



LEAP Online

Learning Excellence Achievement Pathway Online Tutorial



Distinguishing Between Fact From Fiction

LEAP Online

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A Big Trip



Haleema joins a friend for lunch and shares some big news. She's just bought tickets to visit New York City.

Bridget is shocked and tells Haleema, "You'll be in danger in New York! It's dirty and crime-ridden."

Bridget's comments worry Haleema, but she decides to trust the exhaustive research she did about the city before booking her trip. A few weeks later, she boards a plane for New York.

Haleema's New York experience

First, she marvels at the lights, crowds, and traffic in Times Square. Then, she catches a Broadway show. On her last day in town, she eats the best pizza she's ever tasted.

What if?

On the plane home, Haleema goes over the high points of her trip, remembering Bridget's comments. She realises that her friend's concern was an opinion, while her own research was fact-based.

But what might have happened if Haleema had misinterpreted Bridget's opinion as fact?

Myths vs. Facts

Separating fact and opinion

We use facts and opinions to draw conclusions, form beliefs, and make decisions daily. Yet Haleema's story demonstrates why distinguishing between them is important for determining our next steps.

In this tutorial, you'll learn the difference between fact and opinion and get clues to recognise them in context. You'll also examine ways to find balanced information, especially if sources suddenly seem one-sided.

Fact vs. opinions

First, let's clarify the difference between facts and opinions. You're probably familiar with the terms, but can you define them? Read below to see how your understanding matches these definitions.

Fact

A fact can be observed, verified, measured, and/or recorded. Facts are also objective, not influenced by an individual's personal viewpoint.

Opinion

Opinions are beliefs or values that are subjective, specific to the person holding them. Because of this, opinions can't be measured or verified.

What's the Agenda?

The definitions may seem straightforward, but confusing the two is easier than you might think, especially if you get caught up in what you think or how you feel about the statement presented. Luckily, clues can help you separate facts from opinions.

The first clues are context and intent, which can help you determine a statement's value and weight. Ask yourself, "What motivates the person writing or saying this? What might they want me to think, feel, or do?" Consider if they're presenting educational information or hoping to convince an audience to vote or make a purchase.

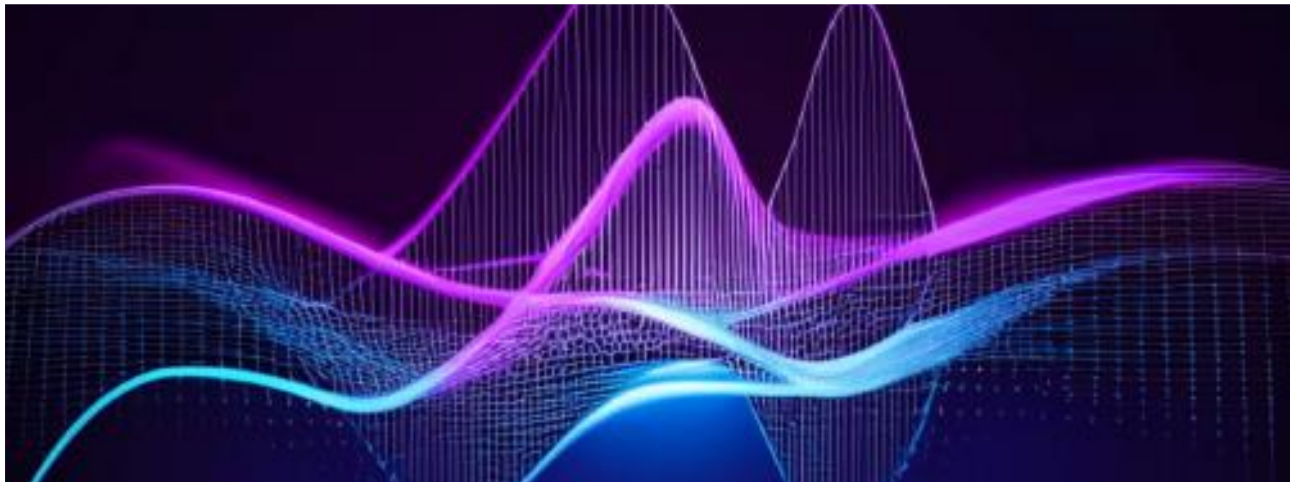
Context influences the value a statement holds. For example, you might respect your mother's opinion on whether an area would be a nice place to live, but trust an Estate Agent's facts to decide if the home is priced fairly.

Next, look at the information presented. Someone presenting information is more likely to be quoting facts, while someone seeking to persuade might rely on opinions or a combination of facts and opinions that meet an agenda. However, those aren't foolproof rules. Examine the table below for more clues to determine if a statement is a fact or an opinion.

Facts	Opinions
Observable or measurable	Belief or values-based
Objective	Subjective
Balanced, multiple perspectives presented	One-sided
Introduced with phrases like "research shows," "data notes," or "records indicate."	Changeable
	Introduced with values-based or qualifier words like "always/never," "bad/good," "think/feel/believe," or "should/don't."

Facts and opinions are neither "bad" nor "good." But understanding the difference can help us make informed, balanced decisions.

When Information is One-Sided



Have you ever scanned your social media feed and thought as you read each post, “Yep, this makes sense,” or nodded your head along with the news? You might be in an echo chamber—when sources of information from news, government, and social groups confirm our ways of thinking. Both facts and opinions might support a one-sided argument in an echo chamber.



Most problems have more than one “right” solution. Students using the same critical thinking process may come up with different solutions. The value of the critical thinking process is not in reaching the same conclusion as others. Instead, it ensures that the conclusion you come to is rooted in evidence, logic, and reason and free from personal bias.

What's the Big Deal?

Consuming information from sources that share our beliefs may seem harmless. However, staying in an information silo can drive extremism and make it harder to listen to different perspectives. Looking at the world from someone else's point of view builds empathy and understanding, allowing us to learn something new. Read below for tips to expand an information bubble.

Seek another viewpoint

Are there counterarguments for the idea? What facts and opinions support the idea, and why do they hold merit? Keep an open mind as you evaluate them.

Engage respectfully

Work to seek knowledge and understanding rather than consensus. Try asking questions like:

- "Tell me more about ..."
- "My understanding is x. What is yours?"
- "Could you share more about the information that led you to this conclusion?"
"I'm wondering about your experience with x."

Remember, the conversational goal is not to change minds but to understand. Often, we're working from different information. Practice active listening and curiosity.

Summary

We rely on facts and opinions to draw conclusions and make decisions. Facts and opinions aren't "bad" or "good." However, context matters when deciding whether a fact or opinion is more valuable to solving the problem at hand.

Remember that facts can be verified, measured, or recorded, while opinions can't be. Phrases like "research shows" or "records indicate" are clues that the information being presented is factual. Feeling, value, or qualifier words like "think/believe," "worst/best," and "usually/never" are opinion cues.

An echo chamber occurs when the information we consume is one-sided. It can lead to extremism and an inability to understand other points of view. To prevent echo chambers, seek information from various sources, even if you disagree. Talk respectfully with people whose beliefs differ from your own and "like" various sources to keep your feed balanced.

These simple practices can help you make better-informed decisions and increase positive interactions with others.



Always look for clues. Even experts have opinions, so don't assume that someone in a position of authority or with extensive knowledge is sharing a fact. Look for clues to determine whether what they're saying is factual or a well-informed opinion.