

Open educational resource 4: Learn to distinguish information from opinion

Learning outcomes:

- Distinguish between informational and opinion texts
- Identify different opinion genres
- Evaluate the informational elements of a text

INTRODUCTION

The Journalistic Genres

Journalistic genres refer to the different ways in which the same current event can be communicated. These are textual categories used in journalism to organize and classify texts according to their function: either informative or evaluative. Genres, therefore, help us structure journalistic content and determine how information is presented to the audience.

Journalistic genres are divided into **informative genres** and **opinion genres**, each with distinct formats and structures to present facts, analyze situations, or express viewpoints. This classification is based on the journalist's communicative intent, which can either be to inform or to evaluate. In this educational resource, we will delve into the distinction between information and opinion, as those who spread misinformation often disguise opinion as verified information on social media and messaging platforms, presenting something as news when it is not.

Learning to differentiate information from opinion is crucial in the fight against misinformation. It enables readers, listeners, or viewers to develop critical thinking skills and form their own judgments about events. By mastering this distinction, the audience can easily identify when they are being provided with objective information and when they are being presented with an opinion—that is, a judgment or evaluation about someone or something—through any channel, whether traditional media, social networks, messaging apps, or major digital platforms.

Informative Genres

The quintessential informative genre is the **news article**. Its goal is to convey facts and events of public interest objectively. This is the least creative and most neutral genre, as it must focus solely on providing data and quotes from other people. A news piece should always avoid adjectives unless they are attributed to sources, and it must offer concrete information to the reader, viewer, or listener.

Within informative genres, we also find the **reportage**, which interprets and explains events by providing context, background, and their possible consequences. Here, the journalist's task is not only to report the

facts but also to help the audience understand them, offering context and deeper explanation without losing objectivity.

Among the informative genres is also the **interview**, which can be defined as a journalistic article based on an extensive dialogue between a journalist and the interviewee. The purpose of the interview is to obtain information, not to serve as a transmission channel for what the source (interviewee) wants to communicate. For an interview to be considered informative, its content must be verified by the journalist.

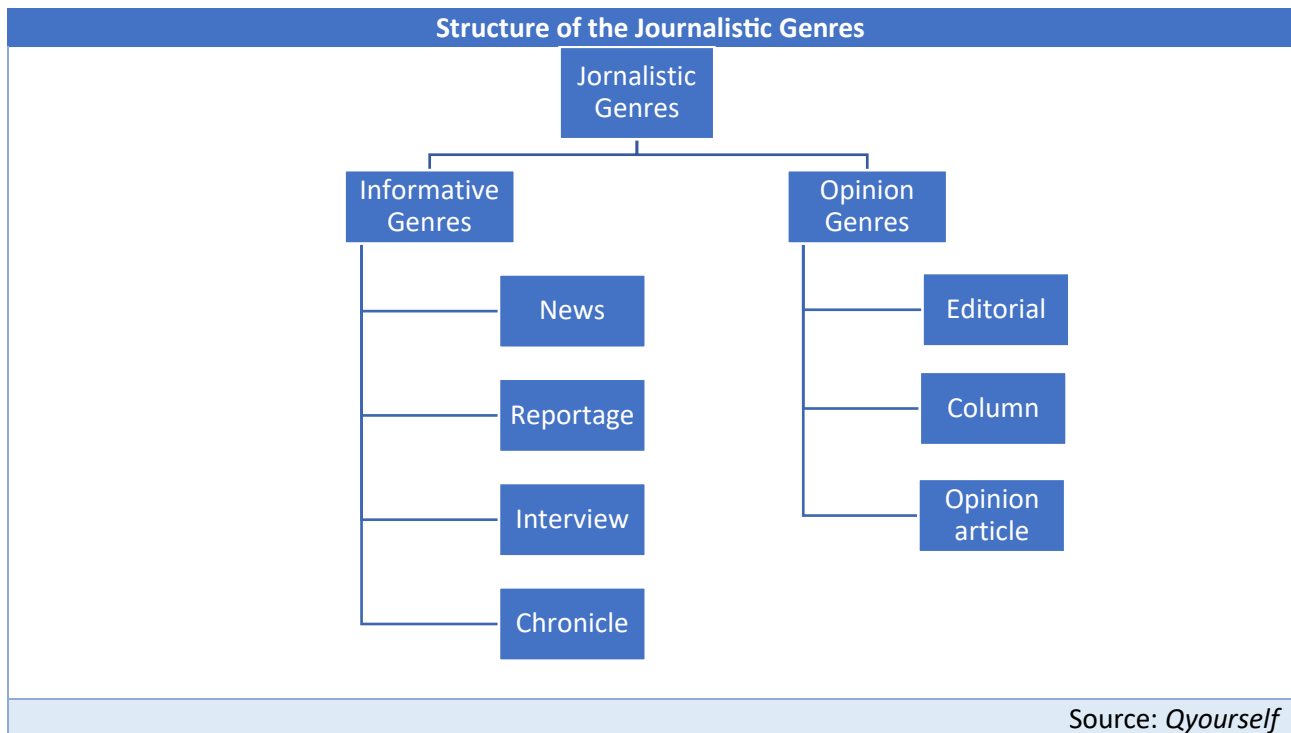
The **chronicle** is the most personal informative genre. It is very common in the journalistic cultures of Spain and Latin America but absent in the Anglo-Saxon world—especially in countries like the United Kingdom and the United States—which do not incorporate it as a journalistic genre. It is an informative narrative where the author is always a witness to the events and does not limit themselves to presenting data. While based on real and verifiable facts, the chronicle allows for the inclusion of observations, descriptions, and comments that enrich the narrative, offering the reader a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the event. Today, they often focus on current topics, giving rise, for example, to parliamentary chronicles or sports chronicles.

