**

### Authors' intention for presenting facts

Alongside the distinction we have just noted between simple and more complex factual information, authors make other decisions about the factual content of their writings. How do they want to communicate these facts to their reading audience? What approaches would best fit into the overall purpose of their writing as well as their intentions at specific points? Authors convey factual

information using any of four means: they report, describe, explain or define

## Report

When authors report they are presenting content that they have selected, summarized, and organized in order to provide a condensed yet valid account. Consider the following example:

### **Extract 1.3**

Prior to 1846, West Indian-produced sugar enjoyed preferential access to the British market. The passage in that year of the Sugar Duties Act threatened to ruin the sugar industry in the Anglophone Caribbean. West Indian-produced sugar could not compete in the UK market with slave-produced sugar from Cuba, Puerto Rico and Brazil or sugar from India. Production fell from about 185,000 tons in 1846 to 127,000 tons a decade later. The key provision of the Sugar Duties Act, (namely) that the differential duty on foreign sugar would be progressively reduced by 1s. 6d. per ton per year until 1851 when the duties on all sugar entering the UK would be equalized, threatened the slow death of the West Indian plantocracy. The duties were fully removed in 1854.

Since the purpose of a report is to present factual information in a condensed form, authors must ensure that the words and phrases they use accurately reflect the original basic factual details.

Sometimes authors use technical, discipline-specific words and phrases that persons knowledgeable in that particular field are familiar with. As a result, they often do not see the need to explain these terms and expect their readers to be familiar with them. That was indeed the case with the terms '*federal and unitary systems of government*' and '*offshore financial services*' that we encountered earlier. In Extract 1.3 above, phrases such as '*preferential access*', and '*Anglophone Caribbean*' are examples of technical terms which the author expects his readers to know.

There are also phrases that embody details that are not mentioned here but

which readers must be aware of if they are to get the full meaning of the particular phrases. For example, at first glance, the phrases *West Indian-produced sugar* and *slave-produced sugar* seem quite straightforward. However they are both complex expressions since they subsume considerable historical factual detail that the author does not spell out here. The same can be said of the provision to '*reduce the differential duty on foreign sugar*'.

It is important that readers do not simply gloss over technical terms and complex factual information. To do so would be to severely restrict their understanding of the text.

### Describe

In some cases the term '*describe*' is used in exactly the same way as '*report*'. This use of '*describe*' finds support in the dictionary definition that gives its meaning as '*to report details about something*'. In another way, it is used to say what something is like. When used in this second way, authors are drawing attention to the qualities or characteristics of a situation, activity, operation or people.

Such a use of the term fits in with a different dictionary definition that gives the meaning of '*describe*' as '*to characterize*'. In a very specific sense therefore, when a segment of text is providing information about the qualities, characteristics or features of something, it is referred to as a description. Consider these extracts:

#### **Extract 1.4**

Since tourism had for some time been regarded as basically benign, development continued apace in many places, including the countries and territories of the Caribbean. Tourism continues to be seen as a non-extractive industry by a range of stakeholders and thus remains a common strategy for economic and social development through exploitation of a location's human, cultural and natural capital. However, as is now well accepted, tourism is not harmless and engenders or contributes to diverse negative environmental impacts.

#### **Extract 1.5**

However, the cultural presence of the Amerindians is most evident

in Caribbean food and its preparation – with the Arawaks being particularly significant. The word ‘barbecue’ and its meaning, for instance, can be traced to the Arawaks, who smoked their meat on a platform of green tree branches over a slow burning fire called a ‘brabacot’.

These are two examples of the second type of description. In each case the content reflects the state or nature of things: how things are or were like. Look again at the first example. What we have here are two contrasting ways of looking at tourism – on the one hand, as a benign, harmless, non-extractive industry, and on the other, as contributing to ‘diverse negative environmental impacts’. Now turn your attention to the second example. This excerpt provides a picture of the food preparation practices that were a feature of the Amerindian cultural presence in the Caribbean and which are still in existence today.

One thing to note: in each case, the description is inherent in the thing itself. The features or characteristics are embedded in the thing being described. Tourism is either harmless, or it is a contributor to negative environmental impacts. Methods of food preparation, in particular among the Arawaks, represent an important aspect of the Amerindian cultural presence in the Caribbean. You need to be alert to this feature of a description as just explained, so that you can clearly separate it from opinions, which we will be looking at in Section 1.5.

Looking again at the first extract, it is clear that terms like ‘*non-extractive industry*’ and ‘*human, cultural and natural capital*’ are technical terms. As already noted in relation to Extract 1.3, readers must have a thorough understanding of the technical language of the content they are studying.

Descriptions in academic text may be of two types – one summarises details to provide a shortened account. When used in this way, the verb ‘*describe*’ carries the same meaning as ‘*report*’. In another sense, ‘*describe*’ highlights the characteristics of the thing the author is focusing on.

