

Why It Matters if It's a Statement, an Opinion, or a Claim That You're Investigating

Teachers always say: "You should investigate social media posts before you share them." But do you investigate every statement you see on social media the same way? It depends on whether it's a STATEMENT, an OPINION, or a CLAIM.

Quick definitions

- OPINIONS are subjective, not debatable, don't need a reason, don't need evidence to support them, might or might not be given by experts
 - CLAIMS are subjective, debatable, need at least one reason, can/should be supported with evidence
 - STATEMENTS are objective, not debatable, don't need a reason, are either true or false
 - A statement is a "meaningful declarative sentence that is true or false" (Wikipedia)
 - A statement that has been verified as true is a FACT
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How can you tell the difference between statements, opinions, and claims?



Example of an opinion

OPINIONS are SUBJECTIVE.

Someone could say "Whose opinion is that?"

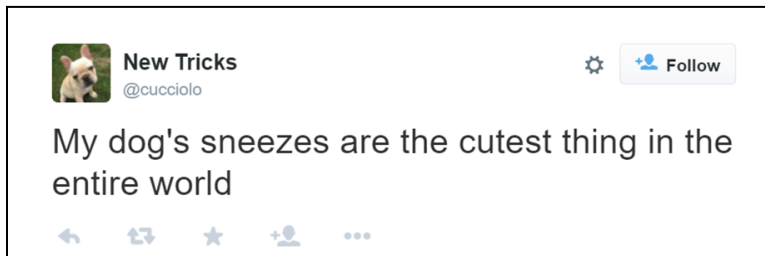
It would make sense if you said, "*In my opinion*, pygmy goats make great pets."



Example of an opinion

Opinions are NOT DEBATABLE.

Opinions are what someone thinks or feels or believes—and you can't argue with someone that they *don't* actually think or feel or believe something



Example of an opinion

Opinions DON'T NEED A REASON other than a personal preference or belief.

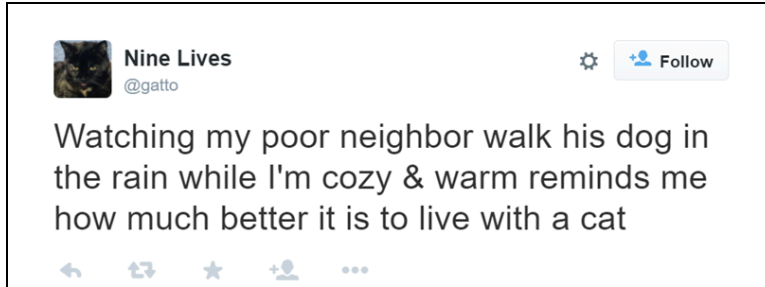
You could say, "I think my dog's sneezes are cute *because I do.*"



Example of a claim

CLAIMS are SUBJECTIVE.

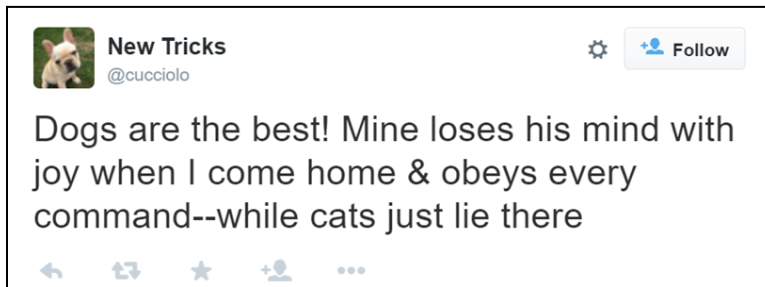
Someone could say, "Who made that claim?"



Example of a claim

Claims are DEBATABLE.

If you made a claim that cats make better pets than dogs, a reasonable person could take the other side of this debate and argue that dogs actually make better pets.



Example of a claim

Claims NEED AT LEAST ONE REASON.

For example, "Cats make better pets *because they don't have to be taken for walks.*"

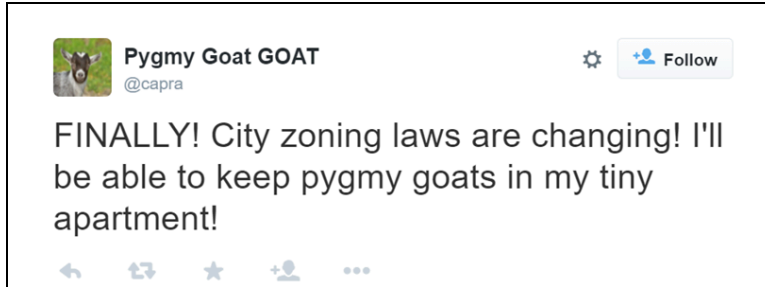
Or: "Dogs make better pets *because they show more affection and obedience.*"



Example of a statement

STATEMENTS are OBJECTIVE.

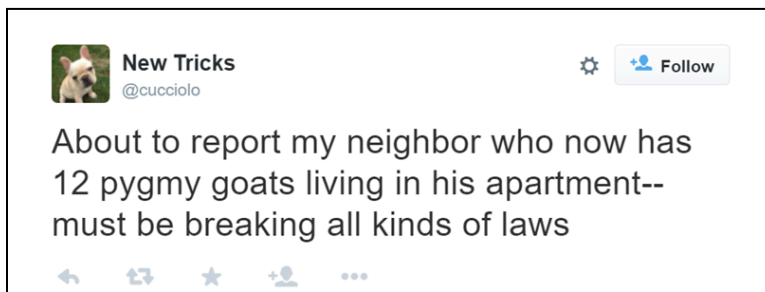
They are saying something is a fact. No one would ever say, "Whose fact is that?"



