

# A compilation of resources on the basic level of the CEFR for English language teachers

teachers

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## Compilers

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## **I. Background**

The Cuban educational system uses the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) as a proficiency reference framework for the development of its own system of teaching-learning and assessment of communicative competence in English. The CEFR was put together by the Council of Europe (CoE), first published in 2001 and updated in 2020. In the Cuban context, its alignment with other worldwide frameworks, and the rich tradition of research and academic practice of Cuban professionals in this branch of science are also taken into consideration.

Consequently, the alliance of the Ministry of Higher Education (MES) and the Ministry of Education (MINED) with the Cuban office of the British Council has been strengthened through the *#InglésParaElDesarrollo* project, focused on creating new opportunities for Cuban teachers' professional development.

This document aims at comprising both, the most relevant cornerstones of the CEFR, and the main resources derived from the most recent initiatives of this project. These resources include the workshops "*Teaching CEFR Level A1*" and "*Teaching CEFR Level A2*", developed in collaboration with St Giles Educational Trust, UK (professors Mike Williams and Arthur Laing) included as post-event courses of the L@ngtech Workshop at the UCIENCIA 2021 Conference, in October 2021. Materials from two other courses, taught *as part of the #InglésParaElDesarrollo* Biennial Conference, organized by the British Council and both ministries were also included. One of these courses focused on level A1 and was coordinated by Professor Alan S. Mackenzie, from TransformELT, and the other one, focused on A2, coordinated by the St Giles Educational Trust, UK. The Cuban counterpart institutions were the Universidad de las Ciencias Informáticas and the Universidad de Cienfuegos.

## **II. Introduction to the CEFR**

The CEFR has become one of the most commonly used reference tools for language teaching, learning, and assessment, not only by the

European Union (EU) or the Council of Europe (CoE) member states, but also by many educational systems around the world. The CEFR is being used not only to help ensure transparency and clear reference points for assessment purposes but also, progressively, for curriculum development and pedagogical purposes. This widespread use enforced the extension of the illustrative descriptors published in the 2001 document, thus giving way to the publication of the Companion Volume (CV), whose final version came to light in 2020.

### **“1. Main objectives of the CEFR**

- Promoting plurilingualism and **diversification** in the choice of languages in the curriculum.
- Supporting the development and demonstration of the **plurilingual profile** of individual learners.
- Developing and reviewing the content of **language curricula** and defining positive ‘can do’ descriptors adapted to the age, interests and needs of learners.
- Designing and developing **textbooks** and teaching material.
- Supporting **teacher education** and cooperation among teachers of different languages.
- Enhancing **quality** and success in learning, teaching, and assessment.
- Facilitating **transparency in testing** and the comparability of certifications”<sup>1</sup>

The CEFR is not tied to any specific language test –and most standardized language tests now provide CEFR level equivalents. It was designed to provide a transparent, coherent, and comprehensive basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses and curriculum guidelines, the design of teaching and learning materials, and the assessment of foreign language proficiency.

The CEFR was first published in 2001 (CoE, 2001) and updated in 2018 with a provisional version of a companion volume document that was replaced by The CEFR Companion Volume (CoE2020). It updates and extends the CEFR, adding descriptors for aspects of mediation, online interaction and plurilingual/pluricultural competence. The 2018 version

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/uses-and-objectives>

has been slightly restructured and modified. Descriptors have been edited to make them modality inclusive.

## **2. The levels in the CEFR**

Rather than the specific number of hours or qualifications, the CEFR describes what people can actually do in the language.

The “Global scales” have three levels, and each level is divided into two:<sup>2</sup>

### ***A: Basic User***

- A1 Breakthrough or beginner
- A2 Waystage or elementary

### ***B: Independent User***

- B1 Threshold or intermediate
- B2 Vantage or upper intermediate

### ***C: Proficient User***

- C1 Effective Operational Proficiency or advanced
- C2 Mastery or proficiency

The levels are based on a series of illustrative descriptors that describe the things you can do in the language you are learning. For example, at level A1 a learner ‘can produce simple, mainly isolated phrases about people and places’ and at level B2 they ‘can give clear, detailed descriptions and presentations on a wide range of ‘subjects’.

The can-do statements cover four modes of communication: interaction, production, mediation, and reception.

### **How long does it take to move up the levels?<sup>3</sup>**

Although each learner may have specific time requirements, Cambridge English Language Assessment estimates a general guide to the number of hours of ‘guided learning’ that are needed to progress through the levels (table 1). ‘It implies the guidance of a teacher and includes individual study’.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.britishcouncil.pt/en/our-levels-and-cefr>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.englishprofile.org/images/pdf/GuideToCEFR.pdf>



**Table 1** (Cambridge University, 2013)

<b>CEFR Level</b>	<b>Guided Learning Hours</b>
C2	Approximately 1,000 - 1,200
C1	Approximately 700 - 800
B2	Approximately 500 - 600
B1	Approximately 350 - 400
A2	Approximately 180 - 200
A1	Approximately 90 - 100

Following, are some tables (tables 2 to 4) that include the most important considerations for level specifications in the CEFR

**Table 2** (CEFR 3.3): Common Reference levels: Global scale (CoE, 2001, p. 24)

<b>PROFICIENT USER</b>	<b>C2</b>	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
	<b>C1</b>	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations. 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.
<b>INDEPENDENT USER</b>	<b>B2</b>	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

		<p>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.</p>
	<b>B1</b>	<p>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 &amp; ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.</p>
<b>BASIC USER</b>	<b>A2</b>	<p>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.</p>
	<b>A1</b>	<p>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.</p>

Self-assessment grid (table 3)

**Table 3** (CEFR 3.4): Common Reference levels (CoE, 2001, pp. 26-27)

<b>Listening</b>	<b>A1</b>	<b>A2</b>	<b>B1</b>	<b>B2</b>	<b>C1</b>	<b>C2</b>
<b>U N D E R T A N D I N G</b>	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 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 active speed, provided I have some time to get familiar with the accent.

	<b>Reading</b>	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 every day 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 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.
<b>S P E A K I N G</b>	<b>Spoken Interaction</b>	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	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	I can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst traveling in an area where the language is spoken. I can enter unprepared into conversation on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or	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	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	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. I can do have a

**Table 3** (continuation)

	<b>A1</b>	<b>A2</b>	<b>B1</b>	<b>B2</b>	<b>C1</b>	<b>C2</b>
	questions in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics.	, even though I can't usually understand enough to keep the conversation going myself.	pertinent to everyday life (e.g., family, hobbies, work, travel, and current events).	and sustaining my views.	and opinions with precision and relate my contribution skilfully to those of other speakers.	problem, I can back track and restructure around the difficulty so smoothly that other people are hardly aware of it.
<b>Spoken Production</b>	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 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 opinions.	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 helps to the recipient to notice and remember significant points.

<b>W</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>G</b>
<b>Writing</b>						
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 interest. 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 clear, smoothly flowing text in an appropriate style. I can write complex letters, reports or articles which are affective. Logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points. I can write summaries and reviews of professional or literary works.						

**Table 4** (CEFR 3.4): Qualitative aspects of spoken language use (CoE, 2001, pp. 28-29)

	<b>RANGE</b>	<b>ACCURACY</b>	<b>FLUENCY</b>	<b>INTERACTION</b>	<b>COHERENCE</b>
<b>C2</b>	Shows great flexibility reformulating ideas in differing linguistic forms to convey finer shades of meaning precisely, to give emphasis, to differentiate and to eliminate ambiguity. Also has a good command of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms.	Maintains consistent grammatical control of complex language, even while attention is otherwise engaged (e.g. in forward planning, in monitoring others' reactions).	Can express him/herself spontaneously at length with a natural colloquial flow, avoiding or backtracking around any difficulty so smoothly that the interlocutor is hardly aware of it.	Can interact with ease and skill, picking up and using non-verbal and intonational cues apparently effortlessly. Can interweave his/her contribution into the joint discourse with fully natural turn taking, referencing, allusion making etc.	Can create coherent and cohesive discourse making full and appropriate use of a variety of organisational patterns and a wide range of connectors and other cohesive devices.
<b>C1</b>	Has a good command of a broad range of language allowing him/her to select a formulation to express him/herself clearly in an appropriate style on a wide range of general, academic, professional or leisure topics without having to restrict what he/she wants to say.	Consistently maintains a high degree of grammatical accuracy; errors are rare, difficult to spot and generally corrected when they do occur.	Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously, almost effortlessly. Only a conceptually difficult subject can hinder a natural, smooth flow of language.	Can select a suitable phrase from a readily available range of discourse functions to preface his remarks in order to get or to keep the floor and to relate his/her own contributions skilfully to those of other speakers.	Can produce clear, smoothly flowing, well-structured speech, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors, and cohesive devices.

