



## How to Rate Expression

In our Ad Fontes Media Methodology, we start with rating articles based on the metric of “Expression.” We ask the question “how is this expressed?” We start with Expression because we have found that expression is ONE of the best, if not THE best, indicators of reliability, and because we use it to help rate other metrics, which we will talk about later.

We are looking at how sentences, whole paragraphs, or articles are stated. We rate them on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being at the top and 5 being at the bottom of the slider. You will notice that the slider is divided into five unequal sections—we did this on purpose to help you line up the 1-5 ratings with their corresponding categories on the overall reliability scale of the chart.

The different kinds of expression are:

Expression:

- 1-(Presented as) Fact
- 2-(Presented as) Fact with some Analysis
- 3-(Presented as) Analysis
- 4-(Presented as) Analysis with some Opinion
- 5-(Presented as) Opinion

At this point, we are not necessarily looking at the “truth,” or “veracity” of the sentences—that comes later. Right now, we are just looking at how something is expressed.

What is the difference between expression as fact, analysis, and opinion, then?

Generally, starting at the top, a fact is something that is, exists, or happened, and at the bottom, opinion is a conclusion about something that can be based on a lot of different things, like moral judgments, personal beliefs, as well as facts.

Also, generally, we tend to recognize facts as things that are not widely disputed, meaning most people agree on it easily, and opinions as things that are widely disputed, for example where half of people agree with it and half don't.

Analysis falls between facts and opinions. They are conclusions too, but they are ones that are well supported by facts.

To rate sentences and paragraphs on the expression scale from 1-5, we rate it as “1” if it is just a plain statement of fact, and then from 2-5 based on how closely a conclusion is tied to facts. If the facts are closely tied to conclusions, they get scores in the 2s and 3s. If the conclusion is only loosely tied to facts, it gets a 4, and if it is not tied to facts at all, it gets a 5. As you can see, our sliders allow you to choose with greater detail than just 1-5—something can be in between, like a 1.3, or a 2.5, based on your judgement. The slider section covering a “5” for opinion covers the biggest area, and you can use your judgment to rate something as a “high” 5 that is an ordinary opinion or a “low” 5 because it has other negative qualities.

Here are examples of sentences with ratings from 1-5:

- 1: "State officials said all roads damaged by the quakes had been repaired and reopened."
2. "The declaration comes at a time of sharply increased U.S.-Iranian confrontation, a year after Washington quit the pact and reimposed sanctions that had been lifted under the accord in exchange for Tehran curbing its nuclear work."
3. "The [local newspaper] covered all that. It helped keep a community under intense strain connected. When the GM announcement came out, politicians and business leaders discussed prospects for the future (and denounced GM) in the pages of the newspaper. Now there will be no valley-wide public forum where this kind of debate can happen. The television stations can offer snippets — but not the full coverage of print"
4. "Instead, [company] followed the advice of a man whose business model is to stir grievance and controversy for its own sake."
5. "[Politician]'s attempt at spectacle was positively dreadful."

Let's look at a couple of ways to tell how you should rate an article for expression. One really great indicator you can rely is the presence of loaded language. The more you find adjectives and adverbs, hyperbole, or extreme or insulting words, the likelier it is that the article is toward the opinion side of the scale.

Another helpful way to judge expression is to think of it like participants in the court system, such as 1) an investigator (i.e., a detective testifying as a witness), 2) a judge, or 3) a lawyer.

In a court case, an investigator's job would be to piece together and lay out all the known facts and get to the bottom of what happened, so an author that sounds like an investigator should get scored as a 1, or maybe a 2.

A lawyer's job, on the other hand, is to fiercely advocate for one side by using whatever he or she can to convince you. That can certainly include facts, but maybe they leave out the ones that are not helpful and only focus on the ones that support their conclusion. Sometimes they appeal to emotion and moral judgment with loaded language. An author that sounds like a lawyer advocating for a client would be ranked as a 4 or 5 for expression.

A judge's job is to take in the facts and make a fair a conclusion about them based on what he or she knows. The judge is supposed to be as fair as possible, but that doesn't mean that the judge has to remain neutral. The judge can make a conclusion that favors one side over another. If an author sounds like a judge, that would be ranked as a 2, 3, or 4.

So what does that make you, the news reader? Well, you are the jury, which is similar and complimentary to a judge. A big part of media literacy is to try to figure out if the author you are reading is an investigator, a judge, or a lawyer. Is the author just presenting facts to you like an investigator, for you to figure out? Is the author presenting them to you with fair analysis, like a judge? Or is the author trying really hard to convince you about one side of the story, like a lawyer?

It is somewhat easier to rate things that are “1” and “5.” Things that are “1” typically have many provable facts in a row—just provable fact after provable fact, on and on. Things that are “5” typically have many disputable conclusions in a row. It is harder to rate the sentences and paragraphs that are 2, 3, and 4.

The most important clue to whether something should be scored closer to a 1 or closer to a 5 is how many provable facts are contained in the sentence, paragraph, or article in relation to the conclusions. The more provable facts, the closer to a 1 it should be.

As I previously noted, you will notice that the slider for Expression is divided into unequal sections. We divided it up that way to help you correlate the 1-5 scores to vertical placements on the chart. As you will learn, the main two factors accounted for in the category descriptions for reliability are Veracity and Expression, so the final ranking should reflect a combination of both.