

DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS

Determining Factual Accuracy

It is important to be aware that everything read or heard may not be *fact*—something known for certain or that can be proven. Also, information may not be *accurate*—correct or without mistakes. A part of thinking critically is being able to tell if a statement is or is not factually accurate.

A statement that is factually accurate contains information that can be proven to be without error. There are several steps involved in the skill of deciding if a statement is factually correct. They include the following:

1. Keep in mind that a statement may or may not be factually accurate.

Then, read the following:

In the middle 1300s B.C., Egypt was ruled by a pharaoh named Tutankhamon. He ruled for only nine years and died before he was 20 years old.

Tutankhamon married a daughter of Akhnaton and later succeeded him to the throne of Egypt. However, he disagreed with his father-in-law's religious ideas. Under the influence of Egypt's powerful priests, Tutankhamon ended the worship of the god Aton and returned the country to the religion of many gods. When he died, the priests honored Tutankhamon with an elaborate burial.

Tutankhamon's burial place was veiled in mystery and remained unknown for thousands of years. Then, in 1922, Howard Carter, an English archaeologist, accidentally discovered it while on a dig in the Valley of the Kings. This was

the traditional burial site of Egyptian pharaohs.

Carter eventually uncovered four rooms filled with magnificent objects that had belonged to Tutankhamon. These included animal-shaped couches, clothing, statues, jewels, chairs, and a gold throne.

In the final chamber, Carter found the mummy of Tutankhamon enclosed in three coffins. The innermost coffin was made of solid gold. The other ones were made of gold hammered over wooden frames.

2. Ask if the information in the paragraphs is correct, based on what has already been learned or known. If not enough is known about the subject to answer, go to the next step.
3. Read the first sentence of the passage again. Decide what facts are given in it. Then, ask questions that will help determine if those facts are accurate or not. For example: (a) Was there a pharaoh named Tutankhamon? (b) If so, did he rule Egypt in the middle 1300s B.C.?
If the answers to these questions are not known, research them in other sources, such as encyclopedias.
4. Repeat step 3 for each sentence in the passage. Once this has been done, it will be possible to state whether or not the passage is factually accurate.

For further practice in this skill, apply these steps to the first paragraph of Chapter 4, Mesopotamia, on page 55.