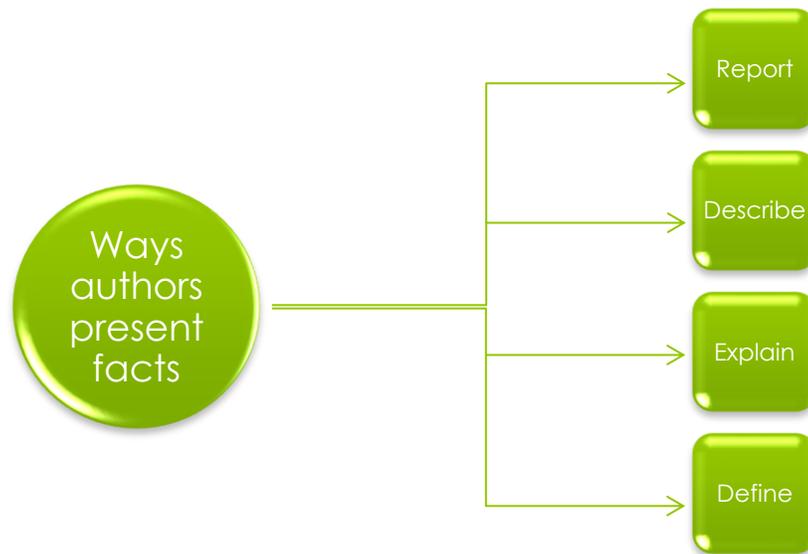


Figure 1.7 – Ways in which authors present facts.

## Explain

When authors explain, the content that they produce may serve one of two purposes.

Explain: *to clarify*

First the author may wish to clarify, make things clearer so that the reader may understand more easily. The thing being explained may be some technical term or concept that is a key part of some area of study. Sometimes authors may explain a term because they think that readers may not be familiar with it. In other instances, the term may be quite familiar but authors need to ensure that readers do not limit themselves to everyday meanings, but are able to grasp the special meaning that applies in the particular area of study, for example *communication*.

Explanations may be provided in a single sentence or may spread over several sentences, possibly a paragraph. A longer explanation would go into more detail, to expand on the initial statement or to provide examples of what was explained in the first instance. Consider these three extracts:

### Extract 1.6

Rites of passage are rituals marking the transition from one stage of

the human cycle to another, such as birth, growing up, marriage and death. These rituals create a sense of belonging, of acceptance and mark a new beginning as an individual is initiated into the next phase of his or her life.

**Extract 1.7**

**Self-concept**

When we communicate, we are full of expectations, doubts, fears and hopes. Where we place emphasis, what we focus on, and how we view our potential has a direct impact on our communication interactions. You gather a sense of self as you grow, age and experience others and the world. At various times in your life, you have probably been praised for some of your abilities and talents, and criticized for doing some things poorly. Much of what we know about ourselves, we've learned through interaction with others. Not everyone has had positive influences in their lives, and not every critic knows what they are talking about, but criticism and praise still influence how and what we expect from ourselves.

**Extract 1.8**

**Scarcity**

Our resources are limited. At any one time, we have only so much land, so many factories, so much oil, so many people. But our wants, our desires for the things that we can produce with those resources, are unlimited. We would always like more and better housing, more and better education—more and better of practically everything.

If our resources were also unlimited, we could say yes to each of our wants—and there would be no economics. Because our resources are limited, we cannot say yes to everything. To say yes to one thing

requires that we say no to another. Whether we like it or not, we must make choices.

Our unlimited wants are continually colliding with the limits of our resources, forcing us to pick some activities and to reject others. Scarcity is the condition of having to choose among alternatives. A scarce good is one for which the choice of one alternative requires that another be given up.

Consider a parcel of land. The parcel presents us with several alternative uses. We could build a house on it. We could put a gas station on it. We could create a small park on it. We could leave the land undeveloped in order to be able to make a decision later as to how it should be used.

All three are intended to clarify a term or an idea. In the case of Extract 1.6, the core explanation is provided in the first sentence. However, pay attention to the way the author extends on that initial sentence and provides additional details to make the explanation even clearer. The author's goal is to provide an explanation that conveys the widely accepted understanding of the term, *Rites of Passage*.

The intention in Extract 1.7 goes beyond that of the first. Here the author's main aim is to convey his particular interpretation of *self-concept*. The intention is not only to clarify something that may be difficult to understand or unfamiliar to the reader but even more importantly to introduce his own interpretation of the term.

The core explanation of the term *scarcity* does not appear until well into the third extract (Extract 1.8), namely that it "*is the condition of having to choose among alternatives*". Nonetheless, from the very beginning, the author provides scenarios that illustrate the meaning of the term in real-world contexts. This strategy is continued after the explanation is stated. In this instance, the extension on the core explanation does not follow the conventional pattern used in Extract 1.6.

Explain: to give reasons

Yet another understanding of 'explain' that may apply to content that you encounter is one in which the author seeks to give reasons for some situation or condition, something that has occurred, or the way people behave or appear. One expression that may be used interchangeably with 'explain' when used in this way is 'account for'. When authors give reasons for something, they may be said to be accounting for that situation.

In this fairly lengthy extract, see if you can identify the reason that the author gives to explain why the employee did not follow the boss' complete instructions.

**Extract 1.9**

Interference, also called noise, can come from any source. "Interference is anything that blocks or changes the source's intended meaning". ...

