

It's a case for
Detective Sergeant Factual

"The facts ma'am, just the facts"

Student's notes on factual and inferential statements.

Just the facts. Sounds simple. But just how do we determine what we can call factual? Dr. Irving J. Lee listed properties of factual and inferential statements. We have chosen to paraphrase this list.

1. An individual can make a statement of fact *after* an observation or experience, and that statement must be confined to the observation or experience.
2. The number of factual statements that can be made is limited since we cannot see it all.
3. The statement of 'fact' then represents a high level of probability. We tend to get agreement with other statements of 'fact' about the same observation or experience.

On the other hand:

1. An individual may make an inferential statement at any time; before, during or after an observation.
2. An unlimited number of inferential statements can be made, and go beyond what one has observed or experienced.
3. Inferential statements have some degree of probability, and if only inferential statements are made in a given situation, we can anticipate disagreement.

Example:

You meet your friend Janeen, and she says, "I went to the Eagles/Dallas game on Sunday." This then falls into the category of a factual statement. (If Janeen's words can be trusted.) Janeen leaves, and your friend Juan joins you. You make the following statement.

"Janeen told me she went to the game on Sunday." Since you are describing something you experienced, (being told) we consider that part of the statement factual.

However, if you said, "Janeen went to the game on Sunday," the statement becomes inferential, you did not see her there.

Now Juan replies, "Since Janeen was at the game, she must have seen the runback on the opening kick-off." Inferential. She may have not yet been seated, or perhaps she was buying a hot dog at that time. Secondly, this inferential statement is derived from a previous inferential statement. "Janeen went to the game on Sunday."

"Janeen goes to all the home games." (Inferential, the season may not be over.)

"Janeen must have season tickets." (Another inference derived from an inference.)

"I don't know why Janeen goes to football games. She really doesn't know what it is all about". (Purely inferential) To which Juan replies, "She must know something by now." (Inferential, promoting disagreement)

The further we go from the original fact, the less likely our statements appear truthful. Our own thoughts, prejudices, jealousies, etc. enter into the picture.