

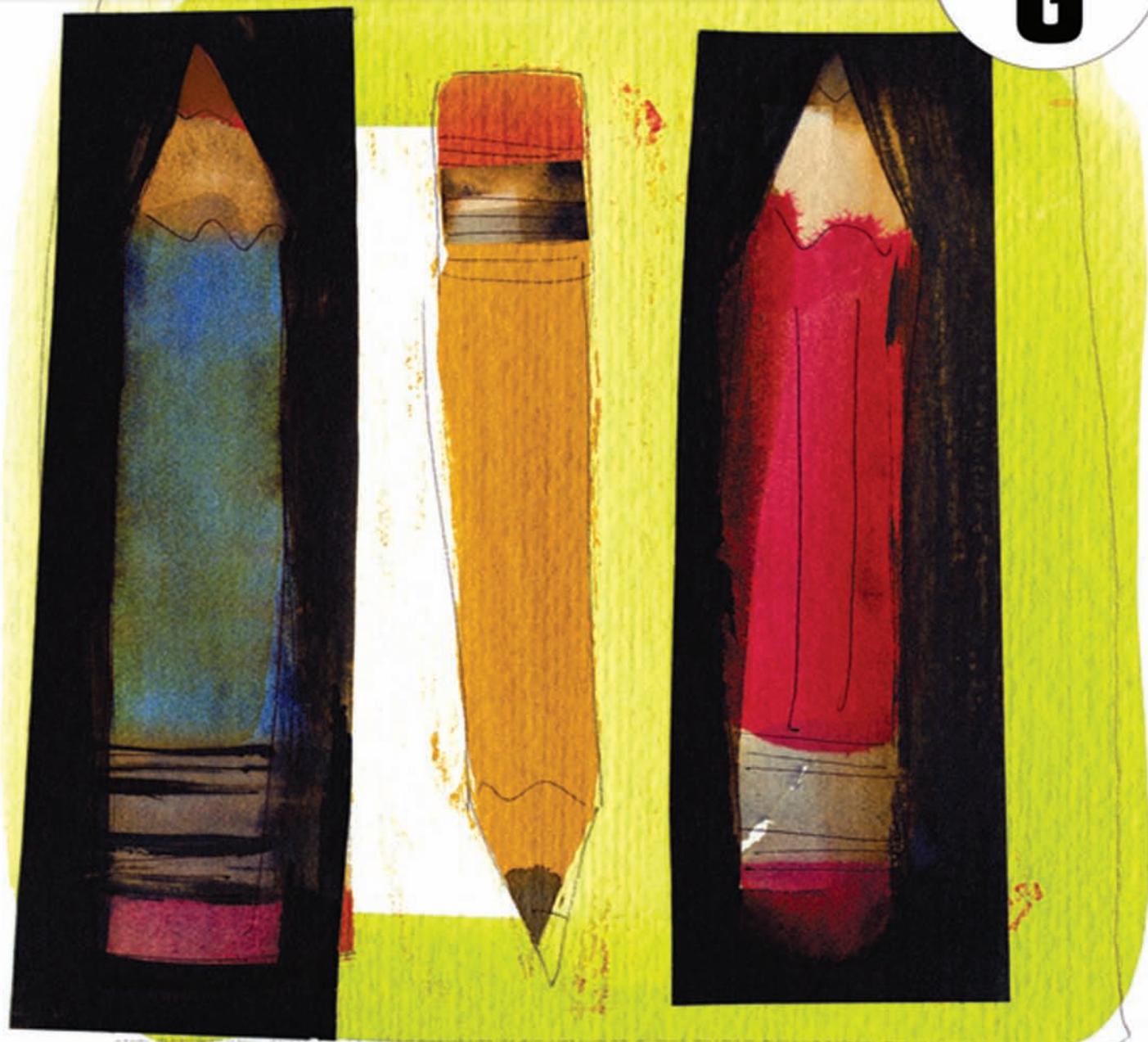
SKILLS

Write It Out

*Mastering Short and Extended Responses
to Open-Ended Questions*

LEVEL

G



Fact and Opinion

If you look at your local paper, you will find two types of articles. On the first page you might read an article about an upcoming election in your town. The *reporter* mentions all the candidates, and she describes their qualifications and their previous voting records on certain issues. The article might even include a chart that makes it easier for readers to compare the candidates.

