Earlier this month, the New York Times published an investigative report about the origins of President Trump’s wealth. It focused on the potentially fraudulent means his father used to transfer funds to him and his siblings without incurring estate and gift taxes. In many places, the lengthy article expressed the dollar amounts from decades ago “in today’s dollars,” to provide the reader with some monetary context.

The president took note of this context, but in doing so he got a basic business principle wrong. In essence, he confused interest with inflation. At least one major business news site repeated his error. I’ll correct that error here.

In a tweet, the president said the Times article had “used the concept of ‘time value of money’ in doing a hit piece on me.” That was wrong. The concept used by the Times was inflation.

An explainer by CNBC said the president “went back to Economics 101.” But its explanation of “time value of money” was wrong because it too confused interest with inflation.

The CNBC article started off in the right direction, noting that “the value of money today will not be equal to the same amount of money in the future.” But the example CNBC used to illustrate this was way off: “A Hershey bar cost about 2 cents when it was first introduced more than 100 years ago. That same chocolate bar costs close to $2 today.”

Sorry, but that Hershey bar’s price increased from two cents to two dollars because of inflation, not interest. Inflation is also why the funds the young Donald Trump received from his father are larger when expressed “in today’s dollars.”

A writer for New York Magazine continued the parade of wrongness, saying that because of the time value of money, “a person would rather be given a thousand dollars today than be guaranteed a payment of a thousand dollars 10 years from now, because inflation erodes its value.” Sigh.

So let’s go back to Economics 101 and get it right. The time value of money is a function of interest, not inflation. Interest and inflation play completely different roles in determining monetary values.

Even if there is no inflation, money has a “time value” that derives from the holder’s ability to invest it and earn a rate of return. Suppose the interest rate is 5 percent and suppose it’s a real rather than a nominal rate, meaning that inflation is out of the picture. It’s better to receive $100 now instead of $100 next year because if it’s received now, it can be invested to yield $105 next year. Obviously, $105 next year is better than $100 next year, and it has nothing to do with inflation.

The time value of money is behind nearly everything in finance. It’s the basis of discounted present value, of interest and returns to equity, of structured settlements and annuities. It’s the reason the Powerball lump sum is less than the advertised jackpot.

Sure, the most important thing about the Times article was its finding that President Trump’s wealth is due largely to the generosity of his father. But the confusion between interest and inflation was interesting, too. The New York Magazine writer said that “the time value of money is a very basic principle that anybody in business should know.” I agree, and if I’ve done my job with this column, you know something about business that the president doesn’t.