

A Teacher's Guide to the Common European Framework

Introduction

Since its publication in 2001, the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment* (CEF) has had a wide-ranging impact on teaching and learning languages across the world. The CEF is now used by many ministries of education, local education authorities, schools and teachers' associations, educational institutions and publishers, among others, and will continue to have an impact for many years to come.

The CEF "provides a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks etc." (CEF: 2001: 1)

However, for many teachers and learners there still remains a considerable amount of worry and misunderstanding as to what the aims, goals, benefits and content of the CEF are. The purpose of this guide is to give teachers and learners an insight into the CEF, and, to see how it can have a positive impact on learning, teaching and assessment.

This guide does not aim to replace a more in-depth reading of the CEF itself, nor does it hope to provide all the answers to questions you or your learners may have about it. However, we hope that you find this introduction useful and that it opens doors to understanding and fully taking advantage of the CEF - a powerful and useful tool in language teaching and learning.

- Pearson Longman

Content

In this guide to the Common European Framework (CEF) we look at the following areas:

1. What is the Common European Framework and its goals?:

- a) The need for common description of levels of language learning, teaching and assessment.
- b) What is the Common European Framework (CEF)?
- c) Global Scale and "can do" statements
- d) Using the CEF to help teachers and learners "map" a journey

2. What are the benefits of the CEF and why should teachers incorporate it into their classroom goals?

- a) Benefits of the Common European Framework for teachers
- b) Incorporating the CEF into classroom goals?

3. In practical terms, what does it mean for the teacher?

- a) Defining how long it takes to reach each CEF level
- b) Helping learners "learn to learn"

4. And what does it mean for the learner?

- a) Benefits of the Common European Framework for learners
- b) Language Portfolios and the Common European Framework

5. CEF in practice

- Throughout this introduction to the CEF we have given you **quick reference** tabs for you to find the information you need easily.
- At the end of some sections we have also looked at some common **questions** about the CEF and given some **answers**.

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Part 1: What is the Common European Framework and its goals?

a) The need for common description of levels of language learning, teaching and assessment.

People have been learning, teaching and assessing languages for centuries, even millennia. In this long history there have been as many different ways of teaching as there have been ways of describing learning and “levels”. Even today if you look around at different schools, universities and language academies you will see lots of “methodologies”, and descriptions of levels.

Think for a few minutes of how you would describe to a learner what you mean by *elementary*, *beginner*, *intermediate*, *advanced*, etc

Quick reference:
Some problems in describing levels in language learning and teaching.

For example, let's consider the term *intermediate*:

- What is an *intermediate* level?
- What does *intermediate* mean to you as a teacher and to your learners?
- Does *intermediate* refer to how a learner communicates in an everyday situation in an English speaking country, or, does it refer to the amount of vocabulary they have learnt to use, or does it refer to what grammar items they know at that ‘level’?
- How can we assess a learner's achievement at an *intermediate* level if we don't define exactly what we mean by *intermediate*?

Levels we use to describe language do not have much meaning unless we have a **framework** in which we can **describe** language learning, teaching and assessment.

Quick reference:
Levels can mean different things in different institutions and countries

Many organisations, and even countries, have different ways of choosing or defining levels - what may be an “intermediate” level in one country could be an “upper-intermediate” in another, this could even vary between two institutions in the same town.

Comparing levels could get even more difficult if you want to compare a person who is learning English to someone learning, for example, French. Could we compare the two languages being learnt in terms of what an “advanced” English student does compared to what an “advanced” level French student does?

What we need is a way to specify what our learners are able to do at certain levels, to make learning and teaching clearer and easier to follow. What we also need as teachers is to know how these levels can guide our teaching and how we select coursebooks and resources to help teaching.

Quick reference:
The need for easy-to-use reference levels of learning, teaching and assessment.

b) What is the Common European Framework (CEF)?