<b>B2</b>	Has a sufficient range of language to be able to give clear descriptions, express viewpoints on most general topics, without much conspicuous searching for words, using some complex sentence forms to do so.	Shows a relatively high degree of grammatical control. Does not make errors which cause misunderstanding and can correct most of his/her mistakes.	Can produce stretches of language with a fairly even tempo; although he/she can be hesitant as he or she searches for patterns and expressions, there are few noticeably long pauses.	Can initiate discourse, take his/her turn when appropriate and end conversation when he/she needs to, though he/she may not always do this elegantly. Can help the discussion along on familiar ground confirming comprehension, inviting others in, etc.	Can use a limited number of cohesive devices to link his/her utterances into clear, coherent discourse, though there may be some "jumpiness" in a long contribution.
<b>B1</b>	Has enough language to get by, with sufficient vocabulary to express him/herself with some hesitation and circumlocutions on topics such as family, hobbies and interests, work, travel, and current events.	Uses reasonably accurately a repertoire of frequently used "routines" and patterns associated with more predictable situations.	Can keep going comprehensibly, even though pausing for grammatical and lexical planning and repair is very evident, especially in longer stretches of free production.	Can initiate, maintain, and close simple face-to-face conversation on topics that are familiar or of personal interest. Can repeat back part of what someone has said to confirm mutual understanding.	Can link a series of shorter, discrete simple elements into a connected, linear sequence of points.
<b>A2</b>	Uses basic sentence patterns with memorised	Uses some simple structures	Can make him/herself understood	Can answer questions and respond to simple statements.	Can link groups of words with simple



**Table 4** (continuation)

	<b>RANGE</b>	<b>ACCURACY</b>	<b>FLUENCY</b>	<b>INTERACTION</b>	<b>COHERENCE</b>
<b>A2</b>	phrases, groups of a few words and formulae in order to communicate limited information in simple everyday situations.	correctly, but still systematically makes basic mistakes.	in very short utterances, even though pauses, false starts and reformulation are very evident.	Can indicate when he/she is following but is rarely able to understand enough to keep conversation going of his/her own accord.	connectors like “and, “but” and “because”.
<b>A1</b>	Has a very basic repertoire of words and simple phrases related to personal details and particular concrete situations.	Shows only limited control of a few simple grammatical structures and sentence patterns in a memorised repertoire.	Can manage very short, isolated, mainly pre-packaged utterances, with much pausing to search for expressions, to articulate less familiar words, and to repair communication.	Can ask and answer questions about personal details. Can interact in a simple way but communication is totally dependent on repetition, rephrasing, and repair.	Can link words or groups of words with very basic linear connectors like “and” or “then”.

Among the most important sources teacher should consult when aligning their teaching to the CEFR, we also recommend the booklet *Using the CEFR: Principles of good practice* (Cambridge, E.S.O.L., 2011) for it is a useful introduction to its adaptation.

### III. The Core Inventory of General English

The Inventory represents the core of English language taught at Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) levels A1 to C1 in English. Only the features most commonly included at each level have been listed. In any context, teachers and syllabus writers would add other language points to this minimal core, based upon an analysis of the needs and interests of the learners concerned. Decisions on recycling of language have also been left to teachers and syllabus writers. The inventory can also be used by learners as a guide to essential language for self-directed study. (North, Ortega, and Sheehan, 2010, p. 10).

Only the general features corresponding to the CEFR Basic Level are included in the present document. Therefore, the authors of this compilation recommend the use all the sections of this inventory for reference in daily practice (table 5).

**Table 5** (North *et al.*, 2010)

	A1	A2
<b>Functions</b>	Directions Describing habits and routines Giving personal information Greetings Telling the time Understanding and using numbers Understanding and using prices	Describing habits and routines Describing past experiences Describing people Describing places Describing things Obligation and necessity Requests Suggestions
<b>Grammar</b>	Adjectives: common and demonstrative Adverbs of frequency Comparatives and superlatives <i>Going to</i> How much/how many and very common uncountable	Adjectives –comparative- use of <i>than</i> and definite article Adjectives –superlative- use of definite article Adverbials phrases of time, place and frequency –including word order Adverbs of frequency

**Table 5 (continuation)**

	<b>A1</b>	<b>A2</b>
<b>Grammar</b>	nouns <i>I'd like</i> Imperatives (+/-) Intensifiers –very basic Modals: <i>can/can't/could/couldn't</i> Past simple of "to be" Past simple Possessive adjectives Possessive 's Prepositions, common Prepositions of place Prepositions of time, including in/on/at Present continuous Present simple Pronouns: simple, personal Questions <i>There is/are</i> To be, including questions + negatives Verb + ing: <i>like/hate/love</i>	Articles –with countable and uncountable nouns Countables and Uncountables: <i>much/many</i> Future time ( <i>will and going to</i> ) Gerunds Going to Imperatives Modals – <i>can/could</i> Modals – <i>have to</i> Modals – <i>should</i> Past continuous Past simple Phrasal verbs –common Possessives –use of 's, s' Prepositional phrases (place, time, and movement) Prepositions of time: <i>in/on/at</i> Present continuous Present continuous for future Present perfect Questions Verb + ing/infinitive: <i>like/want-would like</i> Wh- questions in past Zero and 1st conditional
<b>Vocabulary</b>	Food and drink Nationalities and countries Personal information Things in the town, shops, and shopping Verbs –basic	Adjectives: personality, description, feelings Food and drink Things in the town, shops, and shopping Travel and services
<b>Topics</b>	Family life Hobbies and pastimes Holidays Leisure activities Shopping Work and jobs	Education Hobbies and pastimes Holidays Leisure activities Shopping Work and jobs

## IV. English Profile

Another remarkable project that has proved useful is the English Profile Program. English Profile is both a global research programme, and a

lively and growing global community made up of researchers, academics, corpus linguists, teachers, testers, ministries of education, and other language specialists. This website is the centre of that community.

Cambridge University Press and Cambridge English Language Assessment are the main funding partners in English Profile. In addition, English Profile has a number of data contributor partners who have contributed data to the corpus, and there were also a number of organisations involved in the EU-funded English Profile Network project. (<http://englishprofile.org/home/about-us>)

Within its online resources, the English Vocabulary Profile (Capel, A. *et al.*, 2012) and the English Grammar Profile (Cambridge University, 2017) are extremely helpful.

The English Vocabulary Profile (EVP) offers reliable information about which words (and importantly, which meanings of those words) and phrases are known and used by learners at each level of the CEFR.

The English Vocabulary Profile contains information about phrases, idioms, and collocations as well as the words themselves. By leaving the text box blank and selecting one of the levels, you can generate lists of words for each level; but you can also filter these using the advanced search functions, to find out what 'food and drink' vocabulary A1 learners know, or which phrasal verbs are known at B2 level. There is a British and American English version, and there is audio pronunciation for all entries.

The EVP forms an invaluable reference source for anyone involved in syllabus design as well as materials writers, test developers, teachers, and teacher trainers. (<http://englishprofile.org/wordlists>)

The English Grammar Profile allows us to see how learners develop competence in grammatical form and meaning, as well as pragmatic appropriateness, as they move up the CEFR levels. This provides us with typical, world-wide grammar profiles for each level.

Like vocabulary, grammatical forms often have more than one meaning. For example, the modal verb 'may' can be used with various meanings at different levels. The EGP teases apart these meanings and tells us at which level we see learners of English using them correctly and appropriately. (<http://englishprofile.org/english-grammar-profile>)

## **V. Summary of the contributions from the workshops developed in October-November 2021 under the guidance of TransformELT and St Giles Educational Trust**

The three above-mentioned workshops (“Teaching CEFR Level A1”, “Teaching CEFR Level A2”, and “Developing key competencies of the CEFR at the A2 Level”) provide a valuable source of knowledge and expertise to be applied in teaching practice. Therefore, a summary of the contents of those courses has been reshaped and adapted in this material.

