

Appendix 1

SALIENT FEATURES OF THE CEFR LEVELS

Level A1 is considered the lowest level of generative language use – the point at which the learner can “interact in a simple way, ask and answer simple questions about themselves, where they live, people they know, and things they have, initiate and respond to simple statements in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics”, rather than relying purely on a very finite rehearsed, lexically organised repertoire of situation-specific phrases.

Level A2 does appear to reflect the level referred to by the “Waystage” specification. It is at this level that the majority of descriptors stating social functions are to be found, like “use simple everyday polite forms of greeting and address”; “greet people, ask how they are and react to news”; “handle very short social exchanges”; “ask and answer questions about what people do at work and in free time”; “make and respond to invitations”; “discuss what to do, where to go and make arrangements to meet”; “make and accept offers”. Here too are to be found descriptors on getting out and about: the simplified cut-down version of the full set of transactional specifications in “The Threshold Level” for adults living abroad, like: “make simple transactions in shops, post offices or banks”; “get simple information about travel”; “use public transport: buses, trains, and taxis, ask for basic information, ask and give directions, and buy tickets”; “ask for and provide everyday goods and services”.

The next band represents a “strong Waystage” (A2+) performance. What is noticeable here is more active participation in conversation given some assistance and certain limitations, for example: “initiate, maintain and close simple, restricted face-to-face conversation”; “understand enough to manage simple, routine exchanges without undue effort”; “make themselves understood and exchange ideas and information on familiar topics in predictable everyday situations, provided the other person helps if necessary”; “communicate successfully on basic themes if they can ask for help to express what they want to”; “deal with everyday situations with predictable content, though they will generally have to compromise the message and search for words/signs”; “interact with reasonable ease in structured situations, given some help, but participation in open discussion is fairly restricted”; plus significantly more ability to sustain monologues, for example: “express how they feel in simple terms”; “give an extended description of everyday aspects of their environment, e.g. people, places, a job or study experience”; “describe past activities and personal experiences”; “describe habits and routines”; “describe plans and arrangements”; “explain what they like or dislike about something”; “give short, basic descriptions of events and activities”; “describe pets and possessions”; “use simple descriptive language to make brief statements about and compare objects and possessions”.

Level B1 reflects the “Threshold Level” specification for a visitor to a foreign country and is perhaps most obviously categorised by two features. The first feature is the ability to maintain interaction and get across what you want to, in a range of contexts, for example: “generally follow the main points of extended discussion around them, provided people articulate clearly in standard language”; “give or seek personal views and opinions in an informal discussion with friends”; “express the main point they want to make comprehensibly”; “exploit a wide range of simple language flexibly to express much of what they want to”; “maintain a conversation or discussion but may sometimes be difficult to follow when trying to express exactly what they would like to”; “keep going comprehensibly, even though pausing for grammatical and lexical planning and repair is very evident, especially in longer stretches of free production”. The second feature is the ability to cope flexibly with problems in everyday life, for example “cope with less routine situations on public transport”; “deal with most situations likely to arise when making travel arrangements through an agent or when actually travelling”; “enter unprepared into conversations on familiar topics”; “make a complaint”; “take some initiatives in an interview/consultation (e.g. to bring up a new subject) but is very dependent on interviewer in the interaction”; “ask someone to clarify or elaborate what they have just said”.

The subsequent band seems to be a “strong Threshold” (B1+). The same two main features continue to be present, with the addition of a number of descriptors that focus on the exchange of “quantities” of information, for example: “take messages communicating enquiries, explaining problems”; “provide concrete information required in an interview/consultation (e.g. describe symptoms to a doctor) but does so with limited precision”; “explain why something is a problem”; “summarise and give their opinion about a short story, article, talk, discussion, interview or documentary and answer further questions of detail”; “carry out a prepared interview, checking and confirming information, though they may occasionally have to ask for repetition if the other person’s response is rapid or extended”; “describe how to do something, giving detailed instructions”; “exchange accumulated factual information on familiar routine and non-routine matters within their field with some confidence”.

