

It's a case for **Detective Sergeant Factual**

"The facts ma'am, just the facts"

Teacher: Please read this to your class

A man in an orange coat, purple pants and a green hat is walking down the sidewalk of 5th Avenue in New York City.* As he walks he is banging two metal trashcan lids together, making a lot of noise.

Sgt. Factual stops him and asks, "Why are you making all this noise?" The man in the colorful outfit replies, "I am keeping the elephants away."

Sgt. Factual looks one way and the other and says, "But there are no elephants here on 5th Avenue!"*

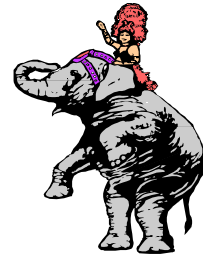
To which the man in the colorful outfit replies, "See, it works!" and continues walking and banging his lids.

This obviously is a joke. It depends on you knowing, or thinking you know, that there are almost never elephants on 5th Avenue.* This is called an assumption with a high level of probability, that it is more likely to be factual than not to be factual.

But Sgt. Factual wanted to be so sure of the facts, that he did something before he answered the man. Can anyone tell me what he did?

Sgt. Factual looked one way and the other. He checked his assumption with an observation, and he knew his statement would be factual, as of this moment.

Are there any elephants in your neighborhood?
Are you sure? Did you ever see any?
What if the circus was in town?



The only way we can be absolutely, positively, really, really sure, is to go to your neighborhood and look around. That observation would give you the right to make a factual statement, but it would be factual only while you looked. But based on what you have seen in the past we can assume there are no elephants in your neighborhood and be almost 100% sure of being correct. This is an assumption with a very high level of probability of being factual.

We can only assume that the trash can lids had nothing to do with the absence of elephants. This assumption also has a high level of being factual.

**Substitute the main street of a local urban area if your students may not be familiar with 5th Avenue*