

Distinguishing between matters of Fact, matters of Opinion and matters of Reasoned Judgment

Matter of fact: issues about which reasonable people either all agree or all disagree; there is a well-established method for settling the issue between people.
Examples:

- Diet soda contains less sugar than regular soda contains.
- Elvis is alive and living in Pittsburgh.

Notice that saying something is a "matter of fact" does not necessarily mean that it is *true* , only that it is something that we could all agree is true or false using some established method.

Matter of opinion: issues that cannot be settled definitively between people using any method. When a claim is *just* a matter of opinion, it is equally reasonable for one person to believe a claim and another person to reject it. Examples:

- The water in the shower is uncomfortably cold.
 - Diet soda tastes bland compared to regular soda.
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Matter of reasoned judgment: issues for which there is more than one standard* of judgment. Although these are issues about which two people could reasonably disagree, settling matters of reasoned judgment between people is often necessary in everyday life. This is done by debating the different pros and cons of different relevant standards of judgment.

- The new sewage treatment plant is a waste of money.
- Joe is too short to play football.

*Standard: a law or rule agreed upon by a group of people. Example:

No one can play football on our team unless he's at least 6 feet tall.

Other examples of issues that can be called matters of reasoned judgment:

- We must guarantee health care to everyone.
- We should reinstate the death penalty.
- Cloning research should not be pursued.
- I don't think I'm going to buy a new computer.

There are better and worse reasons for agreeing to a matter of reasoned judgment, even if those reasons don't settle the issue clearly and absolutely. When someone provides reasons for a matter of reasoned judgment, they are giving an argument.

What category do the following statements fall into, matter of fact, matter of opinion, or matter of reasoned judgment?

- (1) Manuel weighs over 150 pounds.
- (2) The air in Santa Monica smells better than the air in New York City.
- (3) Guns should be outlawed.
- (4) Prayer in public schools is forbidden by the constitution.
- (5) The air in Santa Monica contains more hydrocarbons than the air in New York City.
- (6) Manuel weighs too much.
- (7) Most people would agree that the water in the shower is uncomfortably cold.
- (8) It's expensive to sail on a cruise ship.
- (9) It's more expensive to sail to Alaska on a cruise ship than fly there.
- (10) The lake is too cold for swimming.