Level B2 represents a new level as far above B1 (“Threshold”) as A2 (“Waystage”) is below it. It is intended to reflect the “Vantage Level” specification. The metaphor is that having been progressing slowly but steadily across the intermediate plateau, the user/learner finds they have arrived somewhere, things look different, they acquire a new perspective, can look around them in a new way. This concept does seem to be borne out to a considerable extent by the descriptors calibrated at this level. They represent quite a break with the content so far. For example, at the lower end of the band there is a focus on effective argument: “account for and sustain their opinions in discussion by providing relevant explanations, arguments and comments”; “explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options”; “construct a chain of reasoned argument”; “develop an argument giving reasons in support of or against a particular point of view”; “explain a problem and make it clear that their counterpart in a negotiation must make a concession”; “speculate about causes, consequences, hypothetical situations”; “take an active part in informal discussion in familiar contexts, commenting, putting their point of view clearly, evaluating alternative proposals and making and responding to hypotheses”. Secondly, running right through the level there are two new focuses. The first is being able to more than hold your own in social discourse: for example, “converse naturally, fluently and effectively”; “understand in detail what is said to them in the standard language even in an [audially/visually] noisy environment”; “initiate discourse, take their turn when appropriate and end conversation when they need to, though they may not always do this elegantly”; “use stock phrases (e.g. “That’s a difficult question to answer”) to gain time and keep the turn while formulating what to say”; “interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with users of the target language quite possible without imposing strain on either party”; “adjust to the changes of direction, style and emphasis normally found in conversation”; “sustain relationships with users of the target language without unintentionally amusing or irritating them or requiring them to behave other than they would with another proficient user”. The second new focus is a new degree of language awareness: “correct mistakes if they have led to misunderstandings”; “make a note of their recurrent mistakes and consciously monitor their language”; “generally correct slips and errors if they become conscious of them”; “plan what is to be said and the means to say it, considering the effect on the recipient(s)”. In all, this does seem to be a new threshold for a language learner to cross.

At the next band – representing a “strong Vantage” (B2+) performance – the focus on argument, effective social discourse and on language awareness that appears at B2 (“Vantage”) continues. However, the focus on argument and social discourse can also be interpreted as a new focus on discourse skills. This new degree of discourse competence shows itself in conversational management (co-operating strategies): “give feedback on and follow up statements and inferences by others and so help the development of discussion”; “relate own contribution skilfully to those of others”. It is also apparent in relation to coherence/cohesion: “use a limited number of cohesive devices to link sentences together smoothly into clear, connected discourse”; “use a variety of linking expressions efficiently to mark clearly the relationships between ideas”; “develop an argument systematically with appropriate highlighting of significant points, and relevant supporting detail”. Finally, it is at this band that there is a concentration of items on “negotiating”: “outline a case for compensation, using persuasive language and simple arguments to demand satisfaction”; “state clearly the limits to a concession”.

Level C1, seems to be characterised by good access to a broad range of language, which allows fluent, spontaneous communication, as illustrated by the following examples: “Can express themselves fluently and spontaneously, almost effortlessly. Has a good command of a broad lexical repertoire allowing gaps to be readily overcome with circumlocutions. There is little obvious searching for expressions or avoidance strategies”; “only a conceptually difficult subject can hinder a natural, smooth flow of language”. The discourse skills characterising the previous band continue to be evident at Level C1, with an emphasis on more fluency, for example: “select a suitable phrase from a fluent repertoire of discourse functions to preface their remarks in order to get the floor, or to gain time and keep it while thinking”; “produce clear, smoothly flowing, well-structured language, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices”.

Level C2 is not intended to imply native-speaker or near native-speaker competence. What is intended is to characterise the degree of precision, appropriateness and ease with the language that typifies the speech of those who have been highly successful learners. Descriptors calibrated here include: “convey finer shades of meaning precisely by using, with reasonable accuracy, a wide range of modification devices”; “has a good command of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms with awareness of connotative levels of meaning”; “backtrack and restructure around a difficulty so smoothly the interlocutor is hardly aware of it”.

The Common Reference Levels can be presented and exploited in a number of different formats, in varying degrees of detail. Yet the existence of fixed points of common reference offers transparency and coherence, a tool for future planning and a basis for further development.

The Common Reference Levels are summarised in the following table:

Proficient user	C2	Can understand virtually all types of texts. Can summarise information from different oral and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express themselves 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 themselves 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 user	B2	Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in their field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with users of the target language quite possible without imposing strain on 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 & ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
Basic user	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 their 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 themselves and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where someone lives, people they know and things they have. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.