

Sorting out statements

Some statements are **facts**.

Some statements are **opinions**.

Some statements are **personal narratives**.

The distinctions among these categories can mean the difference between a fruitful conversation and a heated argument.

A factual statement can be backed up with evidence.

"The sun rises every morning."

An opinion is a view or belief based on experience. An opinion may be factual, but an opinion can't be proven. Opinions often have strong emotional dimensions.

"Sunrise is the best time of the day."

A narrative is a retelling of experiences or connected events. It's a personal story that can be factual or not.

"Watching the sunrise every day for a month changed my life."

How do we interpret what we hear? How do we understand what we say?

When discussing hot-button issues, take care to distinguish facts, opinions and narratives.

Some people have trouble separating fact from opinion. When we care deeply about a subject and are committed to a specific point of view, we are more apt to mistake opinions for facts.

An opinion is no less valid than a fact; it's simply different.

ACTION: Avoid ambiguity. If you're confused about a statement, ask the speaker to explain what he means. This requires you to be listening carefully rather than preparing your next response. In clarification, often an opinion that is stated as hard fact softens.