



What would it take to make me change my mind?

Much recent research indicates that it is almost impossible to get people to change their opinions by presenting them with rational evidence alone. How would you rank your own ability to change your mind if confronted with strong evidence?

Part I Procedure: Three steps to directed reflection

Do NOT look yet at the list of Fifteen Knowledge Claims. Avoid temptation! First, read these directions and commit yourself to them. These will be the steps you'll take:

1. Read the knowledge claims and rate yourself from 1 to 5, where 1 is strongly agree and 5 is strongly disagree.
2. Rate yourself from 1 to 5 on how strong your feelings are about the truth of each knowledge claim. 1 is "I never thought about it and couldn't care less" and 5 is "I care a lot about the accuracy of this statement."
3. Ask yourself about each knowledge claim, "What would it take to make me change my mind? What kind of evidence and how much would I need?" Note that each of these statements is fact-based, not value-based.



Part 2: Directed reflection: Apply the three steps to the list below.

**WHAT WOULD IT TAKE TO MAKE ME CHANGE MY MIND?
FIFTEEN KNOWLEDGE CLAIMS**

Rating: Agree? 1 is “strongly agree” to 5 is “strongly disagree”. Feelings? 1 is “I don’t care” to 5 is “I care a lot”.	Agree? Rate 1 to 5	Feelings? Rate 1 to 5
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Finger print evidence is highly accurate. 2. Some people have extra-sensory powers. 3. Organic food is healthier than non-organic food. 4. Some buildings are haunted. 5. Some people have negative health effects when they eat MSG, common in Chinese food. 6. Homeopathic medicine is effective. 7. The attack on the New York Twin Towers was known in advance by U.S. intelligence. 8. Taking a multi-vitamin each day improves overall health. 9. Positive thinking improves ability to fight cancer. 10. Lie detector machines/tests work. 11. Genetically modified food is less safe to eat than "natural" food. 12. Immigrants put a burden on taxpayers and take jobs away from locals. 13. Space aliens have visited earth. 14. The U.S. moon landings didn't actually take place. 15. Acupuncture is an effective treatment. 		

Part 3 Research

Now that you have rated yourself on each of the knowledge claims, you will want to know that scientific skeptics consider each of them to have little or no genuine evidence to support them. Upon reading that do you feel a flash of irritation? Are you skeptical about skeptics? Consider your emotional state as you begin your research.

Now choose one or more of the **Fifteen Knowledge Claims** and research it. You will find many, many websites making absolutely opposite claims. You may wish to choose a statement *either* because the topic really interests you *or* because you have ranked yourself more than 3 on it for the extent of your agreement or the strength of your feelings.

Your task is:

- a. to filter through the websites to pick those that seem most credible, and state why--to the rational mind.
- b. to summarize the evidence and assess the degree to which it is convincing/ conclusive--to the rational mind.
- c. to conclude whether you have enough evidence either to confirm your opinion or change it.

Finally, ask yourself whether you think that, in general, you are open-minded about considering factual evidence when it comes to **fact-based issues** or, in contrast, you feel there is value in having emotion or personal preference override purely factual evidence.

Much research indicates that people are generally most inclined to have the same opinions as their friends and family, even when those opinions are fact-based. Do you think that is true of you?

Part 4 Discussion

At the end of your research, find someone else in your class who researched one of the same knowledge claims as you. Compare your methods, your reasoning, and your conclusions. If your conclusions differ significantly from those of your classmate do you find yourself "digging in" to your own position, or being convinced by your classmate's position?

Remember: the point of this exercise is to encourage reflection and self-awareness. We are all mixes of emotion and reason (amongst other things), but it can be helpful to realize how much we can, when we are conscious of our own ways of thinking, reach more nearly rational conclusions on factual issues.