The workshops focused on Level A (Basic User) because many of the courses in Cuban education currently target this level (subdivided in A1 and A2 sublevels).

### **1. Developing Key Competencies of the CEFR at Level A1. An approach to A1 level of the CEFR (Mackenzie, 2021)**

Now we are focusing on the basic user, we are looking specifically into A1. As you may realize these users can't create complex texts, they can't say complex things, and they can't answer difficult questions. However, focussing on what a learner can't do is a very negative way of looking at learning. What A1 learners 'can do' is very basic, and they are described in these skill-specific descriptors (CoE, 2001, p. 26):

<b>Listening</b>
I can recognise familiar words and very basic phrases concerning myself, my family and immediate concrete surroundings when people speak slowly and clearly.
<b>Reading</b>
I can understand familiar names, words, and very simple sentences, for example on notices and posters or in catalogues.
<b>Writing</b>
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.
<b>Spoken Interaction</b>
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.
<b>Spoken Production</b>
I can use simple phrases and sentences to describe where I live and people I know.

A1 learners can do a number of things as you can see on the chart (table 6), but if they are able to do anything beyond those basic functions, notions, or ways of using language, they would be A2. A2 learners can describe habits and routines in a more detailed way, describe people or things, make requests and suggestions.

**Table 6** Comparing the functions and notions of A1 and A2 learners (After North, Ortega & Sheehan, 2010, p. 38)

	A1	A2	Examples:
Functions/Notions			
Numbers			<b>Understanding and Using Numbers</b>
Prices			We have three cats and one dog. My father is 45 years old.
Telling the time			There are 500 people in our village.
Directions			
Greetings			<b>Understanding and Using Prices</b>
Giving personal information			How much does the room cost? 45 Euros per night.
Describing habits and routines			The train ticket to York is 7 pounds 50 (pence). I spend about 5 dollars a day.
Describing people			
Describing things			<b>Telling the time</b>
Requests			What's the time? A quarter to seven.
Suggestions			Do you have the time please?
Advice			Can you tell me the time, please?
Invitations			It's 9.45.
Offers			(Nine forty-five) The train leaves at three o'clock.
Arrangements/-ing to meet people			
Obligation and necessity			
Describing places			
Describing past experiences & story telling			

A1 level learners can also use basic discourse markers, they usually only really know: **and, but, because,** and maybe **so.** Those may be the only discourse markers they are able to use to connect ideas together at this level. You can see some examples in sentences below.

## Discourse markers

### Connecting words (and, but, because)

She lives in Switzerland, **and** she goes skiing a lot.

I don't like dogs, **but** I like cats.

I go to bed early **because** school starts at 7am.

They can't yet use complex connectors, or introductory phrases at the beginning of a sentence, for example: **first, then, next, after that;** those are more characteristic of an A2-level learner.

When it comes to verb forms, the verb **to be** is very important to A1 learners, as it is a fundamental building block in the English language. Important grammar rules that they need to learn are 1: how to use plurals, and 2. the form and function of the present tense, as this, makes up more than the 50 % of all English used in day-to-day communication. According to a study published by Ginseng English (Ginseng English, 2022), the most commonly used English verb tenses states in table 7.

**Table 7** (Ginseng English, 2022)

5 Most Common English Verb Tenses		
#	Tense	Frequency
1	Simple Present	57.51 %
2	Simple Past	19.7 %
3	Simple Future	8.5 %
4	Present Perfect	6.0 %
5	Present Continuous	5.1 %

They also need to learn about the function of talking about possession: *Have you got?, I have got, I haven't got (more British)/ I have, I don't have (more American)*. It's useful for them to know that there are different ways of saying things and that they are used more or less in different parts of the world.

### Verb forms

<b>To be (including questions and negatives)</b> We are from South America. No, I'm not tired.	<b>Have got (British)</b> Have you got any money? I've got all of his tracks. We've got lots of time.
--	--

France is a wonderful country. I am a psychology learner. Are you French? No, I'm not.	
--	--

These examples below come from a document called: *British Council - EAQUALS Core Inventory for General English* (North *et al.*, 2010). It looks at all the different languages across the different levels of the CEFR and gives you examples of what action should be able to do at those different levels. If you want to see some examples of the kinds of target language the learners should be able to use at A1 level, have a look at that core inventory and it will help you to determine your goals. It will also help you to distinguish between A1 and A2 and the other levels.

We recommend to study appendixes D and E of the above-mentioned inventory which include the language content mapping and exponents for each level (North *et al.* 2010, pp. 38-50), and then try the reflection suggested below.

**Reflection task:**

1. Thinking about your learners. What can they do? Make a list of statements like the ones you have read above.
2. Thinking about your learners, is there anything that they can do above their target level? What do they still have to achieve at their target level?
3. What do you spend most of your time on in class? Is this appropriate? Why?

## **1.1. Assessing A1: Assessment concepts**

We have had a basic look at what the descriptors are for A1. Now let's focus on how we go about assessing at A1 level. In fact, these principles are mostly the same right across all CEFR levels, but we will look specifically at how to assess A1 level. There are some basic assessment concepts we need to refer to first.

### **1.1.1. Assessment of learning (summative) vs. Assessment for learning (formative)**

**Assessment of learning** is looking at whether the learners have achieved the target language, or the target level that they need to have achieved. That is usually done at the end of the learning process, and as a summative assessment, where you are looking at the sum of



all their learning to date. Throughout a term, you may test vocabulary or grammar through quizzes and give scores for the number of correct answers. This is assessment of learning. At the end of term, learners may complete tests, do some kind of big project, or perform the language in front of the class or the teacher to show that they are able to do all of the things that they need to be able to do at an A1 level. After these tests, they are given a score, and there is no more opportunity to improve on those points tested from the assessment point on.

**Assessment of learning** (Teacher Standards and Accreditation, 2021) provides evidence of learner learning at particular key points in time. 'Assessment of learning' helps to summarize what pupils know, understand or 'can do' against the relevant year-level achievement standard for different learning areas/subjects, in order to report on achievement and progress. Assessment of learning takes place after the learning has occurred and is used to:

- provide evidence of achievement to the wider community, including parents, educators, the learners themselves and outside groups;
- provide a transparent interpretation across all audiences;
- inform future learning pathways for learners, such as in gateway exams for specific programmes or higher education.

To decide when 'assessment of learning' should take place and at which key points in time, teachers can use syllabus outcomes within a standards framework, and related learning goals established at the beginning of a year, semester, term, or unit of work.

Assessment **of** learning requires teachers to make judgements about learner learning, to communicate to parents, other teachers and to learners themselves about what learners know and can do, in relation to the standards-referenced framework of syllabuses.

The reference point of the syllabus standards is a crucial factor in assessment **of** learning. Other reference points, such as other learners (comparisons) and the learners themselves (individual progress) should be communicated separately and should not interfere with judgements.

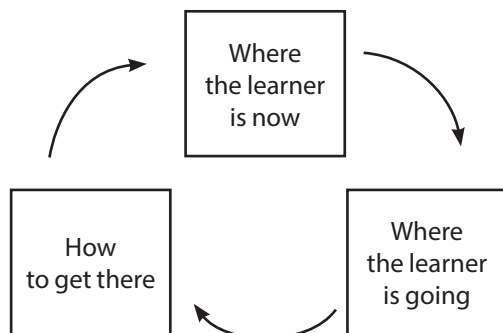
Effective implementation of assessments should ensure that the results do not come as a surprise to learners and parents. It is important that the underlying logic and measurement of assessment of learning be credible and defensible. Gathering information over time and

triangulating assessment of learning information assists in ensuring the accuracy of decisions made. With the help of their teachers, learners can look forward to assessment **of** learning tasks as occasions to show their competence, as well as the depth and breadth of their learning.

**Assessment for learning** (Mackenzie, 2021) is usually done during the learning process, and helps you and the learners to find out how well they are progressing towards their learning goals. Assessment **for** learning informs the learning process. Results of assessments help you to adjust the learning process to be able to achieve those targets by the end of the time that you have allotted for achieving those targets. It happens during the learning process, before major terminal assessment points.