Psychological noise is what happens when your thoughts occupy your attention while you are hearing, or reading, a message. Imagine that it is 4.45 p.m. and your boss, who is at a meeting in another city, emails you asking for last month's sales figures, an analysis of current sales projections and the sales figures from the same month for the past five years. You may open the email, start to read and think, "Great – no problem. I have those figures and that analysis right here in my computer".

You fire off a reply with last month's sales figures and the current projections attached. Then at five o'clock, you turn off your computer and go home.

The next morning, your boss calls on the phone to tell you he was inconvenienced because you neglected to include the sales figures from the previous years. What was the problem? Interference: by thinking about how you wanted to respond to your boss's message, you prevented yourself from reading attentively enough to understand the whole message.

We have to read all the way to the end of the excerpt to find out the explanation about why the employee only emailed information from the current year and not from the preceding five years as requested by her boss. It was because of 'interference', the 'noise' of her own thoughts blocked her from receiving the complete message communicated.

Look at this other extract.

**Extract 1.10**

What motivates people as they make choices? Perhaps more than anything else, it is the economist's answer to this question that distinguishes economics from other fields.

Economists assume that individuals make choices that they expect will create the maximum value of some objective, given the constraints they face. Furthermore, economists assume that people's objectives will be those that serve their own self-interest.

Economists assume, for example, that the owners of business firms seek to maximize profit. Given the assumed goal of profit maximization, economists can predict how firms in an industry will respond to changes in the markets in which they operate. As labor costs in the United States rise, for example, economists are not surprised to see firms moving some of their manufacturing operations overseas. (p. 25)

The initial question of this extract is an indication that the author intends to explain, or provide a reason why people make the choices they do. What follows is an extended explanation, as seen through the eyes of the economist, of what makes people, including businesses, make the choices they do. Specifically, people make choices because they can be expected 'to maximize value of some objective' and 'to serve self-interest'.

In summary, the word 'explain' may be used in two different ways – to clarify and to give reasons.

## Define

Closely linked to explanations, are those statements that define. In fact, we can say that defining is a specific way of explaining, in the sense of making something understandable. However, its focus is providing the meaning of a word or phrase, in much the same way that a dictionary does. It gives a precise meaning of a term or expression. It should be noted though that authors do not necessarily use the dictionary as their source when giving definitions. More often than not, the terms that they choose to define as well as the definitions themselves emerge out of the topic, theme or issue about which they are writing.

## Examples of definitions

- i. *Communication can be defined as the process of understanding and sharing meaning.*
- ii. *Sharing means doing something together with one or more people.*
- iii. *Feedback is composed of messages the receiver sends back to the source.*
- iv. *Being unable to communicate might even mean losing a part of yourself, for you communicate your **self-concept** – your sense of self and awareness of who you are – in many ways.*

There are two things to note about the above definitions. First, even in those examples where the word 'define' or 'mean' does not appear, the alternatives are used in a way to convey those understandings. The expression, 'is composed of', and the hyphens in the last example, both point us to the meaning of *feedback* and *self-concept* respectively.

Secondly, a definition is more focused on giving the precise meaning of the term rather than providing a broader interpretation of its use. Just compare the definitions in this sub-section with the explanations in the preceding one to get a sense of the difference in approach to dealing with the two.

Sometimes an author may follow up a definition with a more detailed explanation to ensure that the meaning of the definition is fully understood. Observe how the author of the second definition above, expands on it with a fuller explanation in Extract 1.11.

**Extract 1.11**

Sharing means doing something together with one or more people. You may share a joint activity, as when you share in compiling a report; or you may benefit jointly from a resource, as when you and several coworkers share a pizza. In communication, sharing occurs when you convey thoughts, feelings, ideas, or insights to others.

Here is another:

**Extract 1.12**

Labor is human effort that can be applied to production. People who work to repair tires, pilot airplanes, teach children, or enforce laws are all part of the economy's labor. People who would like to work but have not found employment – who are unemployed – are also considered part of the labor available to the economy. In some contexts, it is useful to distinguish two forms of labor. ...

The first sentence of the second extract is expanded on to ensure that a complete understanding of labor is provided for the reader. In fact, the explanation is not confined to a single paragraph but continues over a few others beyond what is given here. Depending on their overall purpose authors may go into considerable detail, including the use of real-life scenarios, to clarify a definition.

## Key Takeaways

- ❖ Facts are based on knowledge gained from direct observation, experience or from other sources.
- ❖ There is evidence to confirm their accuracy.
- ❖ In this course we make a distinction between simple facts and complex factual information.
- ❖ Simple facts point directly to some situation.
- ❖ Complex factual information merges simple facts into broader more inclusive statements.
- ❖ Authors communicate factual information by reporting, describing, explaining or defining, depending on the purpose of their writing.

**Go to self-check mini-test 1.4 on Course Page**

**GO TO COURSE PAGE FOR MAIN TESTS**

**MAIN TEST 1.1 – SIMPLE FACTS AND COMPLEX FACTUAL INFORMATION**

**MAIN TEST 1.2 – DIFFERENT WAYS OF PRESENTING FACTS**