In most countries there is a general agreement that language learning can be organised into three levels - basic/beginner, intermediate and advanced.

Reflecting this, the Council of Europe developed the **Common European Framework of References for Languages** to establish international standards for learning, teaching and assessment for all modern European languages.

The Common European Framework describes what a learner ‘**can do**’ at six specific levels which match general concepts of basic, intermediate and advanced levels.

- **Basic User:** (A1 and A2),
- **Independent User** (B1 and B2)
- **Proficient User** (C1 and C2).

Quick reference:
Six common reference levels A1 – C2
THE GLOBAL SCALE

These six levels are often referred to as the **Global Scale**, and is often the only contact learners and teachers have with the CEF.

The **Global Scale** is not language specific and can be used with virtually any language and can be used to compare achievement and learning across languages – for example, an A2 in Spanish is the same in Japanese or English.

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c) Global Scale and "can do" statements

Quick reference:

Common reference levels (A1 – C2) are based on statements of what a learner **can do** at each level

The **Global Scale** is based on a set of statements that describe what a learner 'can do'. It is important to remember that the **can do** statements are positive - what a learner is able to do, rather than what they cannot do or do wrong.

The **Global Scale** helps many people (including teachers, academic coordinators and course book writers) to decide on curriculum and syllabus content, which course book to choose etc.

Students may find the language used in the **Global Scale** a little complicated. For this reason the **Global Scale** is used as the basis for 'self-assessment grids' for learners, very often produced and referred to in their mother tongue and in easy-to-understand terms. This is so they can see what their level is and where they will go to next with their language learning and use

This means that even at low levels (A1, for example) a learner can see that learning has value and worth and what they **can do** is achievable.

Common Reference Levels - The Global Scale

Proficient	C2	Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.
	C1	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
Independent	B2	Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
	B1	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes & ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
Basic	A2	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
	A1	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

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For learners a **self assessment grid** for the B1 level looks like this for **listening**:

B1 Listening	I can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. I can understand the main point of many radio or TV programmes on current affairs or topics of personal or professional interest when the delivery is relatively slow and clear.
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The **self-assessment grids** are a central part of involving the learner in reflecting on their current and future levels and is used as part of a **Language Portfolio** (this is discussed in more detail in Part 4).

The CEF is **not** just the **Global Scale**, and this is important to remember. After the **Global Scale**, the CEF is then broken down into a set of more specific descriptive scales in three areas in communicating in a language:

Quick reference:
The Global Scale in the CEF is starting point to begin looking at specific language descriptors

- **Understanding** (Listening and Reading)
- **Speaking** (Spoken Interaction and Spoken Production)
- **Writing**

These are the descriptors used and adapted for **self-assessment**, and are often used as the basis for coursebook design, curriculum design and defining of the content of levels, based on the **Global Scale**.

On the following page you can see the CEF self assessment grid

d) Using the CEF to help teachers and learners “map” a journey

We can see the CEF as a way of mapping a learner's “journey” in learning a language. In many ways the CEF is very similar to a **road map** and it may help us to think about how we **use** a road map as a way of thinking about how to use the CEF.

A road map shows you how to get from point A to point B. It will show possible routes to take but what it won't do is tell you how to get there. You can go by car, walk, take a bus, a train etc. You can stop on the way, take as long as you want to admire the view or take a short route. You can also be travelling for many reasons, for pleasure, for business, for no reason at all, a road map doesn't define the purpose of a journey.

This is much the same way as we can look at the CEF, it shows us what the route in learning a language is but doesn't take us there. Furthermore there are many reasons for learning a language and language is used in a variety of contexts. The CEF also allows us to view language in different contexts. There are specific descriptor scales for specific contexts (such as business or social contexts) and language use.

Quick reference:
Think of the CEF as a road map, it can show us a route but not a way to travel.

A learner could start the journey at A1 level as a “beginner” and finish their journey at the C2 level as a “master” of the language. They may choose to stop at one of the levels when their purposes or aspirations have been met (most learners do not progress beyond a B2 level).

