

# Facts, Opinions, Theories, and Conspiracy Theories

## Fact

**A fact is something verifiable and not arguable:** *Middle Tennessee State University is in Murfreesboro, TN.* I can pull out a map and show you, and it is very difficult to argue the point with me without seeming a little crazy.

## Opinion

**An opinion is arguable.** *MTSU is a beautiful campus.* I can show you pictures of the campus and support my opinion by describing the lawns, the trees, gardens, and the buildings; however you can still disagree with me, claiming, for example, that brick buildings in your opinion are ugly, and not seem crazy.

## Theory

**A theory is based upon a hypothesis and backed by evidence.** A theory presents a concept or idea that is testable. In science, a theory is not merely a guess. A theory is a fact-based framework for describing a phenomenon.

## Conspiracy Theory

Simply put, **a conspiracy theory is an alternative explanation for an event.**

For a conspiracy theory to get started, there has to be something that a conspiracy theorist can use, something that doesn't make sense. The theory starts with some sort of discrepancy, but the theorist then has to explain *everything* that happened in a believable way. If the theorist cannot do that, then the theory is not going to hold up. In order to create a complete conspiracy theory, the conspiracy theorist has to create a set of story elements that explain everything that happened in the event. He must then find evidence to support the story elements.

However, when exploring a conspiracy theory, one has to ask the following questions: **Does it make sense? Is it plausible? Is there a means, motive and opportunity available at every stage? Is there enough evidence to support the theory? And most importantly, does the conspiracy theory actually explain what happened?**

**What makes it a conspiracy theory rather than reality is the absence of a “smoking gun”** -- a leaked internal memo, a whistleblower who actually participated in the event, direct evidence from a crash sites, etc. This is what makes it difficult to prove a conspiracy theory.