**Assessment for learning** (AFL) (Cambridge Assessment International Education (s. f.)) is **an approach to teaching and learning** that creates feedback which is then used to improve learners' performance. Learners become more involved in the learning process and from this gain confidence in what they are expected to learn and to what standard. One way of thinking about AFL is that it aims to 'close the gap' between a learners' current situation and where they want to be in their learning and achievement. In this sense, skilled teachers can plan tasks which help learners to do this.

AFL involves learners becoming more active in their learning and starting to 'think like a teacher'. They think more actively about where they are now, where they are going, and how to get there.



Effective teachers integrate AFL in their lessons as a natural part of what they do, choosing how much or how little to use the method. AFL can be

adapted to suit the age and ability of the learners involved. AFL strategies are directly linked to improvements in learner performance in summative tests and examinations. Research shows that these strategies particularly help low-achieving learners to enhance their learning.

### **AFL and the relationship with formative and summative assessment**

Traditionally, AFL has been closely associated with formative assessment due to practices such as questioning and providing feedback which help ‘form’ or ‘shape’ learner learning. This differs from summative assessment which typically is an attempt to measure learner attainment at the end of a period of learning.

Table 8, based on the UK’s National Foundation for Educational Research Report (NFER, 2007), classifies types of formative and summative assessment as either formal or informal.

**Table 8**

	<b>Formative Assessment</b>	<b>Summative Assessment</b>
Informal	Questioning Feedback Peer assessment Self-assessment	Essays in uncontrolled conditions Portfolios Coursework Teacher assessment
Formal	Further analysis or test, exams, essays Target setting	Tests Exams Essays in controlled conditions

It can be argued that all the assessment strategies in this table support AFL if their ultimate use is to help the learners progress in terms of their learning.

A good example of using a summative assessment strategy in an AFL context is where a test or exam is used to identify a lack of understanding (e.g., in a particular area of the syllabus) and subsequently targets are set to rectify this.

There are five main processes that take place in assessment for learning:

- a) Questioning enables a learners, with the help of their teacher, to find out what level they are at.

b) Learners understand what successful work looks like for each task they are doing.

The teacher provides feedback to each learner about how to improve their learning.

c) Learners become more independent in their learning, taking part in peer assessment and self-assessment.

d) Summative assessments (e.g., the learners' exam or portfolio submission) are also used formatively to help them improve.

Summarizing, **assessment of learning** is something that is done usually at the end of a learning process or unit. It finalizes a thing, and says "right you can do that, and now let's move on to the next thing".

**Assessment for learning** is about how well you can do the thing being assessed, and "let's see what more we need to do to be able to get to the point where we can say that you 'can do' this well".

**Reflection task:**

1. Are your assessments 'of' or 'for' learning? How? Why?
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each of these? What questions do you still have about assessment of and for learning?

### **1.1.2. Terminal assessment vs. Continuous assessment**

**Terminal assessment** is what happens at the end of the course and **continuous assessment** happens during the course. There are some courses where there is no form of continuous assessment during the course, and therefore there is no assessment for learning because you don't know how well learners are doing things as they go through the term. Most courses need a blend of both of these, in the same way that they need both: assessment of learning and assessment for learning. (Mackenzie, 2021)

### **1.1.3. Learning –and learner- centred assessments**

As well as when and what you are assessing about the learners and their learning, you need to think about how you are going to assess, and what specifically you are going to look at from their learning.

- **Performance-based assessment: Product, Process & Performance**

If we think about a performance-based assessment, where you are looking at what the learner can do with the language, then there are three

different things you can look at, there is the product that they are creating, the process they are going through and the form of the performance.

**The product** is for example: if you were asking them to produce a piece of writing and they write a postcard to a relative from a holiday destination, then the postcard is the product. Telling the class about a recent holiday is a presentation. The skills, the criteria for assessment and the process for creating that product would need to be completely different to writing a postcard, even though a lot of the language would be the same.

**Performance tasks** are when you ask learners to do things that use the target language or achieve a particular communicative task. For example, having a dialogue with a classmate, asking, and answering questions to each other about their names, their addresses, where they live, asks them to 'perform' the actual communicative task. Giving this context makes the task more realistic, 'Pretend to meet for the first time and have an introductory conversation exchanging basic information', for example. Performance in this case, means the act of doing the task, rather than scripting a dialogue, which is only a plan for communication, not communication itself. Performance does not necessarily mean being on stage, or in the spotlight. Although class presentations performing rehearsed dialogues and improvising conversations in public can also be used as assessment events.

As well as the product to be assessed (the thing that will be assessed), and the form of that product (the performance task), we also must consider **the process** learners will go through to enable them to produce the product and succeed in the performance task. The process that they go through to create the product can also be assessed. This means looking at what they have done to be able to get to where they are going. So, you had two learners working on producing a dialogue together, you can look at what they were doing, how they were working together, and the kinds of things they were trying to turn that dialogue into a coherent performance. Assessing the process means looking at what happens before they get to the performance or the product. Assessment of process can help you as a teacher to structure the learning process more successfully for learners. It can also help learners to see how they could complete similar tasks more successfully in the future. This makes assessment of process essential in assessment for learning.

For the most part at A1, you are really looking at the product and the performance; process-based assessments are better suited to more complex communicative tasks. For A1, most tasks involve making sure that the learners can produce the language that they need, based on the vocabulary they have learned and the fixed phrases they use.

- **Alternative assessment**

Alternative forms of assessment tend to look at learning processes. **Self-assessment** for example, has the learners think about whether they can do what the outcome statements says they should be able to do, to what quality standards they can do those things, and what they need to do to be able to meet those quality standards, if they are not doing so.

**Peer assessment** is having friends and classmates look at what they are doing, telling them how well they are achieving what they are doing (that they are doing a great, or a not-so-great job), suggesting how they can improve what they are doing. This is a really useful way of motivating learners and getting them to encourage each other as well as become more aware of where they are themselves in terms of the learning outcome achievement.

**Portfolios** can be a useful way of collecting evidence of learning to show that the learner can do these various things. Portfolios are a selected number of texts that the learner produces, dialogues that they create, and records of things that they have achieved in the process of their learning. Collecting these into a selection of their work that they and you, and their classmates can look at will help you to evaluate the learning process that they have gone through during the term.

#### 1.1.4. Assessment task types

- **Informal checks on understanding**

During class, asking a learner, 'What is your name?' then asking them to ask another learner what their name is, then getting them to say, 'Her name is (...)', would be an informal check on understanding. During the process of the class, you are making sure that the learner knows the structures to produce, the vocabulary to use, and the appropriate expressions that are needed during the learning process. But this is also a great way to assess for learning because you can look at where they are and how much they have been able to achieve the actual learning outcome.

- **Observation / dialogue**

*Observing what learners are doing in class if you have learners working in pairs or groups, or if you have asked them to complete a task in writing, for example.* When they are sitting there writing, go over and look at what they are doing, observe them doing it or have a dialogue with them to find out how well they are getting on. This is also a useful way of assessing for learning.

- **Quiz / Test**

*Quizzes and tests we are all very familiar with.* It is the most common form of assessment or check on understanding that teachers use to judge whether learners are achieving what they are supposed to. However, they may not be the best way of judging language ability. For example, language ability is a complex construct and simple quizzes, and tests generally do not provide very accurate measures of whether learners are able to do the things that they can do and need to be able to do with language, to be able to say that they are at a particular level. Academic prompts are more likely to give a better picture of what learners are able to do.

- **Academic prompt**

Academic prompts might be things like 'Introduce yourself to another learner', 'Tell me about your family', 'Tell me your name', 'Write a postcard to your best friend telling them about the holiday you are on now', 'Write a shopping list for your birthday party'. They are open instructions to complete a task that will demonstrate they can achieve the learning outcome. Academic prompts often ask learners to perform specific communicative tasks.

