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Teacher's Guide
to the
Common European Framework

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 the teaching and learning of languages around the world. Many ministries of education, local education authorities, educational institutions, teachers' associations, and publishers use the CEF, and it will continue to have an impact for many years to come.

In its own words, the CEF "provides a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc." (CEF: 2001: 1) For many teachers and learners, though, there is some misunderstanding as to what the context, aims, and benefits of the CEF are. The purpose of this guide is to give teachers and learners insight into the CEF and to show how it can have a positive impact on learning, teaching, and assessment.

This guide is not intended to replace a more in-depth reading of the CEF itself, nor can it provide all the answers to questions you or your learners may have. However, we hope that you will find this introduction useful if you are considering the CEF as a classroom tool.

Pearson Longman

Table of Contents

All of the topics listed below are addressed in this guide. Throughout we have provided **quick reference tabs** so you can find the information you need easily. At the end of some sections we have also addressed some **frequently asked questions** about the CEF.

Part 1: What is the Common European Framework and how did it evolve?

A. A common reference for describing language learning, teaching, and assessment.

People have been learning, teaching, and assessing language for centuries. In this long history, there have been as many different ways of teaching as there have been ways of describing levels of language learning and assessment. Even today, schools, universities, and language academies use many different methodologies and many ways to describe proficiency levels. What may be an intermediate level in one country may be an upper-intermediate level in another. Levels may vary even among institutions in the same area.

Consider how you would describe to a learner what you mean by *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, to the amount of vocabulary a person has learned to use, or to the grammar items a person at that level understands?
- How can we assess a learner's achievement at an *intermediate* level if we don't define exactly what we mean by *intermediate*?

> **Quick Reference:**
> Several issues become apparent when trying to describe levels of language learning, teaching, and assessment.

Comparing levels becomes even more difficult when comparing someone who is learning English to someone who is learning another language, for example, French. Can we directly compare the proficiency level of an advanced English student to that of an advanced French student?

> **Quick Reference:**
> Levels can mean different things among different institutions and in different countries.

In order to facilitate both teaching and learning, we need a way to specify what our learners are able to do at certain levels. As teachers, we also need to know how these levels can guide our teaching and the way we select course books and resources. In short, we need a common language by which we can describe language learning, teaching, and assessment.

In most countries there is general agreement that language learning can be organized 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.

B. Understanding and using the Global Scale

The Common European Framework describes what a learner can do at six specific levels: A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, and C2.

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

> **Quick reference:**
> Common reference levels in the Global Scale range from A1 to C2.

These levels match general concepts of basic, intermediate, and advanced and are often referred to as the Global Scale. For each level, the full CEF document complements this by describing in depth

- Competencies necessary for effective communication.
- Skills and knowledge related to language learning and competencies.
- Situations (people, place, time, organization, etc.) and contexts (study, work, social, tourism, etc.) in which communication takes place.

The Global Scale is not language-specific. In other words, it 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 as an A2 in Japanese or English.

The Global Scale also helps teachers, academic coordinators, and course book writers to decide on curriculum and syllabus content and to choose appropriate course books, etc.

"Can do" statements

The Global Scale is based on a set of statements that describe what a learner can do. The "can do" statements are always positive: they describe what a learner is able to do, not what a learner cannot do or does wrong. This helps all learners, even those at the lowest levels, see that learning has value and that they can attain language goals.

> **Quick Reference:**
> Common reference levels are based on statements of what a learner can do at each level.

The following table describes each of the six levels of the Global Scale.

Common Reference Levels - The Global Scale

Proficient	**C2**	• Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. • Can summarize 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 recognize 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 organizational 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 specialization. • 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 while 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 and 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.

Self-Assessment Grids

Students may find the language used in the Global Scale a little complicated. For this reason, when using the Global Scale to provide a self-assessment grid for learners, teachers may wish to simplify the language. Then students will be able to understand what their level is and where they will go next with their language learning and use.

A self-assessment grid for B1 level learners (for listening) looks like this:

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 points of many radio or TV programs on current affairs or topics of personal or professional interest when the delivery is relatively slow and clear.

Self-assessment grids encourage learners to reflect on their current and future levels and are used as part of a Language Portfolio (discussed in more detail in Part 4).