On the *editorial page*, however, you find another article about the election. In this article, the writer endorses one of the candidates. He gives all the reasons why that candidate is the best choice. If he discusses the other candidates at all, he does it only to illustrate why his candidate is better.

What's going on here? Aren't newspaper reporters supposed to be objective? Aren't they supposed to write the *who-what-when-where and why* of a story? The reporter of the front-page article did just that. She reported the **facts** of the story. Facts are information that can be proven *true* or *false*.

An *editorial writer*, however, is supposed to *interpret the facts and express an **opinion***. In this example, the writer used facts to reach his own opinion about the best candidate. Readers may *agree* or *disagree* with his opinion, but they cannot say that his opinion is right or wrong.

At school, you are given different writing assignments. For your science teacher, you may have to write a research paper, full of facts. Your social studies teacher, on the other hand, may ask you to express an opinion on a controversial issue. A good writer must know how to do both, and a good reader must be able to distinguish *fact* from *opinion*.

Lesson 1

What Makes a Good Answer?

Read this selection. It includes both facts and opinions. The question that follows asks you to find the facts.

Speaking Without Words

Think about a time when a teacher asked you to do something you didn't want to do. You didn't want to hurt the teacher's feelings or risk detention by talking back, but you let your feelings show anyway. Maybe you rolled your eyes. Maybe you made a face, or pointed a finger to your head and moved it in circles to show that you thought the teacher was crazy to make that request. Even though you didn't say anything, everyone still knew what you meant.

Words aren't the only way that people communicate. Even when we don't say anything, we express more than we realize. The gestures we make with our hands, our facial expressions, the way we hold our bodies, even the way we dress and wear our hair all contribute to how we communicate information about ourselves. This kind of nonverbal communication is known as body language.

We can't always control our body language. Some body language is involuntary. Did you ever try to stop blushing when you were embarrassed? Can you keep from jumping in fright when someone sneaks up on you? These reactions are *innate*. We are born with them, and we respond *instinctively*.

Other nonverbal signals are learned. In the military, for example, new recruits quickly learn to salute to show respect for superior officers. Learned signals are not universal. They mean different things in different cultures. In the United States, we learn to clap our hands to show that we appreciate a concert or a show. In some European countries, the people in the audience may stamp their feet to show the same appreciation.

Some body language combines the learned and the innate. Everybody is born knowing how to cry. In fact, crying is one of the first ways a baby communicates with the world. As we grow up, the culture we live in teaches us when it is appropriate to cry, and when we should hold back our tears.

Because people "listen" to conversations with their eyes as well as their ears, unspoken signals can clarify our spoken words. They also can lead to confusion. Sometimes our facial expression says one thing but our words say the opposite. When we send a "mixed signal," the person we are speaking

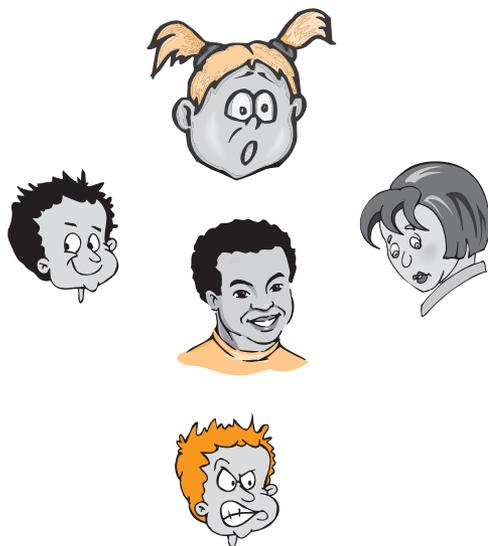
This paragraph is loaded with facts.

Look for a fact about the military here.

with can easily become confused. Then body language may become more important than the words. The message that comes through more clearly is the one that our body language conveys.