Opinion Genres

Opinion genres are those in which a journalist or contributor conveys value judgments, personal interpretations, or subjective perspectives on current events or relevant topics. They are characterized by offering arguments with the purpose of influencing the audience or inviting them to reflect, rather than simply presenting information objectively. Opinion genres, therefore, focus on the subjective evaluation of events, aiming to provide an interpretation or judgment about them, guiding public opinion with the goal of influencing it and sparking reflection or debate.

Among the opinion genres is the **editorial**, which is an article where the media outlet expresses its opinion on an issue of public concern, usually related to current events. The writer, always someone close to the editorial leadership, does not reflect their own thoughts but rather those of the media outlet. It is a reflection of the outlet's editorial stance, that is, its position on issues it considers important in relation to political, economic, or social organization. The main function of the editorial is to offer a clear and well-reasoned position, expressing support, criticism, or concern regarding the topic addressed, and it is common for it to also propose solutions or actions to be taken.

Another opinion genre is the **column**. Unlike the editorial, the column has a known author, which is why it must always be signed. It is an article where the opinion expressed belongs to the author, not the media outlet. The column provides a subjective and reasoned interpretation of a topic, with the aim of influencing public opinion or inviting debate. It is always published at a specific frequency: daily, weekly, or monthly. If there is no specific frequency and someone writes it on a one-time basis to give their perspective on a specific issue, it is referred to as an **opinion article**.



EXERCISES

Practical exercises

Exercise 4.1

We provide you with an informative text from a high-quality Spanish journalistic outlet. You must explain why it qualifies as news (refer to informative genres: news). The only value judgment present is when the journalist describes the bill as "controversial," which is acceptable because it provides context to the information, linking this adjective to previously published details explaining the controversy.

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Germany legalizes recreational cannabis use and the possession of small amounts

Almudena de Cabo | February 23, 2024



Protesters in favor of cannabis legalization in Berlin, August 2023 | OMER MESSINGER (GETTY IMAGES)

The German Bundestag approved this Friday the controversial law project proposed by German Health Minister Karl Lauterbach to legalize cannabis use, despite strong criticism from both experts and the opposition, as well as within the coalition government of Chancellor Olaf Scholz, which consists of the Social Democrats (SPD), the Greens, and the Liberals (FDP). With this measure, which is set to come into effect on April 1, the coalition government is advancing one of its main projects.