However, the CEF is more than the Global Scale. The CEF goes further by breaking down the Global Scale into more descriptive scales covering three areas of communication:

Quick Reference:
The Global Scale in the CEF is the starting point for looking at specific language descriptors.

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

These descriptors are adapted for self-assessment and are often used as the basis for course book design and curriculum design, and for defining the content of levels based on the Global Scale. See pages 8-9 for the **complete CEF self-assessment grid.**

C. Frequently asked questions

Q: Why a Common *European* Framework? I don't 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, although the CEF has now been translated into more than 30 languages, including non-European languages such as Arabic and Japanese, making it accessible to nearly everyone around the world.

Q: Is the CEF a teaching methodology?

A: No, the CEF isn't a methodology, and it doesn't prescribe a way of teaching. It is a descriptive framework for all language levels. How you teach the levels is up to you. The CEF leaves plenty of room for you to help your learners achieve new levels of proficiency using a methodology that you feel comfortable with and that 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 to describe how language users communicate and how they understand written and spoken texts. As it is used to describe and compare European languages, we cannot hope to provide a detailed list of grammar structures. However, learners do need to know about language systems (grammar, vocabulary, etc.) in order to learn. A good course book linked to the CEF will provide all the language input necessary. The "can do" statements complement more specific language areas.

Part 2: How can teachers make use of the CEF to achieve their classroom goals?

A. Understanding the benefits for teachers

If you choose to use the CEF as a reference point for your classroom, here are some of the benefits related to using a common framework:

1. Teachers have access to a meaningful and useful point of reference that is understood globally and that informs their decisions on measuring language knowledge and skills.

2. Teachers receive a detailed description of learning, teaching, and assessing languages, how learners compare to a set of competencies, and how they carry out communicative tasks.

3. Teachers and learners move toward specific levels and specific goals of those levels.

4. Teachers may want to select teaching materials (course books and resources) that are referenced to the CEF.

5. CEF levels provide an indication of performance and ability to function in communicative contexts in a foreign language.

6. There are no *requirements* in the CEF; it is a *framework of reference*. It is up to the teacher and learner to plot a course for language development. The CEF does not tell them what to do or how to do it.

7. The CEF invites practitioners (all those involved in teaching and learning a language) to reflect on their approach to teaching, learning, and assessment.

B. Using the CEF to "map" a journey

We can view the CEF as a tool for "mapping" a learner's journey in learning a language. In many ways the CEF is similar to a road map. A road map shows you how to get from point A to point B. It presents possible routes but does not specify which one you should follow, nor does it determine the length of your journey.

Similarly, the CEF shows us a path to follow for learning a language but doesn't take us on the journey. There are many reasons for learning a language, and language is used in a variety of contexts. The CEF may be used to view language in different contexts, and it provides specific descriptor scales for specific contexts of language use (business, social, etc.).

Quick reference:
Think of the CEF as a road map. Teachers and learners might use it to find the best route for their journey.

Learners can start their journey at the A1 level as a beginner and finish at the C2 level as a master of the language. They may choose to stop at one of the levels when their purposes have been met or their goals attained. (Most learners do not progress beyond the B2 level.)

How learners reach the different levels depends on many factors, including teaching methodology, students' motivation, their reason or purpose for learning, the course book and materials used, the amount of time taken, and others.

C. Defining how long it will take to reach each CEF level

As mentioned before in this guide, one of the main concerns of teachers is how long it takes to reach each level. At first glance, the CEF appears to be like a staircase with each step the same distance from the next (A1 eto A2 to B1 to B2, etc.). This might seem to indicate that each step or level should be achieved in an equal amount of time. But learning a language is like climbing a mountain:

Quick reference:
Learning a language is like climbing a mountain: The higher you go, the harder it gets.

the ascent gets harder the higher you climb. It does *not* take the same amount of time to reach each level. It will take longer to get to B2 from B1 than it does to get to A2 from A1.

A principle reason for this is that as the learner progresses with the language, he or she needs to acquire a larger range of language knowledge and competencies. Also, when going beyond B1 level, most learners reach a *linguistic plateau*, and acquisition slows. Teachers are of course aware of this and understand that the language learning process is a continual and very individualized one.

