Facts, Interpretations & Assumptions

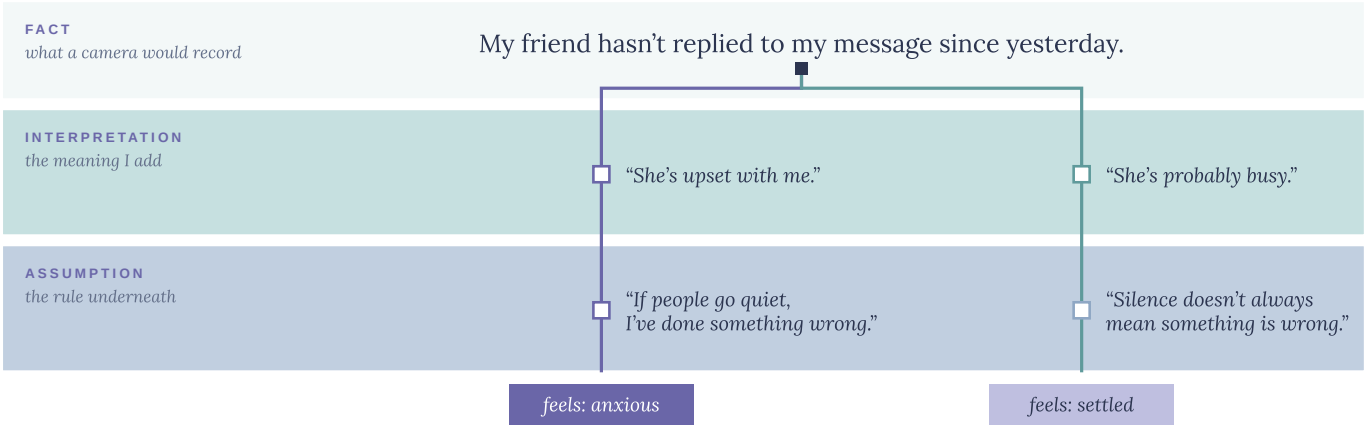
SEPARATING WHAT HAPPENED FROM WHAT IT MEANS

The same moment can mean very different things, depending on the lens we bring to it

An event does not always determine how we feel about it. Our interpretation of what happened, and the assumptions we bring to it, can influence our emotional response. Separating these layers can help us consider other possible explanations.

01 One fact, two paths

the meaning shapes the feeling



The fact stays the same. The meaning, and the feeling, depend on the path it takes through our interpretations and assumptions.

02 Telling them apart

three different layers

Facts

what actually happened

WHAT IT IS

Observable, specific details that anyone present would agree on.

CHECK

Could a camera record it?

"She hasn't replied since yesterday."

Interpretations

what we take it to mean

WHAT IT IS

The meaning, motive or prediction we add, often quickly and automatically.

CHECK

Is this a guess about thoughts, motives or the future?

"She's upset with me."

Assumptions

the lens underneath

WHAT IT IS

Underlying beliefs or expectations that can shape how we interpret events. Some develop through experience and may become familiar ways of making sense of situations.

CHECK

Does it sound like "If…, then…" or "I must…"?

"If people go quiet, I've done something wrong."

03 Quick sort

F, I or A?

STATEMENT	F	I	A
My manager emailed me at 9pm.	☐	☐	☐
She's unhappy with my work.	☐	☐	☐
If someone is unhappy with me, I've failed.	☐	☐	☐
Nobody sat with me at lunch.	☐	☐	☐
They don't like me.	☐	☐	☐
I have to be liked by everyone to be okay.	☐	☐	☐

F = fact · I = interpretation · A = assumption. Answers: F, I, A, F, I, A

04 Untangling a moment

my own example

The facts *what a camera would record*	
My interpretation *what I took it to mean*	
The assumption underneath *the rule or belief behind it*	
Other possible readings *what else could explain it?*	
A more balanced view *fair to the facts, kind to me*	

Interpretations are guesses

They may be right, partly right or wrong. Hold them a little more lightly.

Look for "mind-reading" words

"They think…", "She must be…" and "It means…" often signal an interpretation.

Assumptions can soften

Noticing a rule is the first step to asking whether it still fits your life now.

SOURCES

Beck, A. T. (1976). *Cognitive therapy and the emotional disorders.* International Universities Press.

Beck, J. S. (2020). *Cognitive behavior therapy: Basics and beyond* (3rd ed.). Guilford Press.

Fenn, K., & Byrne, M. (2013). The key principles of cognitive behavioural therapy. *InnovAiT, 6*(9), 579–585. https://doi.org/10.1177/1755738012471029

© 2026 B&F Clinical Psychology · Evidence-informed educational resource · For educational purposes only.