**FACT, OPINION & STANCE: CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS**

**TASK 1:** Use the questions below to hold a conversation with your neighbour.

- Where and when were you born?
- Do you eat meat? Drink alcohol? Smoke?
- Do you think New York would be a nice place to live?
- What kinds of music can calm you down or cheer you up?
- How much do you know about religious education in British schools, and how does this affect your view on whether it is appropriate?
- Based on your experience as a student, what kind of note-taking do you consider to be the most effective?

**TASK 2:** Regarding the questions from Task 1, consider:

a. Which prompted answers with a piece of information that is fixed, and not debatable?
b. Which prompted answers showing one person’s preference or attitude?

c. Which prompted answers explaining how background understanding informs someone’s view on a topic?

**TASK 3:** Here are definitions of the terms ‘fact’, ‘opinion’ and ‘stance’ – decide which category of answer was prompted by the question types noted in Task 2.

**FACT:** something known or proven to be true.

**OPINION:** a personal belief or appraisal, based on insufficient evidence to allow certainty.

**STANCE:** a position on a certain issue, based on consideration of evidence, often expressed publicly

**TASK 4:** Discuss with a partner: Of facts, opinions, and stances, which are most common in the following text types and why?

a. A university essay
b. A newspaper article
c. A self-reflection
d. A letter of recommendation

**TASK 5:** Highlight the facts in the following excerpt, and underline the points which are the author’s interpretation or stance.

*Excerpt*

In recent years, the term ‘English as a lingua franca’ (ELF) has emerged as a way of referring to communication in English between speakers with different first languages. Since roughly only one out of every four users of English in the world is a native speaker of the language (Crystal 2003), most ELF interactions take place among ‘non-native’ speakers of English. Although this does not preclude the participation of English native speakers in ELF interaction, what is distinctive about ELF is that, in most cases, it is ‘a ‘contact language’ between persons who share neither a common native tongue nor a common (national) culture, and for whom English is the chosen foreign language of communication’ (Firth 1996: 240). […]

Despite being welcomed by some and deplored by others, it cannot be denied that English functions as a global lingua franca. However, what has so far tended to be denied is that, as a consequence of its international use, English is being shaped at least as much by its nonnative speakers as by its native speakers. This has led to a somewhat paradoxical situation: on the one hand, for the majority of its users, English is a foreign language, and the vast majority of verbal exchanges in English do not involve any native speakers of the language at all. On the other hand, there is still a tendency for native speakers to be regarded as custodians over what is acceptable usage. Thus, in order for the concept of ELF to gain acceptance alongside English as native language, there have been calls for the systematic study of the nature of ELF — what it looks and sounds like and how people actually use it and make it work — and a consideration of the implications for the teaching and learning of the language. […]

Extra Practice: Write the bibliography entry for this text.

"A critical reader questions the information and points of view presented by the writer in a text. An uncritical reader simply accepts what is said in a text as correct.” (Hewings & Thaine, 14)
**TASK 5a:** What is the difference between the reporting verb used in these two sentences, and why is each one used the way it is?

- Smith *believes* that Chinese will soon overtake English as the most commonly spoken world language.
- Jones *shows* that Spanish is taught in more schools than Chinese is.

**5b:** Which of the following reporting verbs would be used to report an author’s stance, and which would be used to report facts? Why?

*contend - remind - indicate - assert - propose - point out - demonstrate - assume*

**5c:** Write four sentences of your own to report 2 facts and 2 stances mentioned in the text excerpt above.

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**TASK 6:** Find the mistakes made in students’ reporting of this article in their essays:

**a.** As Crystal (2003) reminds us, around 25% of the people who speak English around the world are not native speakers of English.

**b.** Firth (1996) assumes that ELF is used between speakers of other languages who often do not share any cultural background.

**c.** Seidlhofer (2005) believes that ‘native speakers are regarded as custodians over what is acceptable’ in English.

**d.** Seidlhofer demonstrates that ELF is a ‘contact language’ used between speakers of other languages (2005).

**e.** Seidlhofer contends that there are voices calling for a more detailed assessment of the forms of ELF so that more concrete conclusions can be drawn regarding its relevance for teaching English in future (2005).

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**Further Reading & Practice**