Because no two learners develop their language skills in the same way or at the same pace, it is difficult to define the exact amount of time needed to reach each level. The *Association of Language Testers of Europe* (ALTE), whose members have aligned their language examinations with the CEF, provides guidance on the number of guided teaching hours needed to fulfill the aims of each CEF level:

Quick reference:
It is difficult to define the amount of time needed to reach CEF level. The number of hours is different for every learner.

A1	Approximately 90 - 100 hours
A2	Approximately 180 - 200 hours
B1	Approximately 350 - 400 hours
B2	Approximately 500 - 600 hours
C1	Approximately 700 - 800 hours
C2	Approximately 1,000 - 1,200 hours

Guided teaching hours are the hours during which the learner is in a formal learning context such as the classroom. The number of hours needed for different learners varies greatly, depending on a range of factors such as

- age and motivation
- background
- amount of prior study and extent of exposure to the language outside the classroom
- amount of time spent in individual study

Learners from some countries and cultures may take longer to acquire a new language, especially if they have to learn to read and write with a Latin script.

CEF Self-Assessment Grid

		A1	A2	B1
UNDERSTANDING	**Listening**	• I can recognize 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 programs on current affairs or topics of personal or professional interest when the delivery is relatively slow and clear.
	Reading	• I can understand familiar names, words and very simple sentences, for example on notices and posters or in catalogs.	• 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.
SPEAKING	**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 while traveling 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).
	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.
WRITING	**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.

B2	C1	C2
• 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 programs. • 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 signaled explicitly. • I can understand television programs 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.
• 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 specialized 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, specialized articles and literary works.
• 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.
• 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.
• 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 of view at some length. • I can write 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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You may want to begin your evaluation of how many hours are needed by looking at the number of teaching hours allotted in your courses. Then see how that number corresponds to the number of approximate hours it takes to get from one level of CEF to the next.

Note that each designated CEF level covers a *range* of proficiency and achievement levels. Your course levels may correspond to the higher or lower end of this range, or to both. Pearson Longman course books cover the range of proficiency and achievement in each CEF level. In most cases, a course book will be used over a number of course levels, allowing all students to achieve proficiency over a period of time.

D. Using CEF-referenced course books

For many teachers and curriculum planners, one difficulty with any framework (not just the CEF) is deciding how to match the levels to an existing curriculum and classroom goals. By comparing the content of your course to the CEF, you can define what language skills, vocabulary, grammar, and communicative functions will be covered.

Course books and supplementary materials that are referenced to the CEF can help the teacher achieve his or her classroom goals. Pearson Longman has helped by aligning course books with the CEF. This helps the teacher decide whether the content of the course book (topics, language covered, etc.) fits classroom goals and learners' needs and whether the level is appropriate.

Teachers know their classroom goals better than anyone else. Working with other teachers in your institution as a group, you may want to read through the levels in the CEF Global Scale and self-assessment grids (as a minimum) and decide how you think they fit the classroom goals, the curriculum, the syllabus, and the course book you have chosen.

Quick Reference: Working together teachers can decide how the CEF fits their classroom goals.

Part 3: How Can Teachers Help Their Students to Learn?

Most of our discussion of the CEF so far has focused on helping teachers understand the basic concepts behind the CEF and Global Scale. However, at the center of the learning process and the framework itself is the learner. It is important that learners understand

Quick Reference: Learners need to understand CEF levels, self-assessment , and how to become reflective and autonomous.

what the framework means to them so that they can use self-assessment and learner autonomy to become more effective learners inside and outside the classroom.

At Pearson Longman we firmly believe that *Great Teachers Inspire - Great Teachers Motivate*. Inspired and motivated learners take control of their learning and become more effective autonomous learners. Teachers play an incredibly important role in the lives of our learners, because learners view their teachers as the source of inspiration and knowledge. Through learner training we can help learners understand how they learn and how they can acquire useful tools that will enhance their progress.

A. Encouraging Reflection

You may want to ask your students to reflect on their learning. Learners, especially children, often have little knowledge about the learning process. If they don't understand in concrete terms what learning a language involves, they will have trouble deciding on their goals and evaluating their current levels. The following guidance may help to encourage self-reflection and facilitate learner training:

Quick Reference: Students can be encouraged to reflect on their learning.

