

Estimative language gives decision-makers a consistent, calibrated understanding of analytical confidence and likelihood. Without standardised terms, the same word — "likely" — can mean 55% to one reader and 80% to another. This dictionary removes that ambiguity.

Probability Terms — Standard Reference Table

Term	Probability Range	Approximate Odds	Usage Note
Almost Certain Virtually Certain	93 – 99%	~19:1	Reserve for near-definite outcomes with strong evidential basis.
Highly Likely Highly Probable	85 – 93%	~7:1	Strong evidence supports; only minor uncertainty remains.
Likely Probable	55 – 85%	~3:2	Most common estimative term. Default when evidence favours an outcome.
Roughly Even Chance About as Likely as Not	45 – 55%	~1:1	Genuine uncertainty. Use sparingly — signals low confidence.
Unlikely Improbable	15 – 45%	~1:3	Evidence weighs against, but outcome cannot be ruled out.
Highly Unlikely Highly Improbable	7 – 15%	~1:7	Strong evidence against; residual possibility acknowledged.
Remote Almost No Chance	1 – 7%	~1:19	Near-impossible but not formally excluded.

Confidence Levels

Probability and confidence are distinct concepts. Probability expresses how likely an outcome is. Confidence expresses how much you trust your evidence base.

Level	Meaning	Typical Indicators
HIGH	Strong, corroborated evidence from reliable sources.	Multiple independent sources; consistent reporting; validated collection.
MODERATE	Credible information but some gaps or inconsistencies.	Limited sources; some corroboration; minor collection gaps.

Level	Meaning	Typical Indicators
LOW	Fragmentary, uncorroborated, or questionable sourcing.	Single source; unvalidated; significant information gaps.

Writing Guidance

<p>✓ DO</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use ONE probability term per judgement. • Pair probability with a confidence level. • Define your term when writing for non-analysts. • State your key assumptions explicitly. • Use 'We assess' or 'We judge' before estimates. • Acknowledge alternative outcomes when $\geq 25\%$. 	<p>✗ DON'T</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't use vague terms: 'may', 'might', 'could'. • Don't stack terms: 'very likely probable'. • Don't use 'obviously' — nothing is obvious. • Don't omit confidence level on key judgements. • Don't confuse probability with certainty. • Don't hedge every sentence — choose a position.
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Example Sentences

Probability Term	Confidence	Example Sentence
Almost Certain	HIGH	We assess with high confidence that the network will attempt re-entry within 30 days.
Likely	MODERATE	It is likely, though with moderate confidence, that financial support is being routed through a third party.
Roughly Even	LOW	With low confidence, we judge there is roughly an even chance the cell has relocated.
Unlikely	MODERATE	It is unlikely the group can reconstitute within six months, based on current reporting.
Remote	HIGH	We assess with high confidence that a large-scale attack in this period is remote.

Need a Different Format?

- Word (.docx) and Excel versions are available on request.
- Email: info@theintelanalystacademy.com.au with the subject 'Estimative Language Dictionary — Format Request'