

JESI, 2009: “In My Opinion” – Establishing a Strong Authorial Voice

Some student writers believe that using apologetic expressions such as “in my opinion,” “it is my belief that,” or “I believe that” somehow excuses sloppy thinking. These expressions help students hedge their bets about someone’s evaluation of their prose. These phrases are akin to the vernacular, “Hey, it’s just my opinion but.” Or “I’m just saying....”

Help students avoid them in their writing. They pad writing without adding any content. Note the following example.

I think that the Republican Party made a mistake in nominating Sarah Palin as a candidate for vice president.

If a student uses this construction in an essay, encourage editing. A general rule for writers may be, “Unless otherwise noted, the ideas I express in an essay are my own.”

Note the edited version.

The Republican Party made a mistake in nominating Sarah Palin as a candidate for vice president.

Or better...? (hmmm)

The Republican Party mistakenly nominated Sarah Palin as a candidate for vice president.

It’s understandable that student writers may lack confidence about stating an idea, yes, even their opinion, in a strong, authoritative fashion.

Unless the origin of a statement is in question, readers naturally assume that the originator of the statement is the author.