Source: [El País, February 23, 2024](#) & author's own work

Exercise 4.2: Manipulated text (1)

The original informative text has been manipulated by including judgments or opinions against the approval of the bill (**highlighted in red**). This serves as an opportunity to explain why an ostensibly informative message that disguises opinion within it should not be trusted (remember: a news piece must be neutral, as objective as possible, and should always avoid adjectives). It is worth noting that high-quality journalistic outlets always clearly differentiate between these genres. Conversely, disinformation often circulates through different channels (mainly social networks and messaging apps), where opinion is disguised as information, hence the message has been adapted to these types of platforms.

The German Bundestag approved on Friday the controversial law project proposed by German Health Minister Karl Lauterbach to legalize cannabis consumption, despite strong criticism from experts, the opposition, and even within Chancellor Olaf Scholz's ruling coalition, comprised of the Social Democrats (SPD), the Greens, and the Free Democrats (FDP). With this **regrettable** measure, set to take effect on April 1, the Government coalition advances **a dangerous project that will jeopardize the health of thousands of German citizens**.



QYourse!f @QYourse!f

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Source: Author's own work

Exercise 4.3. Manipulated text (2)

This time, the original informative text has been manipulated by including judgments or opinions (**highlighted in red**) in favor of adopting the measure.

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Source: Author's own work

Exercise 4.4

Reflect on how opinion disguised as information biases the news and steers us toward a particular viewpoint: against cannabis legalization (manipulated text A) or in favor of it (manipulated text B). Remember that distinguishing information from opinion is crucial, as those who spread misinformation often mask opinions as verified information, presenting something as news when it is not. Also, keep in mind that misinformation is not a phenomenon found in high-quality journalistic outlets but rather on social networks and in messages distributed via messaging apps.

Exercise 4.5

We provide you with two opinion articles published in Spain by journalistic outlets. In the first, the author opposes cannabis legalization. In the second, the author supports legalization. The goal is to explain that opinion itself is not negative but must be clearly identified as such so the audience can easily recognize it. Remember that high-quality journalistic outlets always label opinions as such, ensuring readers, listeners, or viewers understand that these are opinions and not information.

Opinion text against the legalization of Marijuana

ES NOTICIA		Israel		Audiencias ayer		El Hormiguero		Guerra Rusia Ucrania		Ayuso		Peter Lim		Madeleine McCann		Huracán Milton		Puigdemont		Incendio Guillema		AEMET Madrid		Santoral
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GRANMADRID		Getafe		Alcalá de Henares		Aranjuez		Torrejón		Fuenlabrada		Móstoles		Más	+									

Marijuana: The Most Dangerous of Drugs



Isabel Díaz Ayuso | May 18, 2024

Why is marijuana or cannabis the worst drug of all? Mercedes Rodríguez, director of Proyecto Hombre in Madrid, has clear reasons: its use begins at very early ages, often before 15; it triggers mental illnesses, particularly psychotic episodes; and it affects all aspects of young people's lives, jeopardizing their future.

Moreover, current cultivation techniques make cannabis today four times more potent than it was two decades ago each joint is equivalent to four. Cannabis is falsely labeled as a "soft drug," a term used to whitewash its image decades ago, now reinforced by derivatives like CBD. While there are drugs that directly cause more deaths, like fentanyl, cannabis destroys more lives, especially among young people, as all users of harder drugs started with marijuana. We should heed the voices of those who know this fight best: the "mothers of drugs," Proyecto Hombre, Narcotics Anonymous, teachers, psychiatrists, psychologists, and desperate families.

They all warn us of the dangerous narrative linking cannabis to "health" and the "therapeutic." This misleads young people into associating cannabis with something "natural" and "good," to the point where they believe cigarettes are worse.

CHILD RISK

CBD is becoming a gateway to marijuana. Children and young people are defenseless against CBD campaigns, backed by powerful interests, with these products even finding their way into pharmacies and stores near schools. The Madrid regional government is preparing legislation to protect minors, within the limits of its powers, from cannabis-derived products.

