



HOMESCHOOL NOW  
PARENT RESEARCH CENTER

RESEARCH METHOD FILE  
HN-RC-HIS-003

# The Evidence Classification Guide



How Homeschool Now Evaluates  
Controversial Claims

## EVIDENCE MATTERS

- ☒ Ask Questions
- ☒ Find Sources
- ☒ Read Closely
- ☒ Evaluate Carefully
- ☒ Decide Wisely

DOCUMENT



Questions

Sources

Context

Evidence

Analysis

Wisdom



PARENT RESEARCH CENTER



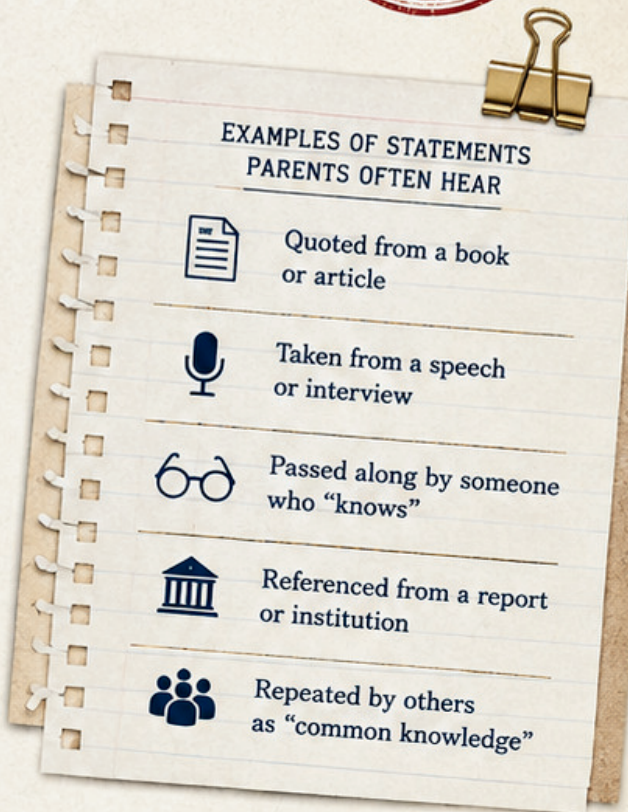
# Why Evidence Needs Labels

Parents encounter statements every day that sound equally certain:

- *"The document proves..."*
- *"A researcher discovered..."*
- *"Someone testified..."*
- *"This was deliberately designed..."*
- *"Experts know..."*

But these statements may rest on very different kinds of evidence—ranging from original documents to personal interpretations, from eyewitness accounts to incomplete or unverified information.

**The Evidence Classification System exists so that the strength of the language matches the strength of the evidence.**



**We should never say more than the evidence allows us to say.**

— HOMESCHOOL NOW PRINCIPLE

## WHY THIS MATTERS

Without clear labels, we risk:



### CONFUSION

Treating strong allegations as established facts.



### MISINFORMATION

Repeating claims we cannot honestly support.



### MISPLACED CONFIDENCE

Overstating certainty where the evidence is uncertain.



### CYNICISM

Dismissing everything because we do not know how to evaluate it.



### WEAK DISCIPLESHIP

Passing on opinions instead of teaching discernment.

*These labels help us think clearly, speak responsibly, and research faithfully.*



# Evidence Is Not Binary

It is tempting to sort claims into only two categories: **TRUE** or **FALSE**.

But real historical and educational research rarely works that way. Evidence comes in different forms and strengths.

