

Usually, writing to inform seems straightforward until you start drafting. That's because if you were writing an informative paragraph about underage drinking in La Crosse, you would probably be tempted to give your opinion or to comment on the issue. That would be a natural reaction. So, good writers need to recognize what is fact and what is opinion to effectively inform.

The first two sentences of a student-written document illustrate the difference between fact and opinion.

Western has an enrollment of over 5,500 students, and 33 percent of them are under the legal drinking age of 21. Most of those students will drink on the weekends and binge drink, which is why we have to do something to make them see they have a problem.

Is this informative writing? Yes and no. The first sentence contains facts. The second sentence does not. Why? For starters, "most" is too vague and sounds like an impression and not a summary of various statistics. If a specific percentage of underage students have reported their drinking habits, then that statistic should be cited. The second sentence also slides quickly away from an informative tone with a rally cry that "we have to do something." Informative writing doesn't mean that you inform the audience about your opinion. Instead, it means that you use **statistics, general knowledge, examples, and explanations that come from experts**. Once the student realized this, he rewrote the beginning of his paragraph.

Alcohol abuse is a complex problem facing the La Crosse area and Western Technical College. The La Crosse County Health Department reports that 38 percent of young adults age 18 to 24 engage in binge drinking, but the rate is 63 percent among college students. Western has an enrollment of 5,500 students, and 33 percent are under the legal drinking age of 21. To educate its students and discourage binge drinking, Western collaborates with Viterbo University, the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, the La Crosse County Health Department, Gundersen Lutheran, and Franciscan Skemp Healthcare.

Characteristics of Informative Writing

- Helps the audience understand a concept or idea
- Reports facts; may often include statistical analysis
- Refrains from expressing opinions or a bias toward the topic
- Contains explanations and examples, often to help the audience see relationships between ideas
- May describe the scope of an issue and its relevance

Types of Informative Writing

- Newspaper articles
- Reference books, manuals, and textbooks
- Web-based information
- Reports by organizations and government agencies

Examples of Informative Writing

See the Online Writing Center's "WINK: An Online Journal" to read well-written examples of informative writing by Western Technical College students.

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