What is important is that the learners (and teachers) know exactly what a learner **can do** at each level and that this level is the same all over the world. As in most journeys, they will also know where they are going next – in many cases the next level in the CEF global scale, and the self assessment grids and global scale will let them know what to expect on the “journey”.

How our learners reach those levels is dependent on our teaching methodology, the motivation of the students, the learner's reason or purpose for learning, the coursebook and materials used, the amount of time taken etc.

Self-Assessment Grids

	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
Listening	I can recognise familiar words and very basic phrases concerning myself, my family and immediate concrete surroundings when people speak slowly and clearly.	I can understand phrases and the highest frequency vocabulary related to areas of most immediate personal relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local area, employment). I can catch the main point in short, clear, simple messages and announcements.	I can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. I can understand the main point of many radio or TV programmes on current affairs or topics of personal or professional interest when the delivery is relatively slow and clear.	I can understand extended speech and lectures and follow even complex lines of argument provided the topic is reasonably familiar. I can understand most TV news and current affairs programmes. I can understand the majority of films in standard dialect.	I can understand extended speech even when it is not clearly structured and when relationships are only implied and not signalled explicitly. I can understand television programmes and films without too much effort.	I have no difficulty in understanding any kind of spoken language, whether live or broadcast, even when delivered at fast native speed, provided I have some time to get familiar with the accent.
UNDEERS						
Reading	I can understand familiar names, words and very simple sentences, for example on notices and posters or in catalogues.	I can read very short, simple texts. I can find specific, predictable information in simple everyday material such as advertisements, prospectuses, menus and timetables and I can understand short simple personal letters.	I can understand texts that consist mainly of high frequency everyday or job-related language. I can understand the description of events, feelings and wishes in personal letters.	I can read articles and reports concerned with contemporary problems in which the writers adopt particular attitudes or viewpoints. I can understand contemporary literary prose.	I can understand long and complex factual and literary texts, appreciating distinctions of style. I can understand specialised articles and longer technical instructions, even when they do not relate to my field.	I can read with ease virtually all forms of the written language, including abstract, structurally or linguistically complex texts such as manuals, specialised articles and literary works.
AND ING						
Spoken Interaction	I can interact in a simple way provided the other person is prepared to repeat or rephrase things at a slower rate of speech and help me formulate what I'm trying to say. I can ask and answer simple questions in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics.	I can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar topics and activities. I can handle very short social exchanges, even though I can't usually understand enough to keep the conversation going myself.	I can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. I can enter unprepared into conversation on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life (e.g. family, hobbies, work, travel and current events).	I can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible. I can take an active part in discussion in familiar contexts, accounting for and sustaining my views.	I can express myself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. I can use language flexibly and effectively for social and professional purposes. I can formulate ideas and opinions with precision and relate my contribution skillfully to those of other speakers.	I can take part effortlessly in any conversation or discussion and have a good familiarity with idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms. I can express myself fluently and convey finer shades of meaning precisely. If I do have a problem I can backtrack and restructure around the difficulty so smoothly that other people are hardly aware of it.
SPEEA						
K ING						
Spoken Production	I can use simple phrases and sentences to describe where I live and people I know.	I can use a series of phrases and sentences to describe in simple terms my family and other people, living conditions, my educational background and my present or most recent job.	I can connect phrases in a simple way in order to describe experiences and events, my dreams, hopes and ambitions. I can briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. I can narrate a story or relate the plot of a book or film and describe my reactions.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions on a wide range of subjects related to my field of interest. I can explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions of complex subjects integrating sub-themes, developing particular points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion.	I can present a clear, smoothly-flowing description or argument in a style appropriate to the context and with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points.
W R I T I N G						
Writing	I can write a short, simple postcard, for example sending holiday greetings. I can fill in forms with personal details, for example entering my name, nationality and address on a hotel registration form.	I can write short, simple notes and messages relating to matters in areas of immediate needs. I can write a very simple personal letter, for example thanking someone for something.	I can write simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. I can write personal letters describing experiences and impressions.	I can write clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects related to my interests. I can write an essay or report, passing on information or giving reasons in support of or against a particular point of view. I can write letters highlighting the personal significance of events and experiences.	I can express myself in clear, well-structured text, expressing points about complex subjects in a letter, an essay or a report, underlining what I consider to be the salient issues. I can select style appropriate to the reader in mind.	I can write clear, smoothly-flowing text in an appropriate style. I can write complex letters, reports or articles which present a case with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points. I can write summaries and reviews of professional or literary works.