**EVIDENCE STRENGTH IS A SPECTRUM,**  
*not a switch.*



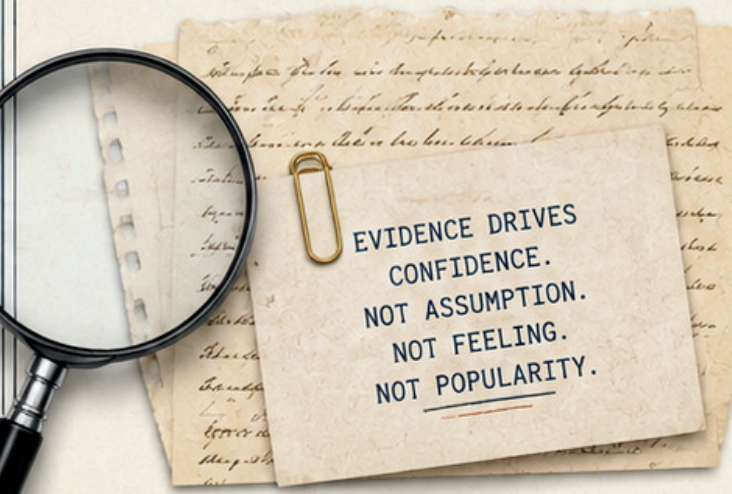
**An open question**  
is not necessarily a false claim.



**A historical allegation**  
is not necessarily true.



**A supported claim**  
is not the same as a documented fact.



Our goal is not to have all the answers.  
Our goal is to understand how certain  
we can be about what we believe.



# DOCUMENTED — What It Means



## DEFINITION

A claim is classified as **DOCUMENTED** when direct, verifiable evidence establishes the specific fact being asserted.



## EXAMPLES OF STRONG EVIDENCE

- ✓ legislation
- ✓ government records
- ✓ institutional publications
- ✓ original books or reports
- ✓ archived correspondence
- ✓ official meeting records
- ✓ recorded public statements
- ✓ verified primary documents



## EXAMPLE

Suppose an original educational report explicitly states that schools should develop particular attitudes.

We may classify this statement as:

**DOCUMENTED**

*But only the statement itself.*

We may not automatically conclude:

*'Therefore every school thereafter deliberately implemented the same agenda.'*

That larger conclusion requires additional evidence.



## PARENT CHECK

*Can I point directly to the source that establishes this claim?*



## PRINCIPLE

*Documented establishes the specific fact— not every interpretation built on it.*



# SUPPORTED / PLAUSIBLE — What It Means



## DEFINITION

A claim is classified as **SUPPORTED / PLAUSIBLE** when multiple pieces of evidence reasonably support an interpretation, but direct proof is incomplete.



## POSSIBLE EVIDENCE

- ✓ converging documents
- ✓ repeated institutional patterns
- ✓ historical context
- ✓ incentives
- ✓ implementation evidence
- ✓ credible secondary scholarship



## KEY DISTINCTION

*Supported does  
not mean proven.*

## USE LANGUAGE SUCH AS

- ✓ "The evidence supports..."
- ✓ "This appears consistent with..."
- ✓ "A reasonable interpretation is..."

## AVOID

- ✗ "This proves..."
- ✗ "We now know..."

*unless documentation  
actually reaches that level.*



## PARENT CHECK

*Is the conclusion reasonable  
from the evidence, or am I adding  
certainty the sources do not contain?*



## PRINCIPLE

*Plausible means  
responsibly supported—  
not finally proven.*



# HISTORICAL ALLEGATION – What It Means



## DEFINITION

A **HISTORICAL ALLEGATION** is a significant claim preserved through testimony, memoir, interview, recollection, or later reporting that has not been independently established sufficiently to treat as fact.



## COMMON SOURCES



remembered conversations



private meetings



oral testimony



later recollections



claims about undocumented events



## EXAMPLE STRUCTURE

A witness reports:

*"At a private meeting, I was told..."*

1

We can **document** that the witness made the statement.

2

*We have **NOT** documented that the underlying conversation occurred exactly as described.*

**ALLEGATION**



## PARENT CHECK

*What is actually documented—the event, or only the testimony about the event?*



## PRINCIPLE

*Documented testimony about an event is not the same as documented proof of the event itself.*



# OPEN QUESTION

## — What It Means —

### DEFINITION

A claim is classified as an **OPEN QUESTION** when the available evidence is **incomplete**, **conflicting**, **inaccessible**, or **insufficient** to determine the claim.