- **Performance task / Project**

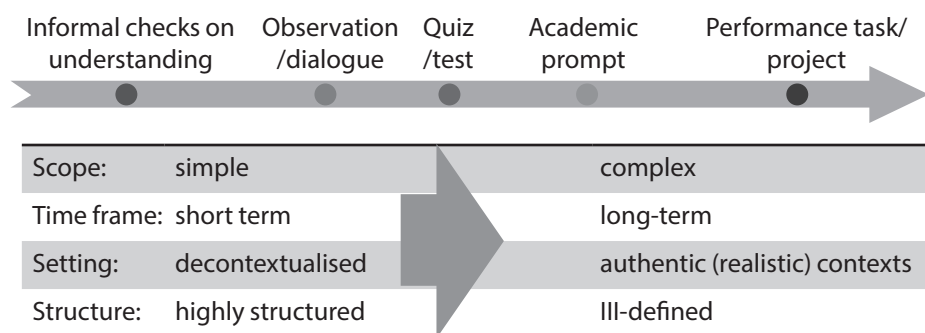
A performance task is a discreet task that asks the learners to complete an act of communication. Multiple performance tasks can be structured into a larger project. For example, giving the learners the task of putting together a dialogue where they are meeting for the first time and they are using their actual names, is a basic performance task. Asking them to do this when they are using pretend names and pretend information can be quite motivating for them, and this is a slightly modified performance task. Having them research a familiar person, find out the same information

about them from the internet, and then perform the dialogue is a more involved task, and at A1 level a project might be considered. Getting them to perform these mini projects in front of the rest of the class means everybody can have a laugh about the celebrities (not the learners!), and you can find out how accurately they are producing the language, and how well they are achieving the learning outcomes.

Projects tend to have several different tasks that are structured to create a larger output of some kind like a poster, a presentation, a play or skit, a news report or a recorded story. For example, a presentation about an animal: where it lives, what it does and what colour it is, describing things it likes and dislikes, etc. But then you are also veering into A2 territory as projects and wider performance tasks like that, are more likely to need higher levels of language and more connected text and that is getting into A2-B1 area.

### 1.1.5. Assessment continuum

All of these different types of assessment are on a continuum from informal checks on understanding, through observing what the learners are doing or having a dialogue with them, through checking them with a test, and giving them an academic prompt that requires a certain kind of response that demonstrates that they are achieving the learning outcome, or giving them a performance task to do, or a project that has a clear set of aims and criteria associated with them.



(Adapted from Wiggins and McTighe, 1998)

Each of the academic prompts and performance tasks require marking criteria for looking at the qualities of what they are doing, and exactly



how they are going about doing them, to be able to give the learner feedback, and help them to achieve the best possible results they can on any performance. But this continuum depends on things like the scope of the task; informal checks on understanding are fairly simple, performance tasks are quite complex.

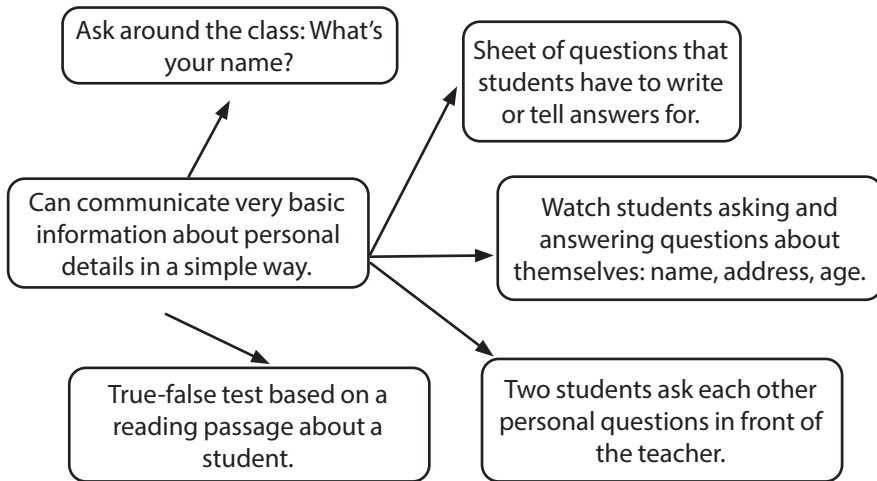
The timeframe necessary to observe a learner in class is short-term and immediate. Writing a postcard or performing some kind of task is quite a long-term thing and learners will need a lot of time to build up to those performance tasks. The setting that you have for assessment tasks is important too. Often quizzes and tests for example are quite decontextualized; there is not much information around the quiz questions to help learners complete the items. Performance tasks or projects, on the other hand, can be much more authentic, or at least have real, or more realistic contexts. For example, talking about an animal that the learners like, or describing it, is something that they research and find out new information, put the information together, and present it to other people who are going to be interested in that topic. There is a lot more realistic context behind that task. Similarly, the informal checks on understanding, observation dialogues and quizzes and tests are highly structured ways of doing things. You are asking the same questions again and again in a similar way, but with academic prompts, the responses are likely to be more individual and spontaneous.

Every learner is going to answer those academic prompts in different ways, and that is a good thing. You want to see that variety; you want to see that creativity similarly in performance tasks and projects, you might give them a clear structure, but what they do with that structure is much more loosely defined.

#### **1.1.6. Assessment options**

For each learning outcome that you want to assess, you have a range of different options you could use, for example, given this learning outcome:

- **Can communicate very basic information about personal details in a simple way.**



You could just ask around the class: *What is your name?*; *What is your father's name?*; *How old are you?*; and the learners would need to be able to give you basic information about themselves in a simple way. This informally checks whether they understood the task and whether they were able to do it.

You could also give them a sheet of questions that learners have to ask each other and write and tell answers for. That would also involve reading, listening, and speaking which may be more complex skills for young learners to master. So, you might need to be aware that whenever you give them a reading or writing task, that is more complex, and just because they can't write the answers, does not mean that they can't give that information in speaking for example. Direct assessment (assessing speaking through speaking, writing through writing, reading through reading, and listening through listening) is always better than indirect assessment.

If you give the task to learners of asking and answering question about themselves and gave them a list of topics on a sheet, for example, name, address, age, or if you are ask them to play the role of a hotel receptionist, for example, asking them information about themselves, then that would be a more realistic way of measuring whether they could give that personal information or not.

That would be an observation of whether they can achieve those tasks or not. It is a performance task also, so you are watching them perform

that task, but a performance task is more when they are doing it in public and in front of the teacher, or other students as in this example:

Two learners ask each other personal questions in front of the teacher, you are watching them, you are scoring them, you have got a checklist of things that you want to check off about whether they can or cannot do these things.

Note that this takes up a lot of class time and can be incredibly boring in large classes where you are watching and listening to the same dialogue 20-30 times. A test in this case is probably not an appropriate thing to do. You might have a true-false test based on a reading passage about an imaginary learner, for example, that says their name, the learner's name is John when actually it is Peter, but that kind of task is really not terribly meaningful, not very useful, and it is a good example of when not to use a test. A performance task for this is a much better way of finding out whether they can do these things or not.

Remember only to assess at the level that you are assessing. If your learners are A1 and you are giving them A2 tasks during assessments, it is not very fair. Here is an example again from the *British Council – EAQUALS Core Inventory for General English* that shows you, for example, when learners need to use different forms of modal or at what levels they are expected to be able to master the use of these different forms of modals. You can see that at A1 they only need *can/can't*. *Could*, might be introduced more at A2. You might also at A2 have *may* and *might*, *possibly*, *probably*, *perhaps*, at A2, but it is highly unlikely. You are probably going to wait until B1, before you get to the difference between *might*, *may*, *will* and *probably*, for example. So, make sure that you are only assessing at the specific level what you are supposed to be assessing at. (Table 9)

**Table 9**

<b>Modals: Can</b>	<b>A1</b>	<b>A2</b>	<b>B1</b>	<b>B2</b>	<b>C1</b>
Can/can't					
Can/could					
<b>Modals: Possibility</b>					
Might, may					
Possibly, probably, perhaps					
Might, may, will, probably					

Must/can't (deduction)					
Modals: Obligation & Necessity					
Must/mustn't					
Have to					
Must/have to					
Should					
Ought to					
Need to/needn't					
Modals: Past					
Should have/might have/etc.					
Can't have, needn't have					

**Reflection task:**

1. There are a lot of different ideas in this section about assessment. Which ones do you like, which do you not like, why?
2. Thinking about a class that you teach, make a list of action points for yourself to experiment with some new assessment types.
3. What language points do you currently teach that may be above your learners target level?

