

FACT

or

Opinion?

by Sarah Johnson

It's important to know if something is a fact or an opinion. We need to know if we can trust information.

How do we know if information is true? How do we know if it's just what someone thinks?



What is a fact? What is an opinion?

A fact is a piece of information that's been proven or shown to be true. It's backed up by **reliable evidence**, such as research, experiments, and **observations**. They show that the fact is true. An opinion is what someone thinks or believes. It is their point of view, but it's not backed up by reliable evidence.

For example, a shop owner may say:



This is a carrot.
Carrots are the yummiest vegetable.

reliable evidence: information that shows something is correct or true

observation: when you closely watch and examine something

The first sentence "This is a carrot" is a fact. We can see that the vegetable is a carrot. We can taste that it's a carrot. We can check that it's a carrot by looking in a book or searching online.

The second sentence "Carrots are the yummiest vegetable" is the shop owner's opinion. She likes carrots, but no one can prove that carrots are the yummiest vegetable. Everyone likes different things.



How can we tell facts from opinions?

This report has a mix of facts and opinions. Can you tell which is which?



Bat or bird? A flappy problem

A dispute has broken out at Riverbank Reserve. At dusk, small animals fly among the trees. Are they bats or are they birds?

Scientist Mani Rewi works at a university. She says the animals are pekapeka or long-tailed bats. "Pekapeka live in holes in old trees." Mani has studied pekapeka for twenty years.

Ted Topp lives next door to the reserve. He doesn't agree with Mani. "In my view, these animals are birds. They have wings, like birds. They live in trees, like birds."

Mani says the animals are definitely not birds. "Birds lay eggs. These bats are mammals – mammals give birth to babies. Photos from our cameras show that fifteen baby bats were born this year."

Ted says he has other evidence that proves the animals are birds. "My cat likes watching them, and she loves birds. Also, I found this egg under a tree."

And so the argument goes on. Bird or bat? How will we ever know?

Mani studies New Zealand animals. She is a reliable source of information because she does lots of research at the university. All her work is checked by other experts.



What Mani says is based on research.



"In my view" is a clue that this may not be a fact. It's what Ted thinks.

What Ted says is based on what he has seen.

What Mani says is based on observations and data.



A cat is not a reliable source!



Useful clues

Sometimes it's hard to know if something is a fact or an opinion. Some people are good at **persuading** others when they think they're right. However, their opinions can be biased. For example, Edith has a dog, and she says that dogs make the best pets. She is biased towards dogs because she owns one.

If you're wondering if something is a fact or an opinion, ask yourself:

- Who said it?
- How would they know? Are they an expert?
- What evidence do they have to back up what they say?
- How reliable is the evidence? Where is it from?
- How many sources of evidence do they have?



persuade: convince someone to agree with something

It's more likely that something is a fact if there are lots of clues and reliable evidence to back it up.

Watch out for these fact and opinion clues. They help to show whether a statement is a fact or an opinion.

Fact clues

- The **research** suggests ...
- The **experts** say ...
- The **evidence** suggests ...
- A **reliable source** says ...

Opinion clues

- I think ...
- I believe ...
- In **my opinion** ...
- Words such as **best/worst, beautiful/ugly, fun/boring, good/bad, nice/terrible**

Identifying fact and opinion

Reading a newspaper is a good way to practise your skills at identifying fact from opinion.

Look at these headlines. Which ones are facts?
Which ones are opinions?



Another place to try out your skills is online. There's a lot of good information on the internet. But there's also heaps of information that isn't backed up by facts.

On some websites, you can't be sure the information is true. Some information is made up, and a lot is opinion. You should look for information that comes from more reliable sources.

Seriously strange facts

Some facts are hard to believe. Take these unusual ones – do you believe them?



→ Young tuatara have a third eye on their forehead.

→ After a female kiwi lays an egg, the male sits on the egg. He keeps it warm until the chick hatches.



→ The ear of a tree wētā is under its knee.

→ A pūriri moth spends six years as a grub. Then it turns into an adult moth and dies after forty-eight hours.



All these facts are from Auckland Museum's website. This is a reliable source.

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