This trend is expanding alongside massive legalization campaigns in countries we once admired, like the United States and Canada, whose cities are now filled with "zombies" and the smell of marijuana—the scent of decay. Some argue for "freedom" to justify drug use, but they forget that a society full of addicts becomes unlivable. Drugs dismantle entire societies, pose public health and safety issues, and lead to marginalization, loneliness, school failure, abuse, unemployment, and ruin. Drugs are the primary cause of poverty worldwide.



Cannabis Plants Seized by Police in a Madrid Raid

Moreover, we are being made to forget that drug trafficking is the most powerful criminal network in history. The worst dictatorships in the world have connections to drug trafficking, just like all terrorist groups across the globe.

Addictions, unfortunately, are the most egalitarian issues; they affect all social levels and environments. Every family shattered by drugs recognizes its own tragedy. David Bowie once said in an interview many years ago that he quit drugs because they made him a worse person. When he was using, he didn't care about anyone, and no one mattered to him.

For young people, the consequences of marijuana use include schizophrenia, self-harm, psychosis, anxiety, depression, and even suicide. We must also consider the link between drugs and crimes such as murder, rape, gang involvement, and theft. That's why those who work with children and youth understand that cannabis legalization is a complete folly. Legalization leads to greater availability and increased consumption.

The existence of a black market would not be resolved by legalization because it would have to be global, or we would become an island drowning in drugs. There would still be a cheaper and unregulated black market (as is currently the case with benzodiazepines in Spain). Moreover, we forget that drugs and addiction are never satisfied; they aim to take over the addict's life, starting with preventing them from living, destroying their surroundings, and ultimately killing them.