### IMPORTANT REMINDER

*An open question is not a failure. It is an honest description of the evidence we currently have.*

### COMMON REASONS A CLAIM IS AN OPEN QUESTION



#### INCOMPLETE RECORDS

Key documents or testimony no longer exist, are missing, or remain undiscovered.



#### CONFLICTING ACCOUNTS

Different credible sources disagree, and the conflict cannot be resolved at this time.



#### INACCESSIBLE SOURCES

Documents are restricted, untranslated, withheld, or not yet digitized.



#### INSUFFICIENT EVIDENCE

The available sources provide hints, but not enough detail to reach a conclusion.

Some of the most significant historical truths were once open questions until new discoveries were made.



### EXAMPLES IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

- The full extent of early curriculum adoption across states.
- Intent behind specific policy decisions in closed-door meetings.
- Precise influence of a particular theory on national standards.
- Whether certain training materials were distributed intentionally.



### PARENT CHECK ★

*If this claim is an open question:*

- ☐ What evidence is still missing?
- ☐ What could change this classification?
- ☐ What new sources would move this toward “supported” or “documented”?



Open questions are invitations to keep looking, not reasons to stop thinking.



# What Evidence Labels Do NOT Mean

Understanding what these labels do NOT mean is just as important as understanding what they do.



## DOCUMENTED

*does not mean*  
every interpretation is  
correct.



A document proves what it  
says. It does not prove every  
conclusion someone draws  
from that document.



## SUPPORTED / PLAUSIBLE

*does not mean*  
proved beyond dispute.



It means the available  
evidence makes the claim  
reasonable. New evidence  
could change that.



## HISTORICAL ALLEGATION

*does not mean*  
false.



It means the allegation has  
been made, but not yet verified  
as fact with sufficient  
evidence.



## OPEN QUESTION

*does not mean*  
unimportant.



Many of the most important  
historical questions remain  
open because the evidence  
is incomplete or inaccessible.

*Classification  
measures evidentiary  
strength—not  
popularity, controversy,  
comfort, or convenience.*

## THE PURPOSE OF LABELS

These labels prevent us  
from overclaiming, spreading  
rumors as facts, or dismissing  
serious concerns simply  
because evidence is not  
yet complete.

They help us speak with  
accuracy, humility, and  
integrity—especially when  
the stakes are high.

## A HEALTHY PERSPECTIVE

- ☒ We pursue truth wherever it leads.
- ☒ We appreciate strong evidence—but we do not demand perfection.
- ☒ We remain open to correction, refinement, and new information.



## REMEMBER:

*Responsible research  
respects the limits  
of what we know.  
That is not weakness.  
That is wisdom.*



# The Claim-by-Claim Rule

**Classify claims individually, not entire books, people, movements, or theories.**

Even a well-researched author, organization, or researcher may make claims of very different evidentiary strength. The job is to evaluate each claim on its own evidence—not on the reputation of its source.



**A strong track record does not automatically make every claim stronger.**

*Let the evidence for the specific claim speak.*

## WHY THIS MATTERS

*Grouping many different claims into one label can lead to overgeneralization, misplaced trust, and avoidable misinformation.*

### EXAMPLE: ONE RESEARCHER, FIVE DIFFERENT CLAIMS

One researcher may present many claims. Each requires its own classification.

| CLAIM                                                             | DESCRIPTION                                                  | BEST EVIDENCE AVAILABLE                                            | CLASSIFICATION                       | WHY THIS LABEL?                                                          |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 Public schools adopted standardized testing in the early 1900s. | A historical fact about policy adoption.                     | Government reports, legislation, archival records.                 | <b>DOCUMENTED</b>                    | Direct records establish the fact.                                       |
| 2 Progressive educators influenced early testing policies.        | A causal relationship between people and policy ideas.       | Multiple writings, correspondence, educational journals.           | <b>SUPPORTED / PLAUSIBLE</b>         | Strong connections exist, but not all intent or influence is documented. |
| 3 Private meetings shaped reform goals.                           | Allegation about what may have occurred behind closed doors. | Witness accounts, later testimony, secondary reporting.            | <b>HISTORICAL ALLEGATION</b>         | The meetings are reported, but details remain unverified.                |
| 4 Certain training manuals were distributed intentionally.        | Unresolved question about distribution methods.              | Partial evidence; some copies exist, but full records are missing. | <b>OPEN QUESTION</b>                 | Insufficient evidence to confirm how or why distribution occurred.       |
| 5 The plan included a hidden agenda to erase parental authority.  | Serious allegation about intent.                             | No direct evidence supports intent; speculative sources only.      | <b>UNSUPPORTED / NOT ESTABLISHED</b> | Available evidence does not support this claim at this time.             |



