

13 Opinion and Evidence

RI.4.8, RI.4.10, RF.4.4.a



Getting the Idea

Authors of informational texts make claims about many things. A **claim** is a statement that something—an idea, event, or observation—is true. For example, an author states: “Babe Ruth was the most talented baseball player of all time.” The author is stating this idea as if it is true. However, it may or may not actually be true.

An **opinion** is a personal belief that cannot be proven true. No one can *prove* that Babe Ruth was the best baseball player; some people may disagree. When stating an opinion, authors often use words like *good*, *bad*, *pleasant*, *awful*, and *should* to express their feelings. Authors may also use phrases such as *I think*, *I believe*, and *in my view* to let you know that they are stating a personal opinion. Read this passage.

Bigelow Park is the most beautiful park in our state. Its wildlife, lakes, and bike paths are more wonderful than any other park has to offer. It also has the best swimming pool and roller-skating rink. There is no better way to spend an afternoon than at Bigelow Park.

Words such as *better*, *best*, *most*, *beautiful*, and *wonderful* tell you that the author is stating opinions. These are the author’s own feelings about Bigelow Park, and no one else’s. Read the chart below.

Examples of Opinions
The dinner that Ted cooked tasted awful.
I feel that my mom made the right decision.
People should exercise every day to stay healthy.
In my view, the umpire made a bad call.

Authors use evidence to back up their claims. **Evidence** is information used to support a point or claim. One effective type of evidence is fact. A **fact** is a statement that is always true. Unlike an opinion, you can prove

a fact in an encyclopedia or other reliable source. See how evidence affects the claim about Babe Ruth:

Babe Ruth was the most talented baseball player of all time. In 1927, he hit 60 home runs in a single season, a record that lasted for 34 years. When he retired in 1935, Ruth had hit a total of 714 home runs. This major-league record lasted for 39 years.

The facts about the home runs and records are powerful evidence. They can be verified in a book. Together, they make the author's opinion about Babe Ruth believable and strong.

Another type of evidence writers use is an eyewitness account. An **eyewitness account** is someone's firsthand description of an event. For example:

The tornado was the worst storm that ever hit Norwood. "I've never seen a storm damage so many houses," said Mayor Peter Olson.

The writer uses an eyewitness account (Peter Olson's statement) to support his claim about the tornado.

Finally, a writer could use expert opinion. **Expert opinion** is the opinion of an expert or someone who knows a great deal about a topic. For example:

Rainforests are valuable places that should be protected. Scientists at Costa University say that our planet would suffer greatly if the rainforests were cut down.

The writer uses an expert opinion (the opinion of scientists) to support the claim that rainforests should be protected.

Thinking It Through

Read the following passage, and then answer the questions that follow.

Riding a bicycle without a helmet is dangerous. In 2007, nearly 52,000 people were injured in bicycle accidents. More than 60 percent of serious bicycle injuries are head injuries.

What claim does the writer make? What kind of evidence does the writer use to support this claim?

HINT

A claim is often stated at the beginning of a passage. Do you see information in the passage that can be proved?





Coached Example

Read the passage and answer the questions.

Seagulls are annoying birds. They are a nuisance and a pest to everything around them. Have you ever heard their squawking and crying? It's enough to drive a person crazy. They are even annoying to look at. Their feathers are messy and their splotchy grey and brown color is ugly.

Last week at the beach, I saw an entire flock of seagulls attacking a man and woman who were eating lunch. They waved and yelled at the diving gulls. The gulls kept diving at them. The screaming birds stole their french fries and hamburgers. When the gulls were finished with their stolen meal, they picked from the garbage pails and littered the beach with trash. This is not the first time I've seen this happen.



- Which sentence from the passage is an opinion?
 - “Seagulls are annoying birds.”
 - “The screaming birds stole their french fries and hamburgers.”
 - “The gulls kept diving at them.”
 - “This is not the first time I've seen this happen.”
- What kind of evidence does the author use in the passage?
 - expert opinion
 - scientific facts
 - eyewitness account
 - personal views

HINT

Which answer choices describe events that actually happened? Which answer tells how the writer feels?

HINT

The writer tells about his experience at the beach.