## 1.2. Structuring the learning process

We need to lead our learners to be able to achieve the learning outcomes, and to structure the learning process. Looking at the sub-outcomes for each of the outcome statements for A1 (listening, reading, writing, spoken interaction and spoken production), can help us do this.

There is a curriculum design principle called 'Backward design', it is also called outcomes-based design. It is thinking about how we take small steps towards being able to achieve our learning outcomes or for our learners to be successful A1 speakers and users of English. It is a long slow process. It is not a question of doing a few tasks and then suddenly magically they will be able to do the learning outcome. They are more likely to need quite a long period of time of review, reinforcement, and repetition.

Let's take one writing outcome as an example:

**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.

There are various things that these learners need to be able to do before they can write a postcard. There are things like:

- being able to form letters;
- being able to write those letters in a coherent, joined-up way. You might want to go straight from learning individual letters, to joined-up writing, this is done in British schools these days;
- getting spelling right, looking at the sound/letter coordination. The learners need to know what letters conform to which sounds and how to put different letters together to make different sounds. How the spelling can be significantly different from that sound-letter combination;
- they might not be able to read the instructions to be able to complete the task. If they don't understand the instructions, how do they do the task?; and
- they will also need to have a range of vocabulary and they will need to be able to spell that vocabulary because they are writing it. So, they don't necessarily need to be able to pronounce it, but they need to know the vocabulary.

A lot of this is similar to their first language experience; so, presumably when these learners are studying for an A1 target level in English, they will already have mastered letter formation and penmanship in Spanish, but they will not have done that in English. As you know the sound-letter coordination between Spanish and English is very different, then the spelling of different words is very different. So, because they have learned how to write in Spanish, there will likely be a lot of transfer from Spanish to English, and a lot of wrong spelling if we look at it in English, but that is just learners trying to make sense of how the two languages are different and how they are similar.

**Reflection task:**

1. Think of a learning outcome for your learners. What steps do they need to take to be able to achieve the learning outcome?
2. How can you plan to help your learners achieve the outcome in 1 above?
3. How is your plan in 2 above different from what you would normally do? Why?

### 1.3. Teaching success factors

- Relevant, age-appropriate vocabulary

Young learners are only interested in what young learners are interested in, they are not interested in what you are interested in, they are not interested in what other adults or teenagers are interested in, and if what we present to them is not interesting, they will not learn it. So, a simple motivational tool is to ensure that the content is directly relevant to them and is also age appropriate.

- Chunks of vocabulary

Teaching vocabulary as chunks and teaching grammar as chunks, i.e., *What's your name?* is not a piece of grammar to a young learner, it's a chunk of vocabulary. You can learn individual words, phrases, and whole sentences as chunks. You can even learn larger texts as chunks if you think about, for example, prayers, the Lord's prayer is a chunk you can learn as one big piece. Learners like learning chunks because they help them to communicate a lot in a limited period.

- Avoid grammar

At A1, learners really do not need to know the vocabulary to describe grammar features. They do need to be able to describe things, and people, so focus on that. At this level the teacher should absolutely avoid grammar virtually completely. Virtually, because there are a couple of pieces of grammar that are extremely useful to understand and know about: the main one being plurals (one and not one). This is a big concept in English, and it structures a lot of the rest of English grammar, so looking at how the verb **to be** changes with 'not one' will be useful to them.

- Visual and active learning

Making learning as visual as possible, and as active as possible is really important. Young learners need to move around, and they are highly stimulated by visual learning activities. Visual and physical activities help us to remember things and create multiple associations that help us to recall language more easily.

- Make it fun

Songs and games are great for reinforcing numbers, names, letters, communicative structures, and songs that repeat the same phrases again and again. They are fun, motivate the learners, and get them to repeat those structures.

- Review, review, review!

With young learners teaching involves constantly reviewing, reviewing, consolidating, recycling, and reviewing again. How do you put this all together? Have regular routines that take you back over a few previous learning points. Sing songs regularly to review previous learning. Use previous learning points to lead to the next learning point. It is very much a question of you, what your preferences are, what resources you have available for your learners, what their needs are, what learning outcomes they need to be able to achieve, and how you are going to assess them.

**Reflection task:**

1. Which of the teaching success factors above do you currently do well? Give examples.
2. Which would you like to try to do better? Explain how you are going to do this.
3. Add more items to the teaching success factors above.
4. Make a list of things you want to do to change your teaching and try to do these over the next few weeks.

**2.1. Developing Key Competencies of the CEFR at Level A2**

(Williams, M. *et al.*, 2021)

What A2 learners ‘can do’ is still very basic, and they are described in these skill-specific descriptors (CoE, 2001, p. 26):

<b>Listening</b>
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.
<b>Reading</b>
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.
<b>Writing</b>
I can write short, simple notes and messages relating to matters in areas of immediate need. I can write a very simple personal letter, for example thanking someone for something.
<b>Spoken Interaction</b>
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.

### Spoken Production

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.

Although still basic users, A2 learners can describe habits and routines in a more detailed way, describe people or things, make requests and suggestions.

To find some examples of the kinds of target language the learners should be able to use at A2 level, have a look at that core inventory, and it will help you to determine your goals. (North *et. al.*, 2010, pp. 42-46)

## 2.1. Speaking Lessons

You are already familiar with the terms A2 learner, B1 learner, C1 learner. See below some relevant CEFR A2 band descriptors for speaking and language lessons.

### ***In overall oral interaction and conversation, A2 learners can:***

- *Communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange on familiar and routine matters to do with work and free time. They can handle very short social exchanges but are rarely able to understand enough to keep conversation going of their own accord.*

This description shows the need for structure, preparation time, and support (scaffolding) during speaking activities.

- *Converse using simple language, asking questions and understanding answers related to most routine matters, familiar contexts and situations, and they can also express how they are feeling using very basic stock expressions, but they don't have a wide range of expression.*

This profile shows the need for increasing A2 learners' range of vocabulary and grammar.

### ***In a sustained monologue putting a case, A2 learners can:***

- *Give their opinion, but only in a simple way using quite simple language, and it requires the person listening to them to be quite patient.*



A2 learners will need support to justify their opinions more fully and support them with examples. They may also need linguistic support to present a clear argument (e.g., functional chunks of language).

***When facilitating collaborative interaction with peers, A2 learners can:***

- *Collaborate in simple, practical tasks in English with their peers, asking what others think, making suggestions and understanding responses, provided they can ask for repetition or reformulation from time to time.*

At A2, there is a strong need for a repertoire of functional language to interact successfully with others. This functional language needs to be practiced repetitively through meaningful speaking tasks.

**2.1.1. Implications of the CEFR band descriptors for teaching A2 learners**

As A2 learners can communicate in simple language on familiar topics, when teaching, it is necessary to ensure the use of familiar contexts that learners can relate to, i.e., contexts for lessons need to be relatable and familiar.

Learners also need to be given support for the speaking tasks, as they cannot sustain a long-spoken turn, as the band descriptors state. If we want learners to improve their spoken fluency at this level, speaking tasks need to be **scaffolded**. This can be done by giving them preparation time before they speak, and by giving them a clear model of how to complete the task; it can also be done by giving students a series of prompts that they have to answer, and this can help them to go on speaking for longer.

As well as this sort of class management support, learners also need **linguistic support**. To help them develop their range of expression, we often need to teach some vocabulary or functional chunks they can use to respond and ask follow-up questions before they start speaking. This will help them to complete speaking tasks.

Finally, teaching of language should provide learners with a **greater range of language** they can use to complete the speaking task. If they already have a basic vocabulary, or some basic expressions to complete the task, we should try to upgrade that language with synonyms or paraphrases, or other examples of how to say the same thing.

### 2.1.2. The role of tasks in speaking lessons and how they can fit into lessons

According to the glossary *The New A-Z of ELT* (Thornbury, 2017), “A task is a classroom activity whose focus is on communicating meaning. The objective of a task may be to reach some consensus on an issue, to solve a problem, to draft a plan, to design something, or to persuade someone to do something.”