Nonverbal communication can lead to serious misunderstandings. Diplomats, business people, and even vacation travelers need to know that the meaning of body language varies from culture to culture. Something as simple as sitting down and putting your feet up may be perfectly acceptable in this country. In other countries, however, showing the soles of your shoes is considered a grave insult. Handshaking is another example. Americans believe that a firm handshake conveys confidence. People in Asia interpret a firm handshake as a sign of aggression.

Despite cultural differences in interpreting body language, one nonverbal sign is universal. You may not speak someone's language. You may not know how to signal that you lost your suitcase or that you need a piece of paper. What you can do is smile. A sincere *smile* conveys the same message everywhere in the world. It's the quickest way to turn strangers into friends.



What fact is this paragraph about?

Why is it important to be aware of body language? Use facts from the selection to support your answer.

Rory's Answer:

Rory wrote a good answer to this question. Read what she wrote, then answer the questions that follow. They will help you understand what made her answer so successful.

It is important to be aware of *body language* because people communicate with more than words. We also “speak” with our hands, our posture, our eyes, and our facial expressions. We are born with some *body language* that we cannot control, like *blushing* when we are embarrassed. We learn other kinds of *body language*, like when a new recruit learns to salute an officer in the military. Some of our *body language* is a combination. We all know how to cry when we are born, but when we get older, we are taught when it is okay to cry and when we should hold it in. We learn how to express our feelings in a way that is acceptable in our culture.

Body language can mean different things in different societies. Something that is okay to do in the United States might offend people in another country. For example, we think it is okay to put our feet up when we are relaxing in a chair. In other countries, though, showing the soles of our feet is an insulting gesture. If we want to avoid misunderstandings, we have to be aware of the things we “say” with our gestures, as well as with our words.

HINT!

Test scorers look for the following elements in an answer:

- * A clear statement of the main idea.
- * A clear understanding of the difference between fact and opinion.
- * Facts from the selection to develop and support the answer.
- * Complete, correct, and interesting sentences.

What Makes Rory's Answer Work?

To see what makes a successful response, let's take a closer look at Rory's answer.

1. Rory starts with a sentence that states the main idea of her answer. She uses the words of the question in her opening sentence. This helps keep her answer focused. Rory also includes an important fact that she learned from the reading selection. This fact is the main idea.

What is Rory's opening sentence? Write it here. Underline the fact that provides the main idea of her answer.

2. Rory supports her answer with facts from the reading selection. In her first paragraph, she discusses the different kinds of body language. Here is how she identifies one kind of body language: "We are born with some body language that we cannot control, like blushing when we are embarrassed."

What other two types of body language does Rory include in her first paragraph? Write Rory's sentences here.

3. In her second paragraph, Rory discusses how the same body language can mean different things in different cultures. She uses an example from the reading selection to support her answer.

What example does Rory include to show cultural differences in interpreting body language? Write Rory's example here.

4. Rory's conclusion expands on the ideas expressed in her opening sentence.

How does Rory conclude her answer? Write Rory's conclusion here.

5. Rory writes sentences that are clear, correct, and interesting. Here is one example: "We all know how to cry when we are born, but when we get older, we are taught when it is okay to cry and when we should hold it in."

Find another of Rory's sentences that is clear, correct, and interesting. Write Rory's sentence here.

Tools & Tips

Distinguishing between *fact* and *opinion* can be challenging. Compare the following two examples.

- A. I think everyone should be required to study Spanish in school. Spanish is the second most commonly spoken language in the United States.
- B. I think everyone should be required to study Spanish in school. Spanish is the most beautiful language in the world.

Both examples begin with the same opinion. In example A, the second sentence is a fact that supports the opinion. The fact makes the opinion more convincing. In example B, the second sentence looks like a fact, but it isn't. The words *most beautiful* are a clue. How can you measure how beautiful a language is? You can't. It is an opinion. It doesn't support the opinion in the first sentence.

To distinguish between fact and opinion, you must realize that:

Facts can be checked. For example:

- Five foreign languages are offered at my middle school.
- Mr. Medina studied in Italy.
- _____

Add another fact to this list on the line above.

Opinions cannot be checked. For example:

- French is the most useful language to study.
- Mr. Medina is the best teacher in the district.
- _____

Add another opinion to this list on the line above.