Tip 1 Ask learners concrete questions (and give examples of possible answers) to help them understand the benefits of reflection. Depending on their level and age, for students in monolingual groups you may have to introduce the concepts in their mother tongue. Here are some examples of questions to begin with:

To help them reflect on general learning ability:

What do you think are your strengths as a student?

What do you think are your weaknesses as a student?

How do you see yourself as a language learner?

What expectations do you have of the language teacher?

To help them reflect on learning a language and aims:

What do you find easy or difficult about learning a language?

How can you improve your study habits working individually or in a group?

Questioning can be done in small groups so that learners can share their thoughts with their peers. Remember that students from some cultures may not feel comfortable or ready to share their thoughts. You'll need to deal with their hesitation carefully and sensitively.

Tip 2 Have learners keep a record of their reflections in a learner's diary for future reference. These can become part of their Language Portfolio (covered in more depth in Part 4).

Tip 3 Introduce the concept and benefits of the CEF as a road map. Most learners, even children, understand the concept of a road map. If you offer them a clear, understandable example, they will quickly grasp the concept.

Tip 4 A K.I.S.S. (Keep It Short and Simple) approach is best. Introduce elements gradually, particularly the self-assessment grids and descriptor scales. Explain that the self-assessment grids focus on everyday situations and tasks. Learners are far more likely to understand the level system when it's presented in these terms instead of as an abstract linguistic tool.

B. Language Portfolios and the CEF

Language Portfolios are another primary way in which students may wish to make use of the CEF. Language Portfolios are designed to help learners become more conscious of their language learning and to encourage them to monitor their own progress. They encourage students to engage in self-assessment using "can do" statements. They promote creativity and help students explore their interests and understand their profiles as language learners. Language Portfolios are the property of the learners. They allow learners to take control of their learning and to showcase examples of their best work. Many Pearson Longman course books now incorporate Language Portfolios into the learning process.

Each Language Portfolio is made up of three parts:

1. **The Language 'Passport'**–In this part of the portfolio learners reflect on their language learning experiences, define their language learning needs, and plan a learning route. They can also summarize their intercultural experiences and their exposure to the language in a variety of contexts.

2. **The Language Biography**–This is a more detailed look at the learner's personal language learning experiences. Learners are encouraged to look at their own individual learning style and reflect on personal language learning objectives, usually by listing them. Learners use self-assessment grids (often called My Learning Progress) and score charts to check their progress throughout the course.

3. **The Language Dossier**–This is a collection of learners' work from throughout the course. Each student is responsible for compiling the dossier and, with the teacher's guidance, selecting examples of work that best represents his or her personal achievements. The dossier can include work taken from course book activities, the workbook, or extra resource sheets. It can include individual or group work and can be compiled in written, audio, or video form.

Part 4: Further Suggestions

Here are some further suggestions for bringing the CEF to life in the classroom:

Take a little time to read the complete document. It can be hard, but it will reward the reader with useful insights. The supporting Guide for Users is a good starting point and an easier read. You can download it at:

www.coe.int/T/DG4/Portfolio/documents/ Guide-for-Users-April02.doc

Go ahead and personalize the CEF. You may want to explore ways to relate the CEF to learners' own interests and contexts. Use cartoons, games, and role play to help young learners contextualize and explore the CEF. Ask your business English learners to write a profile of what they need English for in their job. Then match the CEF to their perceptions and reflections. As in any classroom context, the only limitation is your own imagination!

Celebrate success! We all recognize that reward and motivation are extremely important parts of the learning process. Learners need to feel an internal motivation to continue succeeding. When they have reached different levels in the CEF, celebrate! They will feel even more motivated to continue.

We are here to help. Pearson Longman is dedicated to continuing teacher development and supporting learning. We will continue to provide guidance and resources on the CEF.

We hope this guide has inspired you to explore the CEF in your classroom and in other language learning contexts. Good luck!

C.E.F.

Useful website links:

Pearson Longman CEF companion website:
http://www.longman.com/cef

The full Common European Framework document (in English):
http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Framework_EN.pdf

Language Portfolio self-assessment grids and checklists:
http://www.coe.int/T/DG4/Portfolio/?L=E&M=/main_pages/levels.html