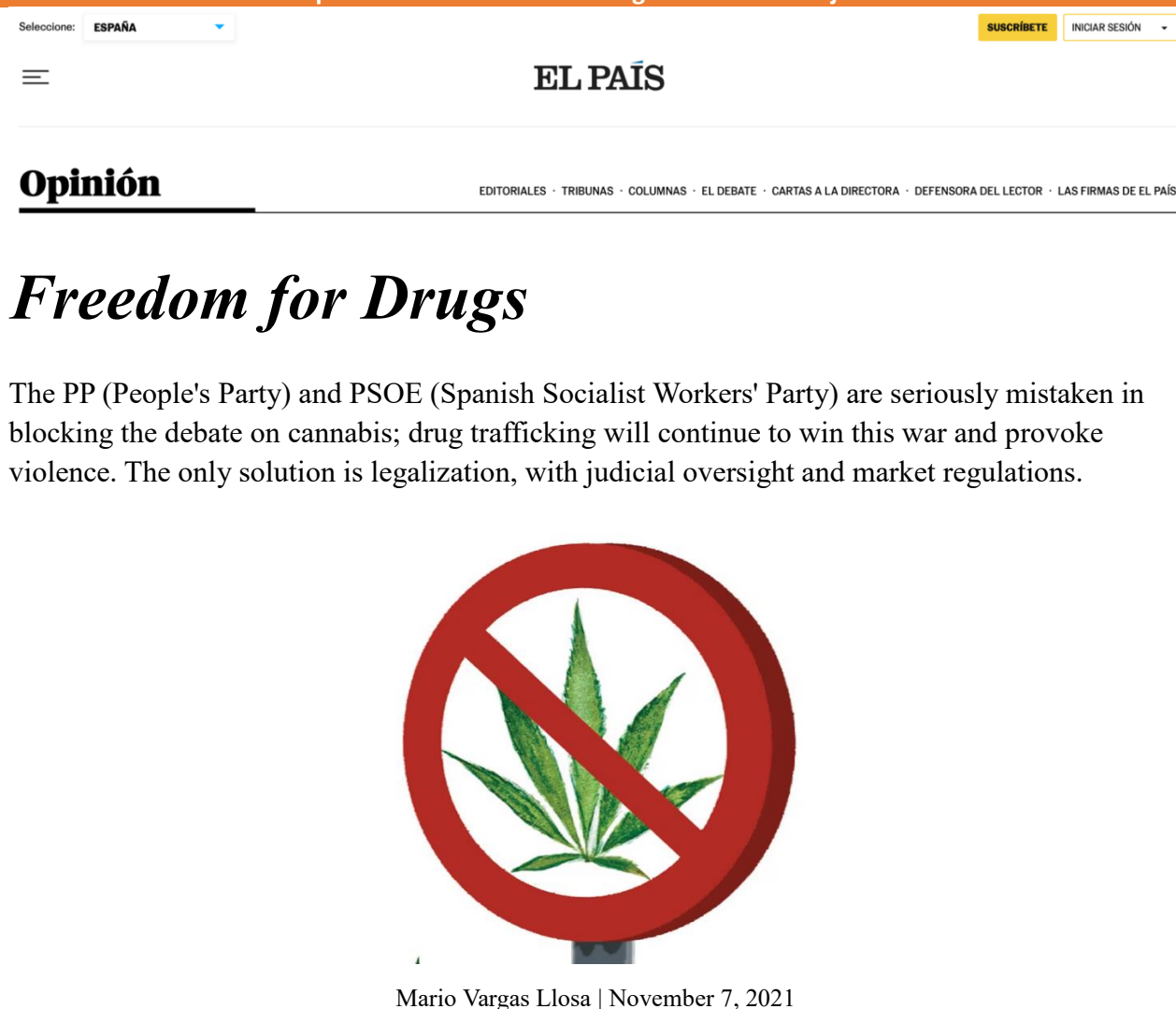
CONTROL LAWS IN MADRID

At a certain point, an addict becomes a sick person who needs help. However, what must be avoided is the first step; prevention must be emphasized, especially among young people. Family, friends, and schools are the key areas for prevention.

Marijuana addiction, cannabis use, is already a national and global emergency. This fight is the firm commitment of the Government of the Community of Madrid. We have been the first to raise the alarm, to take action, and we will engage in a political, informational, and cultural battle against this scourge of our time.

Source: [El Mundo, May 18, 2024](#) & author's own work

Opinion text in favor of the legalization of Marijuana



Seleccione: ESPAÑA

SUSCRÍBETE INICIAR SESIÓN


EL PAÍS

Opinión

EDITORIALES · TRIBUNAS · COLUMNAS · EL DEBATE · CARTAS A LA DIRECTORA · DEFENSORA DEL LECTOR · LAS FIRMAS DE EL PAÍS

Freedom for Drugs

The PP (People's Party) and PSOE (Spanish Socialist Workers' Party) are seriously mistaken in blocking the debate on cannabis; drug trafficking will continue to win this war and provoke violence. The only solution is legalization, with judicial oversight and market regulations.



Mario Vargas Llosa | November 7, 2021

The Socialist Party, in power, and the Popular Party, in opposition, have forged a temporary alliance in the Spanish Parliament to put an end to cannabis, which seemed destined to be tolerated in Spain. They are gravely mistaken. This prohibition will only serve to strengthen the drug trafficking mafias that already

operate in Spain, albeit less than in Mexico and other Latin American countries, and will increase their criminal activities as well as drug consumption in the country.

When I was a candidate in the 1980s, I lived in a movement that was fueled by the passion of the program. We believed it would play a crucial role in the election, and we were completely wrong: it had no impact, and most voters didn't even read it. But for me, it was stimulating; according to the program, all Peruvian problems had solutions. Except for drugs, which escaped the control of the country because they were an international issue.

In what we Peruvians call the “mountain eyebrow,” between the Andes and the Amazon, the territory of coca, the source of cocaine, produces up to three harvests a year; despite the fact that farmers do not consume drugs, they only grow and sell them. They chew coca, meaning they masticate it, and the juice they extract protects them from the cold, hunger, and fatigue. Colombian planes arrive in the lonely areas of that mountain range, and their pilots pay in dollars for the cargo they take away. Who would convince the farmers that they should replace their coca crops with alternative products, which they would sell through terrible roads that take many days to reach the Agrobanco in the cities, which pays them in soles and, moreover, late, poorly, and never? No one, of course. And that's why coca production is becoming more extensive every day in Peru and Latin America, and the cocaine trade, which often comes to us imported from abroad, is intensifying.