A speaking task is essentially a way of communicating meaning, and perhaps students could be asked to plan an event or solve a problem; it could be something specific to a particular profession or field of study, or it could be a presentation, but there needs to be that sense of an end goal, and a real-life end goal that’s meaningful.

Figure 1 shows an example of a communicative speaking task.

This is Ryu.

He’s 21 and is from Tokyo. He is travelling around Central America and the islands of the Caribbean after graduating from university.

He is a student of history and wants to work as a museum curator.

The first stop on his trip is Cuba, and then he will continue his travels in Jamaica.



**Figure 1**

This is an example of the way we can contextualize a task, as the teacher created a believable, relatable situation for learners. In this example, the teacher has set a context for the task with a nice picture and a short description. Now you can look at the kind of tasks that could be used. Keeping a task finite and having those boundaries is quite important.

Imagine you meet Ryu on his first day in Havana and have a coffee with him. What advice could you give him about things to see? Imagine he has two days in Havana, so you should suggest the four best historical places to visit.

So, this was an example of a speaking task that learners should be able to relate to and complete successfully at A2 level.

### 2.1.3. Criteria for effective speaking tasks

- They are **rooted in real-life, familiar communicative settings**. Good speaking tasks are authentic, and they allow learners to experience real-life familiar communication. It's entirely believable that your students might meet a tourist in Havana and make recommendations.
- They should **have clear boundaries** to help learners (e.g., how many places can Ryu visit? How much time can he spend in Havana? You can even include a budget for his two-day trip, and that really helps learners to feel like the task is authentic).
- Good tasks often **create an opinion gap** (learners are likely to have different ideas and this motivates them to negotiate solutions).
- The task should have a clear objective or outcome, as stated in Thornbury's definition above.
- Often tasks need to be supported by functional language (*I think he should go to.../ or why don't we take him to... /why don't we tell him to go to...*).
- Tasks can often **be repeated**. You can slightly change the focus of the task, and students can then complete it with a new partner. This allows them repetitive practice of language.

### 2.1.4. Speaking for fluency in a conversation A2 level

What kind of things can an A2 level speaker do? They can talk about themselves, their families, their free time activities, or their schools. They can collaborate in simple tasks, they can answer questions, they can suggest and respond to suggestions, and they can talk about their likes and dislikes. These are actually the things we can do in real life. Therefore, once we are aware of the things people can do, we can build the lesson around this, recreating real life in the classroom, thus making it possible for the lesson to be both realistic and communicative.

If our aim is to improve students' fluency, we can then choose the kind of lesson framework described below.

### Task Teach Task Framework in a Speaking Lesson

- Lead-in.
- Preparation to speak.
- Task.
- Language input.
- Task.

The **Lead-in** is an important stage because it establishes the topic of the lesson, and it allows learners to express their knowledge, thoughts, and opinions, which they can share in pairs or groups. The lead-in should be personalized, perhaps related to students' life.

An effective lead-in should not be too long. Visuals are also very useful for making it more effective.

The **Preparing for Speaking** stage is also very important. It gives learners time to think and plan what to say in the speaking lesson. A2 learners need scaffolding. They must build up to speaking and it takes time and support to do that.

This stage allows learners to try out ideas with a partner/group. When they are talking together, they are beginning to activate and reactivate known language, i.e., the language they already have. This is important for them because they are trying out with their partners or just alone.

The context should be relatable to students' real life, and the task achievable.

There is a lot going on in the preparation for speaking. For example, some teachers suggest giving students some time to write down ideas before they start socializing. This type of preparation task is useful for them at this level.

During this stage, you may need to manage the classroom setting. Your role is to monitor and check what students are doing/saying/writing, as you can mentally assess the range of language the learners have. You can also give them language support if students ask for it.

Making sure learners are doing what they want is not only an important part of classroom management, but also a real important part in terms of assessment. We are already beginning to assess the A2 learner at this stage because we can listen to the students, look at them, and see what they are thinking.

During the **Socializing task**, learners will probably be hesitant, inaccurate and may have limited range in their language. It is thus a good idea for you to model what you want learners to do. You can either choose a learner to do this demonstration or may ask two learners to do it.

One of the most useful things for students is to see the teacher demonstrate how to do the task (**model the task**) –just very short. If students have this experience, they will know how long they are

supposed to speak for, how they are supposed to organize their spoken turn and maybe even the type of language they are supposed to use.

At this level, you need to support students with prompts. The students can refer back to them and keep speaking for longer, i.e., it helps them to structure a longer spoken term.

As a teacher, you can expect success in the aim of this kind of task, but there will probably be lack of accuracy and fluency. So, your role is to monitor, listen and note spoken language ability, trying not to intrude while students are speaking, thus allowing groups to negotiate and find ways to achieve the task. Good monitoring informs your next stage of the lesson.

Students also need **language input** or a language focus to help them with the activities.

The language input should give the learners support in performing the overall task better. The choice of language input tends to be functional rather than a specific grammatical structure. It should be mostly known language, for this is a speaking lesson not a grammar lesson. So, there should be an element of recycling language, but as a teacher, you can raise the bar a little by adding some challenge some –input just above their level (I + 1).

When we teach language in speaking classes, we don't teach it very heavily, we don't spend a very long time on language teaching because it is not the main focus of the lesson, but there are some important grammar distinctions that is worth focusing on with functional language.

The language input is scaffolding the speaking task rather than all new language, but of course, there may be some things to check for meaning/ use, pronunciation & form, so we should be prepared and flexible. It is important that you do not spend much time when checking **M**eaning, **P**honology and **F**orm.

You should also try to have the language input and any key points to notice somewhere (e.g., on the board), so that learners can look back and refer to it while they are talking to each other during the next task.

The language input task can be designed in a way to speed things up –e.g., draw arrows, sort pieces of paper, trying not to overload the input. This means choosing a sensible number of exponents and not including too much language that is new. You should watch timing, making sure to leave time for the next task.

At the end of the lesson, learners **repeat the task**. At this stage, the task is reproduced. This second task is very similar to the first one, but with slightly different information. To keep this activity fresh and encouraging for students, you can regroup them.

During this activity, you might encourage students to use the language that you have previously focused on.

In this stage regular assessment of learners' communicative competence is built in. As stated before, students may complete the initial task with hesitation and lack of fluency and accuracy, but repetition helps to overcome this.

Repetition helps learners develop accuracy and fluency. They are supported by already knowing the task well. They are likely to focus on using the language from the 'Teach' stage. Repetition will mean they reformulate and restructure their own language and learning can occur through this process.

The range of language in this second task is just above what they were able to produce in the first task. This helps them to complete the task more fluently and precisely.

During this stage, we monitor and assess in a formative way, as we are on hand to provide any help needed. Good monitoring will help us to plan where to go next with whatever area of the language we are teaching. Good monitoring will also help us assess how well CEFR descriptors are being met.

At the end of this last stage, you should praise achievement of the task aim, drawing attention to good examples of the language they used as well as improvements in fluency and accuracy. This is also the time to deal with any key errors that may need attention.

So, this is the basic shape for a speaking lesson using a task-teach-task framework. Learners will actually feel motivated by this kind of lesson as long as the teacher considers them and their level when planning it.

## **Planning**

When planning this kind of lesson, you should design materials that are easy to use. They should involve a natural opinion gap or information gap, *where one speaker needs to get information from another to complete a task*. Classroom management should be planned carefully because

lessons like this involve grouping, re-grouping, clear instructions, etc. and as a teacher, you should think about how the model would support students and ensure they speak at length.

You should think about the language you could highlight before the students start to speak. When planning that language input, there are several things to consider. First, you should know your learners and what will push their language ability (I + 1). You should also consider the language that is needed to improve your students' speaking, avoiding overload. You must be prepared to deal with issues– clarifying meaning, improving pronunciation and accurate forms, always keeping in mind that speaking at length is difficult enough for A2 learners.

The tasks should be genuinely communicative. For example, if you are in a conversation describing your holidays, What is the other person doing? What is the listener saying? You must teach students not only how to describe, how to produce long speaking turns, but also how to interact with each other, what type of questions they could ask when they are listening to a partner.

