

MEDICAL OPINION LANGUAGE

WHAT THE WORDS MEAN



LANGUAGE KEY

Clear probability language helps, but the rationale still controls the weight.

The phrase “at least as likely as not” communicates that the evidence supporting the medical connection is at least as persuasive as the evidence against it. It is not a substitute for analysis.

SUPPORTS

AT LEAST AS LIKELY AS NOT

The provider supports the connection at the applicable evidentiary threshold and should explain why.

AGAINST

LESS LIKELY THAN NOT

The provider does not support the connection and should identify the evidence and reasoning supporting that conclusion.

UNCLEAR

COULD BE OR POSSIBLY

Speculative wording generally does not establish nexus by itself because it does not state a sufficiently definite medical conclusion.

OPINION CONSTRUCTION

A COMPLETE CONCLUSION ANSWERS FOUR QUESTIONS

1 WHAT CONDITION?

Name the current diagnosed disability being addressed.

2 CONNECTED TO WHAT?

Identify the in-service event, primary service-connected condition, treatment, or aggravating mechanism.

3 IN WHICH DIRECTION?

State the primary-to-secondary direction correctly.

4 WHY?

Explain the medical facts, chronology, mechanism, and alternatives.

EXAMPLE STRUCTURE

It is my medical opinion that the veteran’s [current diagnosis] is at least as likely as not related to [identified service event or service-connected primary disability], because [individualized medical rationale].

NO SCIENTIFIC CERTAINTY REQUIRED

The standard does not require absolute proof. The provider should reach a medically supportable conclusion based on the available record.

NO FORCED FAVORABLE OPINION

A clinician should not sign language they do not believe. The goal is an independent, accurate medical judgment.

NO MAGIC SENTENCE

Substance controls. A favorable phrase attached to bad facts or no rationale may still receive little weight.

CLEAR LANGUAGE PLUS CLEAR REASONING. The probability statement tells VA the conclusion. The rationale tells VA why the conclusion deserves weight.