## FAIRNESS IS PART OF TRUTH-SEEKING ★

Fairness means giving each claim the label it deserves—neither inflated by assumptions nor dismissed without sufficient reason.

“  
Evaluate the claim.  
Not the person.  
Not the movement.  
Not the label.  
”



*One source.  
Multiple claims.  
Different levels  
of certainty.*



# The Missing Fifth Label:

## UNSUPPORTED / NOT ESTABLISHED

Not all claims rise to the level of an open question.  
Some are asserted, but the evidence does not support them.

For that reason, the Evidence Classification System includes  
a fifth label: **UNSUPPORTED / NOT ESTABLISHED**.

This label protects parents and researchers from confusing  
conjecture or agenda-driven assertions with legitimate  
historical or educational claims.

### WHY THIS LABEL EXISTS

*Without this label, weak or baseless  
claims can be treated as if they are  
genuine questions—giving them  
unearned credibility.*

### THE FIVE EVIDENCE LABELS – AT A GLANCE

|  |                                     |                                                                                       |
|--|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | 1. DOCUMENTED                       | Strong, verifiable evidence<br>directly establishes the claim.                        |
|  | 2. SUPPORTED /<br>PLAUSIBLE         | Multiple sources and lines of<br>evidence make the claim<br>reasonable.               |
|  | 3. HISTORICAL<br>ALLEGATION         | The claim has been made,<br>but not yet verified as fact<br>with sufficient evidence. |
|  | 4. OPEN QUESTION                    | Evidence is incomplete,<br>conflicting, inaccessible,<br>or insufficient.             |
|  | 5. UNSUPPORTED /<br>NOT ESTABLISHED | Available evidence does not<br>support the claim at this time.                        |

### WHAT THIS LABEL MEANS



The claim is asserted, but the best available  
evidence does not support it—or directly  
contradicts it.

#### THIS LABEL IS USED WHEN:

- ✓ Evidence contradicts the claim
- ✓ The claim is based on speculation or opinion
- ✓ The source lacks credibility or transparency
- ✓ The claim relies on misrepresentation,  
misquotation, or selective information
- ✗ No reliable sources can be found to support the claim



#### PARENT TIP

When you see this label, be especially cautious.  
Ask: "Who benefits if I believe this?"

### EXAMPLES IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

- ✗ "A secret group controls all education worldwide."  
No credible evidence supports this.
- ✗ "Public schools were designed solely to erase religion."  
Evidence shows mixed motives and diverse outcomes.
- ✗ "A single textbook change caused the collapse of America."  
Overly simplistic and unsupported by facts.

### REMEMBER

UNSUPPORTED does not mean "wrong forever."

It means "**not supported—today.**"

New evidence can move a claim  
to a different label.





# The 60-Second Evidence Check

Use this eight-question check before you draw a conclusion, share, teach, or act on a claim.

