

The Evidence Detectives: Fact, Opinion, and the Power of Proof

Materials Needed

- Paper or Notebook and Pen/Pencil
- Highlighter or colored markers (optional)
- **Evidence Cards:** 10 pre-written statements (mix of facts, claims, and opinions)
- **Target Article:** A short, engaging piece of text (e.g., a review of a new technology, a sports editorial, or an article debating a school issue like cell phone use).
- Access to the internet (for verifying facts, if applicable)

Introduction: The Case of the Unproven Statement

The Hook (Ask Yourself):

Imagine your friend says, "The new 'Cosmic Crusaders 5' video game is the absolute greatest game ever made, and it sold over 1 million copies on launch day." How do you know which part of that statement is something you can check, and which part is just how they feel?

In this lesson, you will become an Evidence Detective, learning how to separate solid truth from personal feelings or persuasive arguments.

Learning Objectives (Tell Them What You'll Teach)

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

1. Clearly identify and define the difference between a Fact, an Opinion, and a Claim.
2. Analyze any piece of text and identify the specific evidence used to support a general statement or argument.
3. Construct a well-supported argument using strong, verifiable evidence.

Success Criteria

You know you have succeeded when you can correctly sort 8 out of 10 statements into the right categories (Fact, Opinion, or Claim) and write a paragraph that includes a clear claim supported by at least two pieces of textual evidence.

Body: Building the Case (I Do, We Do, You Do)

Phase 1: I Do (Modeling - Defining the Terms)

Educator Presentation/Modeling (5-7 minutes)

We need three clear definitions for our Detective Toolkit:

1. **Fact:** Something that can be proven true or verified by evidence, data, or observation. It is universal.
 - *Key question to ask:* "Can I look this up and prove it?"
 - *Example:* "The Earth orbits the sun." (Verifiable science)
2. **Opinion:** A belief, judgment, or feeling that cannot be proven true or false. It is personal.
 - *Key question to ask:* "Does this statement include words like 'best,' 'worst,' 'should,' 'greatest,' or 'I feel'?"
 - *Example:* "Pizza is the best food in the world." (Personal preference)
3. **Claim (or General Statement):** An assertion or main argument that the writer believes is true, but requires proof (evidence) to convince the reader. Claims are often debatable.
 - *Key question to ask:* "Is the writer trying to persuade me? What evidence do they need to provide?"
 - *Example:* "Middle school students who take music lessons perform better in math." (This is a claim that requires data—evidence—to back it up.)

Modeling Evidence: If my claim is, "The school cafeteria should stop serving sodas," my evidence needs to be specific facts or data, like: "The school nurse reported 40 cases of excessive sugar intake last semester," or "The state mandates that school lunches meet nutritional standards."

Phase 2: We Do (Guided Practice - Sorting Evidence)

Activity: Evidence Card Sort (10 minutes)

Instructions: Take your pre-made Evidence Cards. Draw three columns on your paper labeled FACT, OPINION, and CLAIM. Read each statement aloud and, as a group (or collaboratively with the educator/parent), decide which category it fits into. Discuss *why* the statement belongs there.

Sample Statements (for Evidence Cards)

Justification

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Blue is a calming color. | (Opinion - "Calming" is subjective.) |
| 2. Mount Everest is the world's tallest mountain above sea level. | (Fact - Verifiable data.) |
| 3. All teenagers spend too much time on their phones. | (Claim - Requires evidence (studies, time tracking) to prove the extent of "too much.") |

Formative Assessment Check: After the sorting activity, review the cards that caused the most confusion. Ask: "What keyword helped you rule out 'Fact' for that statement?"

Phase 3: You Do (Independent Practice - The Case File)

Activity: Analyzing Text and Supporting an Argument (15-20 minutes)

Step 1: Read and Identify the Claim. The learner reads the provided Target Article. As they read, their primary job is to find the central argument or main idea the author is trying to prove (the Claim).

Step 2: Highlight the Evidence. Once the claim is identified, the learner must reread the article, highlighting or underlining the specific facts, statistics, quotes, or examples the author uses to support that main claim. This is the textual evidence.

Step 3: Construct the Argument. The learner will now choose a general statement (either the author's claim or a new related claim) and write a short, three-sentence paragraph in their notebook, ensuring it meets the Success Criteria.

Success Criteria for the Paragraph:

1. Start with a clear, debatable Claim.
2. Follow the claim with a piece of specific textual evidence cited from the article. (Example: "According to the article, [insert specific fact].")
3. Follow the first piece of evidence with a second, distinct piece of textual evidence.

Example Prompt (if the article is about why streaming services are better than cable TV):

Claim: Streaming services offer a superior entertainment experience compared to traditional cable television.

Learner Response Template (Scaffolding): [Your Claim] is true because [Evidence 1: state a specific fact from the text, like a cost statistic]. Furthermore, the author notes that [Evidence 2: provide a second piece of evidence, like a user poll result or a variety statistic].

Conclusion: Case Closed

Recap and Review (Tell Them What You Taught) (5 minutes)

Q&A Session:

- What is the single biggest difference between a Fact and an Opinion? (Facts are verifiable; opinions are not.)
- Why does a Claim always need evidence? (Because it is debatable and needs proof to be convincing.)
- In the "You Do" activity, did you find it difficult to distinguish between the claim and the evidence? Why or why not?

Summative Assessment: Evidence Review

The learner submits their "You Do" paragraph (Claim + 2 pieces of Evidence) for review. Assess whether the evidence truly supports the claim and whether the evidence is specific (not just a restatement of the claim).

Differentiation and Extension

For Scaffolding (Struggling Learners):

- Provide the Claim for the "You Do" activity, so the learner only needs to focus on finding the two pieces of supporting evidence.
- Focus only on sorting Facts vs. Opinions first, before introducing the concept of a debatable Claim.

For Extension (Advanced Learners):

- **Counterclaim Challenge:** Ask the learner to identify one piece of evidence in the article that could potentially weaken the author's main claim (a counterclaim), or ask them to find one external fact that would oppose the article's argument.
 - **Bias Analysis:** Ask the learner to analyze the language in the article for emotionally charged words, determining if the author relies too much on opinionated language rather than solid
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evidence.

Reflection

Think about something you read or watched online today. Was the main argument presented as a Fact, or was it a Claim that required evidence? How will you use your "Evidence Detective" skills next time you see a strong statement online?