

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)

What is it and how can it promote better professional language use?

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What is the CEFR?

Description of communicative competence applicable across all major European languages

Levels described from beginner (A1) to advanced (C2)

A1 /A2 = basic user

B1/B2 independent user

C1/C2 = proficient user

A common language for testers, students and teachers to describe language competency

Levels considered through skills, competencies and domain of use

Purpose (2001, p.3-4)

Equip

- Equip all Europeans for the challenges of international mobility...not only in education, culture and science but also in trade and industry;

Promote

- **Promote tolerance & understanding;**

Promote

- **Promote plurilingualism**

Promote and facilitate

- **Promote and facilitate co-operation among educational institutions in different countries;**

Provide

- **Provide a sound basis for the mutual recognition of language qualifications**

Assist

- **Assist learners, teachers, course designers, examining bodies and educational administrators to situate and coordinate their efforts**

How the CEFR defines levels

Broad 'can do' statement at each level, what a learner should be able to do by the end of that level.

Examples:

B2 'Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party'

A1 '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.'

Examples of Competencies

Narrower, skills based competencies given at each level, each skill broken down into a series of sub skills

Examples:

UNDERSTANDING CONVERSATION BETWEEN NATIVE SPEAKERS

(C1) Can easily follow complex interactions between third parties in group discussion and debate, even on abstract, complex unfamiliar topics

(A2) Can generally identify the topic of discussion around him/her, when it is conducted slowly and clearly.

Benefits & Challenges of the CEFR for Business, Industry & Academia

Benefits

- Provides a framework & language for understanding language proficiency
- Widely used and understood
- International recognition & adoption
- Strong and growing body of evidence-based research to support
- Encourages/requires domain specific specification

Challenges

- linguistic structures to realise the competences
- how discourse competences are carried out or developed between levels
- degree of mastery expected at each level
- how context & cognitive load impact on performance
- types of texts, organisational patterns or discourse features
- Scales for discourse seem to apply more to speech than to written language
- Different levels of ability in different skills (multi-dimensionality of levels)