*One minute of discernment can prevent hours of confusion.*

|   |                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                               |                         |
|---|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 |    | WHAT EXACTLY IS BEING CLAIMED?<br>State the claim in one clear sentence.                                                                      | .....<br>.....<br>..... |
| 2 |    | WHAT IS THE STRONGEST SOURCE?<br>Identify the source you are relying on most.                                                                 | .....<br>.....<br>..... |
| 3 |   | IS THAT SOURCE PRIMARY OR SECONDARY?<br>Classify the source.                                                                                  | .....<br>.....<br>..... |
| 4 |  | WHAT DOES IT DIRECTLY ESTABLISH?<br>List the facts it clearly proves.                                                                         | .....<br>.....<br>..... |
| 5 |  | WHAT INTERPRETATION AM I ADDING?<br>Separate facts from your own inferences.                                                                  | .....<br>.....<br>..... |
| 6 |  | IS THERE A REASONABLE ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATION?<br>What else could explain these facts?                                                        | .....<br>.....<br>..... |
| 7 |  | WHICH EVIDENCE CLASSIFICATION FITS?<br>Documented, Supported/Plausible, Historical Allegation, Open Question, or Unsupported/Not Established? | .....<br>.....<br>..... |
| 8 |  | AM I USING LANGUAGE STRONGER THAN THE EVIDENCE?<br>Match your words to what the evidence can support.                                         | .....<br>.....<br>..... |

## WHY THIS MATTERS

*Facts speak for themselves.*

*Inferences add meaning.*

*Discernment keeps us honest.*

## HOW TO USE THIS CHECK



Set a timer for 60 seconds.



Move through all eight questions quickly and honestly.



Use your answers to guide your next step: believe, accept as likely, hold with caution, or continue investigating.

## PARENT TIP

*Slow down long enough to think it through—so you can move forward with confidence.*



GOOD RESEARCH ISN'T JUST ABOUT FINDING INFORMATION.

It's about asking the right questions—before the answer takes root.

*Let the evidence lead. You lead with discernment.*



# Before You Share It

Use this final parent checklist before you repeat, post, teach, or pass along a claim.

*Discernment is not delay for its own sake. It is honesty before influence.*

1  ☐ I found the original source where possible.

2  ☐ I read beyond the quotation.

3  ☐ I know what the source establishes.

4  ☐ I know what it does not establish.

5  ☐ I separated testimony from verification.

6  ☐ I considered an alternative explanation.

7  ☐ My confidence level matches the evidence.

## PARENT REMINDER

*Clear thinking protects  
our families from  
confusion, exaggeration,  
and unnecessary conflict.*

*Truth spoken without  
care can still cause harm.*

*Lead with evidence.  
Share with wisdom.  
Protect with love.*

## BEFORE YOU SHARE

 Ask: Who will this help, and how?

 Share with clarity and kindness.

 When in doubt, classify the claim—don't amplify it.



CLASSIFICATION DESCRIBES CURRENT EVIDENCE STRENGTH.

It does not measure popularity, agreement, or comfort.

*Names change. Trends shift. Truth remains anchored in evidence.*

“ Good research does not require certainty about everything.  
It requires honesty about what we know. ”



# Investigate → Classify → Discern

A PARENT RESEARCH JOURNEY YOU CAN TRUST

When we investigate with care and classify with honesty,  
*we can discern with wisdom.*

## RESOURCE 1

HN-RC-EDU-001

### The Education Paper Trail Starter Kit

#### HOW DO I INVESTIGATE?

A parent's step-by-step system  
to gather, organize, and  
document the facts.

INVESTIGATE

## RESOURCE 2

HN-RC-HIS-003

### The Evidence Classification Guide

#### HOW STRONG IS WHAT I FOUND?

A parent's guide to evaluate  
evidence and understand  
how much confidence to place  
in a claim.

CLASSIFY

=

## ★ DISCERN ★

MAKE WISE, FAITHFUL DECISIONS FOR YOUR CHILDREN AND FAMILY.

*Not every claim is proven. Not every question is answered.  
But discernment grows when we follow the evidence.*



## PARENT PRACTICE ★

- ☒ INVESTIGATE *with curiosity.*
- ☒ CLASSIFY *with honesty.*
- ☒ DISCERN *with wisdom.*

Then act with courage and grace.

## WHAT'S NEXT?

Continue strengthening your research skills with  
other Parent Research Center resources.

*You are building the skill of discernment—  
one careful step at a time.*

TRUTH  
OVER  
ASSUMPTION