The only solution to this problem is the brave approach taken by Uruguay: to liberalize the drug trade, although I don't understand why only a state-owned company exercises that right; the law should be free, and private entrepreneurs should also enjoy that trade (needless to say, under strict state supervision). This was the solution proposed many years ago by liberal economist Milton Friedman, who also added that if the fight against drugs continued to grow, those who relied on that work would become the worst enemies of its liberation. Exactly this has happened.

Those who fight against drugs today are many thousands of people and institutions around the world, starting with the United States, where DEA officials are now vigorous opponents of its legal redemption. We are accustomed to being informed, based on statistics and surveys, that the fight against drugs is achieving many successes, that its circulation is decreasing, and similar claims. But the truth is that drugs are sold everywhere—the drug dealers give them away at the doors of schools so that young people, and even children, become early users—and the corruption and violence unleashed by powerful cartels knows no limits. Hundreds of women, their preferred victims, and many others are undermining the states, at ministerial levels and sometimes even involving the presidents themselves, as has been the sad case in Peru.

The problem is even deeper. Government systems and authorities are corrupted or will be by the torrents of money that drugs produce, to the extent that, in certain places, which will continue to expand, everything depends on them and the officials involved in their circulation. States cannot compete with those who spend and squander delirious sums to ensure control over certain cities or regions, which are practically left in the hands of drug traffickers, where they gradually replace state authorities.

Faced with this drama, there is no choice but legalization. It is logical to start with lesser drugs, as some advanced countries have already done, to measure the consequences and then, with a medical prescription, move to harder drugs that are truly remedies for schizophrenia and other diseases. By the way, at least in Peru, there is an old controversy—made up of heated discussions, articles, and books—between doctors who see the legalization of cocaine as a serious danger to the health of users (they are a minority) and those who, on the contrary, believe that addiction to it would not be worse than that caused by cigarettes and alcohol. But what is of immediate interest is to put an end to that unexpected counter-power that, in many places, has already replaced the state and is the one that dictates the law.

I am not exaggerating at all. In cities where drug use was secret and unconfessable, nowadays it is little less than public, accessible to everyone, and has become an exhibition of modernity, youth, and progress.

In any case, the worst solution is to aggravate penalties and increase law enforcement against drug trafficking. It is clear—and the case of Mexico is not the only one—that as persecution increases, drug traffickers, who have all the money in the world, arm themselves with machine guns and more sophisticated rifles bought in the United States, and multiply demonstrations of strength, leaving a trail of dead in the towns and cities they control. That path, of hecatombs and massacres, is not realistic.

Of course, freedom for drugs has its risks, and the state must confront them, in this case, with greater judicial and police control over those who would be harmed by that law. Likewise, it is imperative that health systems provide detoxification and treatment services to those willing to free themselves from that burden, which could also pose a serious danger to health. All of this is reasonable and fruitful. However, it is not reasonable to act as if, in reality, we are defeating drug traffickers. That is not the case. They are the ones winning the war. We must take off the blinders and acknowledge it. And they will continue to win as long as states try to destroy them. They are the ones destroying us.

The worst part is the violence associated with this situation in which major traffickers are objects of cult—the most frivolous magazines and programs report on them, as their popularity is great—and the persecutions and wars they wage among themselves are already part of everyday reality, as if the consequences of all this were not the tortured and dead multiplying everywhere. The solution to the problem is not only in the legalization of drugs, of course. But, in the immediate sense, it is the only way to put an end to the illegality surrounding this issue, in which dozens or hundreds of innocents perish every day, and in horrific conditions. Legalization will put an end to this excessive violence that paralyzes progress and keeps many countries in underdevelopment.

Source: [El País, November 7, 2024](#) & author's own work