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Part 1: Conclusions, questions and answers

We hope that this guide will help you to understand some of the concepts and content of the CEF, particularly the Global Scale and self-assessment grids – obviously the best way to understand the CEF more fully is to explore the document and see how it fits your needs - indeed, this is encouraged in the CEF itself.

The CEF is complex, not just exploring descriptors of language achievement, but also offering a comprehensive description of language learning goals, objectives, aims and competencies. The CEF is a system of global levels giving clear guidelines on what a learner **can do** at each level. To achieve this the CEF provides descriptions of:

Quick reference:
The CEF provides more than the Global Scale and self-assessment scales

- competencies necessary for effective communication
- skills and knowledge related to language learning and competencies
- the situations in which communication takes place (people, place, time, organisation etc.) and in what contexts (study, work, social and tourism etc.)

For many teachers the complete CEF document is dense, with complicated terminology and a seemingly endless sets of lists.

We do not expect all teachers to read the CEF or the supporting documents. For many understanding the basic concepts and global scale is enough. All of the coursebooks and materials written by authors for Pearson Longman that are linked to the Common European Framework have been rigorously researched and validated and as such you can trust that the CEF levels given are accurate and will guide you through implementing the levels and language description given.

Some questions and answers about the Common European Framework

Q: Why a Common European Framework? I don't necessarily teach or study in Europe!

A: The Common European Framework is not a political or cultural tool used to promote Europe or European educational systems. The word "European" refers to European languages only - also the CEF has now been translated into over 30 languages, including

non-European languages such as Arabic and Japanese, making it accessible nearly everybody around the world.

Q: Is the CEF a teaching methodology? Does it tell me what to do, how to teach and how my students should learn?

A: No it isn't a methodology and it doesn't tell you how to teach. It is descriptive framework of what a learner **can do**. How you reach the levels is up to you. This is in fact beneficial as the CEF leaves plenty of room for you to help your learners achieve levels of proficiency in English, using a methodology you feel comfortable with and what your learners are used to.

Q: There is no specific grammar or vocabulary in the CEF can do statements, does this mean that grammar shouldn't be taught if we use the CEF as a basis?

A: The CEF deliberately does not refer to grammar or structures, it is designed describe how language users communicate and understand written and spoken texts. As it is used to describe and compare European languages it cannot hope to provide detailed list of grammar structures. However, learners do need to know about language systems (grammar, vocabulary etc.), without this they cannot learn - a good coursebook linked to the CEF will provide all the language input necessary. The **can do** statements are not exclusive, but complement more specific language areas covered in a coursebook.

Q: How long does it take to "reach" each level (A2 B1 etc.)? Is it the same for all learners?

A: Learning a language depends on many factors such as motivation, methodology, how much time is dedicated to learning inside and outside of the classroom, access to resources etc. The people who know their learners best are the teachers and the learners themselves. We hope that by having a better understanding of the CEF and competencies required at each level you will know best how to guide your learners. Some guidance is given in Part 3 on rough estimates of time taken to reach each level. Also, guidance given to accompany Pearson-Longman coursebooks that are mapped to the CEF will help you decide on how long it is recommended to reach each level.