

## What is CEFR?

CEFR stands for the **Common European Framework of Reference for Languages**, an international standard that describes language ability on a six-level scale (A1 to C2) from beginner (A1) to mastery (C2) by skill. It helps teachers, learners, and employers understand and compare language skills across different languages and qualifications. It provides clear 'can-do' descriptors for what a learner can do in speaking, reading, listening, and writing.

**A** = Basic user (A1, A2)

**B** = Independent user (B1, B2)

**C** = Proficient user (C1, C2)

There is also a Pre-A1 for complete beginners. Some levels are split into “core” and “+” to indicate the top half of a level. For example, ‘B1+’ means the top half of the B1 range.

## Progressing through the CEFR levels

The CEFR helps us understand the different levels of language proficiency. It also helps us understand how learners progress through the levels. Cambridge English Language Assessment estimates that learners typically take the following guided learning hours to progress between levels. ‘Guided learning hours’ means time in lessons as well as tasks we set you for homework as well as tasks you do independently. Of course, learners will vary in how long they take depending on many factors, such as motivation, your learning habits, your first language, but you will notice that it takes longer to progress up a level as you move up the scale.

Level		General Description	Guided Learning Hours	
Proficient User	<b>C2</b>	Mastery	Highly proficient - can use English very fluently, precisely and sensitively in most contexts	Approximately 1,000–1,200
	<b>C1</b>	Effective Operational Proficiency	Able to use English fluently and flexibly in a wide range of contexts	Approximately 700–800
Independent User	<b>B2</b>	Vantage	Can use English effectively, with some fluency, in a range of contexts	Approximately 500–600
	<b>B1</b>	Threshold	Can communicate essential points and ideas in familiar contexts	Approximately 300–400
Basic User	<b>A2</b>	Waystage	Can communicate in English within a limited range of contexts	Approximately 180–220
	<b>A1</b>	Breakthrough	Can communicate in English with help from the listener	Approximately 90-150

## The CEFR Global Scales

To help teachers and learners get a better high-level overview of the intended communicative learning outcomes for each CEFR level at Atlas, the Global Scales are a useful starting point:

CEFR Level	Global Scale Descriptors
<b>C2 - Mastery</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can understand virtually everything heard or read.</li> <li>• Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources.</li> <li>• Can express themselves very fluently, precisely, and naturally in complex situations.</li> </ul>
<b>C1 - Advanced</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can understand a wide range of demanding texts and implicit meanings.</li> <li>• Can express ideas fluently and spontaneously without searching for words.</li> <li>• Can use language flexibly for social, academic, and professional purposes.</li> <li>• Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects.</li> </ul>
<b>B2 - Upper-Intermediate</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can understand the main ideas of complex texts, including technical discussions.</li> <li>• Can interact fluently and spontaneously with native speakers.</li> <li>• Can produce clear, detailed text on a range of subjects.</li> <li>• Can explain a viewpoint on a topical issue.</li> </ul>
<b>B1 - Intermediate</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can understand the main points of clear, standard speech (school, work, leisure).</li> <li>• Can handle travel situations in areas where the language is spoken.</li> <li>• Can produce simple, connected text on familiar topics.</li> <li>• Can describe experiences, events, and plans.</li> </ul>
<b>A2 - Elementary</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can understand simple sentences about familiar topics (family, shopping, work).</li> <li>• Can communicate in routine tasks requiring direct exchange of information.</li> <li>• Can describe background, immediate needs, and simple matters.</li> </ul>
<b>A1 - Beginner</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can understand and use simple everyday expressions.</li> <li>• Can introduce themselves and ask/answer basic personal questions.</li> <li>• Can interact if the other person speaks slowly and clearly.</li> </ul>

## Other CEFR Scales

While the CEFR is best known for its six core proficiency levels (A1 to C2), it is also particularly useful because it applies the same set of levels to all the various sub-skills and areas of competence:

- the basic four skills (speaking, reading, writing and listening)
- communicative language (e.g., turn-taking, asking for clarification)
- types of interaction (e.g., obtaining goods and services, interviewing), and
- more linguistic skills (e.g., vocabulary range, phonological control).

It allows schools to link skills in each of these areas with the learners' overall level. The CEFR features a comprehensive system of 57+ illustrative descriptor scales designed to assess language proficiency. For course specification and design at Atlas Language School, we select those scales that, from our experience and understanding, best fit the objectives of our learners. We draw on the descriptors within those scales to define the course objectives.

## Is it just about levels?

The CEFR describes more than just learner levels. It has underpinned a particular approach to language teaching and learning, one based on the idea of **communicative proficiency** – the increasing ability to communicate and operate effectively in the target language. The descriptions of levels are skills-based and take the form of **'can-do' statements**, as in the examples for the Global Scales for each level. These descriptions of ability focus on **communicative purpose** and make for a very practical approach, which looks at what people can do – rather than on specific linguistic (e.g., grammar) knowledge.

## How is the CEFR useful for schools?

At Atlas Language School we use the CEFR for many different practical purposes:

- Specifying and designing courses The CEFR is a tool, not a fixed rulebook. It allows us to adapt descriptors to local needs, while still keeping a standardised system.
- It defines threshold abilities. If a learner cannot demonstrate the descriptors at a level, they are not considered to have that level.
- Creating and marking tests
- Developing learning materials
- Evaluating learners' needs and giving feedback
- Supports quality assurance within and across Atlas centres.

## How is the CEFR useful for teachers?

The CEFR helps teachers:

- understand a standardised terminology for describing language levels and exams.
- see what is needed for different aspects of learning English through the scales.
- make intended course, weekly and lesson learning outcomes more visible at the start of the course, week or lesson. Making learning more accessible can be motivating, though it is important to bear in mind that learners will reach those objectives at different speeds and with different quality.

- describe more clearly in tutorials what learners need to work on in order to reach the next level. It can be useful to show how different component skills are described at each level.
- use assessment grids more effectively when assessing learners during progress and level achievement tests.
- further elaborate the course syllabus. Teachers do not need to create their own syllabuses, but by referencing the high-level CEFR course descriptors CEFR, teachers can choose to adapt a course to meet the particular needs of a specific group of learners. Note, teachers should extend the coverage of a descriptor rather than change the qualitative aspect of it, e.g., specify particular situations, topics that are relevant to their learners.
- more easily integrate new learners commencing a course (rolling enrollment) into a group, i.e., by visiting the intended learning outcomes frequently, especially at the lower levels.

## How is the CEFR useful for learners?

The CEFR helps learners:

- gain a clear understanding of the differences between levels and courses. This creates a shared, transparent understanding of ability within and across the Atlas centres.
- self-assess more meaningfully (For this purpose, at Atlas, we help learners with this by simplifying the descriptors for them )
- increase their motivation. By making intended course, weekly and lesson learning outcomes more visible at the start of the course, week or lesson, learning becomes more purposeful.

## Key Points about the CEFR

- CEFR is a **common language** to talk about language learning.
- **Levels A1 - C2** describe the framework of progression clearly and globally.
- Using CEFR helps learners, teachers, schools, and international partners **stay aligned** when developing courses, materials, assessments, and recognising exams.

## Test your Knowledge