Example of a statement

Statements are NOT DEBATABLE.

If there is evidence that the zoning laws did indeed change, then a reasonable person could not argue the laws stayed the same.



Example of a statement

Statements DON'T NEED A REASON

If you're stating, "My neighbor is breaking the law by keeping pygmy goats in his apartment," you don't need to add "*because...*"



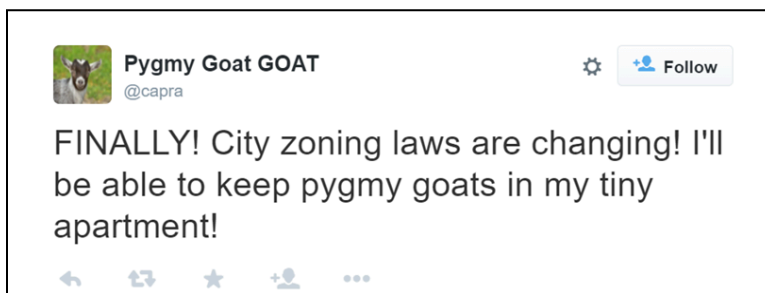
Example of an opinion

It would make sense if you said, "*In my opinion*, pygmy goats make great pets."



Example of a claim

It would make sense if you said, “*From my perspective*, having a pygmy goat eat your food waste is easier than composting it.”



Example of a statement

But if you said, “*In my opinion*, the city has changed its zoning laws,” or “*From my perspective*, the city has changed its zoning laws,” it would sound strange.

In a statement, it’s not a matter of opinion or perspective: either the laws changed or they didn’t.



Example of a statement

Statements ARE EITHER TRUE OR FALSE.

For example, the post above states that the neighbor must be breaking the law as if it were a fact, but we know the laws changed, so it’s false.



Example of a claim

Claims CAN BE SUPPORTED WITH EVIDENCE (and they should be).



Example of an opinion

Opinions DON'T NEED ANY EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THEM.

For example, if someone thinks pygmy goats make great pets, you can't argue that they don't actually think that.



Example of an opinion

You could have a different opinion, but you couldn't prove your opinion was better. (Though you might be able to prove your opinion is more popular.)

Why does it matter whether something is a statement, an opinion, or a claim?

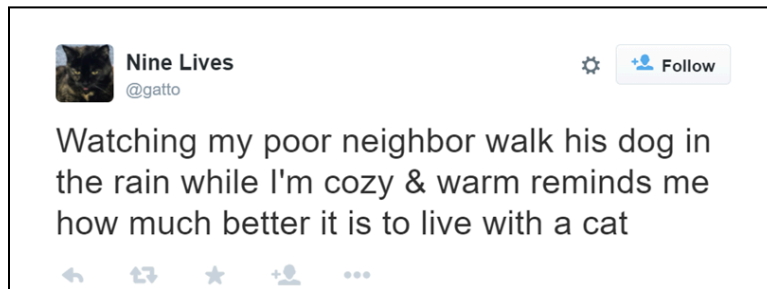
It determines how you investigate the social media post that contains it.



Example of a statement

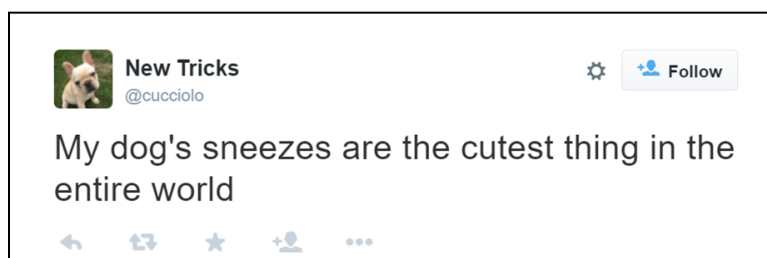
If it's a statement, FACT-CHECK it to verify if it's true or false.

(BTW, this statement is false: Cats were domesticated about 8,000 years ago.)



Example of a claim

If it's a claim, check to see if it was made with sound reasoning and if it's supported by strong evidence.



Example of an opinion

If it's an opinion, you can't, for example, verify whether it's true or false that this dog's sneezes are the cutest thing in the entire world--or find evidence to support it as a claim.

When investigating opinions, the big question is: "Whose opinion is it?"

Some opinions are considered EXPERT OPINIONS.



Example of an opinion

Everyone really is entitled to their own opinions.

It's just that not everyone is an expert about the topic.

And it's up to you to make sure it is actually an opinion—not a statement that could be verified as true or false, or a claim that should be supported with evidence.

Give it a try: Statement, opinion, or claim? How can you tell?

1

The average student loses up to 34% of the prior year's learning during the long summer break

A set of social media interaction icons including a reply arrow, a retweet symbol, a star for favorites, a share icon, and a three-dot menu.

2

Schools should have long summer vacations so teachers can spend time at their beach mansions

A set of social media interaction icons including a reply arrow, a retweet symbol, a star for favorites, a share icon, and a three-dot menu.

3

Many students get summer jobs as camp counselors or as CEOs of major pharmaceutical companies

A set of social media interaction icons including a reply arrow, a retweet symbol, a star for favorites, a share icon, and a three-dot menu.

4

Long summer vacations rule because I hate school

A set of social media interaction icons including a reply arrow, a retweet symbol, a star for favorites, a share icon, and a three-dot menu.

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