### **Benefits of a Task-Teach-Task Approach**

Summarizing, this type of lesson is very useful for teachers. Regular **assessment** of learners' communicative competence is built in. Students do a lot of speaking at the beginning and they do a lot of speaking at the end. So, there are two times when the teacher can assess how well students are communicating, how well they're collaborating, making suggestions, giving responses, trying to find solutions to the problem they are going to meet; so that assessment of learners' capabilities can happen twice throughout the class, and the second task builds on the first task.

Language is taught **at the point of need**. When the learners are taught in the middle of the lesson, they are taught at exactly the point when they need that language. They have attempted to complete a task using the language that they already have. So, during the teach stage, you can come in and feed in some really useful language (**I + 1**) –the range of language is just above what learners can produce and helps them to complete the task more fluently and precisely. It is quite motivating for students to try and learn these new chunks that they can easily fit in to the language that they already know.

The task repeat helps learners develop **accuracy** and **fluency**. The benefit of repeating the task a second time in a lesson like this is that it focuses first on fluency. Students are more familiar with the task they have already attempted; a lot of vocabulary has surfaced while they were doing the first round of speaking; so, this will help them to develop fluency. They are likely to focus on using the language from the 'Teach' stage, and this helps them to develop accuracy and precision.

Repetition of the task will mean they reformulate and restructure their own language and learning can occur through this process.

## **2.2. Developing key competencies of the CEFR at Level A2 in Language Lessons**

It is important to bear in mind that when we are teaching language, we are not just teaching learners to understand language "to know the rules", but we are also teaching them to use the language in a communicative setting. When we look at the band descriptors for speaking and language lessons, we can notice that they are very much focused on communication.

All the information from the CEFR band descriptors shows us what we need to be doing in our classes to help this profile of learner.

### **2.2.1. An alternative approach: examining the Test-Teach-Test framework**

A language lesson using a **Test-Teach-Test framework** is a way to make lessons a bit more communicative and involving.

- The **lead-in**: It is not different from this same stage for the task-teach-task approach. It establishes the topic, and among other things, it allows learners to express their knowledge, thoughts and opinion in pairs or groups.
- **Context**: It gives the lesson a more focused context for the language point.
- **Test 1**: It gives the teacher a chance to see how much learners know about the language point. It already assumes learners know something. This 'test' is normally done alone first. Then, ideas are checked in pairs or groups. This gives the teacher a chance to assess learners while monitoring the activity. If learners are having trouble, the next stage might take a while to clarify the language.



An effective Test 1 has a clear and relatable context. There is a problem to solve, which is something motivating for students to do. It is very controlled, as everyone should arrive at the same answers, and there is some support (scaffolding).

- **Teach:** In this stage of the framework, the teacher deals with areas that could appear to be problematic while monitoring. First the correct answers of the test are clarified, and then the teacher clarifies these areas of language: **M** –what it means (Meaning/use), **P** –how it sounds (Phonology) and **F** –how we make it (Form).

There is an order for dealing with these three key areas of language. Clarification should start with Meaning, as the way language is used is important; then it follows with work on Phonology and finally Form.

In order to check meaning, the teacher can break the concept into small parts and ask a simple question for each part. The right answers are the only way the teacher can ‘see’ that learners understand.

Modelling language chunks and full sentences as well as drills can help establish the phonology. The teacher can isolate important sounds, stress, and intonation to help learners produce it well. Showing the language on the board can help us clarify the form, as learners can refer to it during the lesson.

- **Test 2:** The second assessment of the language point in this lesson gives the teacher a chance to see how much learners have learnt after doing the ‘Teach’. The language point is the same, but the context is different. This is also learner centred.

During this stage, the teacher would expect greater accuracy with the language point. Learners have greater confidence with the language, and they will begin to demonstrate their fluency as well.

The use of visuals and a relatable context will make Test 2 effective; that context should allow for repetition of the language point. There is a little less scaffolding, as students should demonstrate what they can do.

It is important to note that Test 2 is not identical to Test 1. The language is the same, but the context is different. This makes the approach different from the Task-Teach-Task approach, where Task 2 is almost identical to Task 1.

- **A communicative freer task:** Some freer use of the language point is expected at this time, but not all the time. Other language will be used too. The teacher can expect errors and lack of fluency.

An effective freer task is relatable. It gives an opportunity for language use but is no longer so controlled. In terms of the task design, there is a context and a clear aim. Students are given an opportunity to exchange real information; there is a chance for repetition of the task and of the language point. Groups can be remixed in order to share opinions again.

### **An example of the application of the framework**

The example given below aims at getting learners speaking with prepositions.

After a short lead-in or warmer, there is an initial test, there is some teaching and then another test again and some final freer practice.

You will see two ways to teach the same lesson. The first one is much freer with communication between students from start to finish, and the second way is more controlled beginning with a written gap fill activity.

The lesson context is to describe a room using prepositions. For this lesson, the teacher starts with a warmer that reviews vocabulary, which will help students to complete the speaking task.

The teacher presents different fragments of pictures and asks students what they can see, and if they have got any good idea of what the pictures show. After that, they will look at the whole picture. The teacher could maybe point at an image and elicit the name for it from the students.

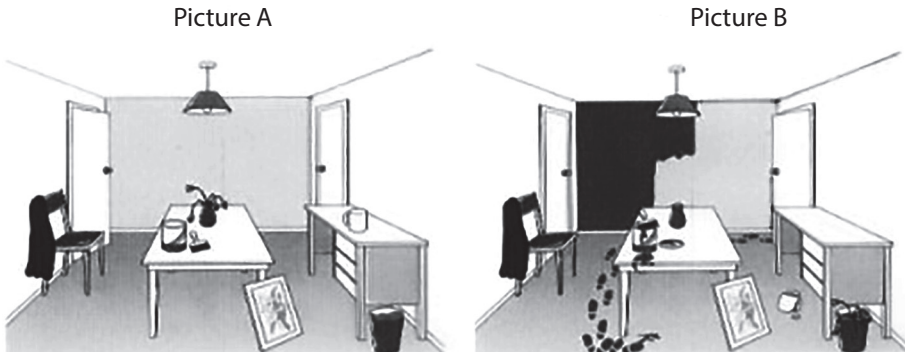
Using fragments of pictures is quite fun because there is an element of guessing and that's why it is appropriate as a warmer at the beginning of the lesson. It reviews vocabulary students will need to use in the following tasks.

The whole lesson is based around a "*spot the difference*" activity. But before the learners start doing that, they are going to have some preparation time.

Imagine you have divided the class into two. Half of the class look at picture A and the other half look at picture B (figure 2).

For the first activity, you will put Group 1 students together and they will all look at Picture A. Group 2 will be looking at Picture B. At this stage, they just need to look at the picture and describe everything that they can see in as much detail as possible. There will be a lot of collaboration among learners as they share vocabulary and share different ways of describing the picture. This provides a lot of support for the next activity, the first speaking test.

## Materials for speaking test 1



**Figure 2**

(Adapted from Gammidge, M., *Speaking Extra*, Cambridge, 2004).

The teacher models with a student how to complete the task with a different picture. Following the instruction of the task, they discuss the differences and similarities between their pictures. By having this conversation with one student in front of the whole class, the teacher can model the activity and show the students how it can be done, and the sort of things that they could say to complete it.

The teacher would then clarify their instructions, making sure that learners know they must identify six differences between the pictures, and crucially that they are not allowed to show each other their pictures, they have to do it all by talking. The teacher would then regroup the students, so that one student from Group 1 would talk to another student from Group 2.

Students will try to use prepositions to describe the room while they are doing this activity, but they might not know some of the preposition; the teacher will then teach these in the clarification stage.

### **Language clarification-electing, modelling naturally and drilling with images**

Once more, the teacher could show three fragments of pictures and elicit from the students what they can see.

The teacher can take advantages of the answers given by the students to model pronunciation naturally. As the teacher models, the students would drill the pronunciation while looking at the pictures. Essentially

the teacher will be clarifying meaning and pronunciation at the same time. Pronunciation could be further highlighted on the black board.

There are **footprints** on the **carpet**.

/sʊŋ ðə kɑ:pɪt/

There's **paint** on the **wall**.

/tɒn ðə wɔ:l/

There's a **bin** beside the **desk**.

/bɪn bɪ saɪ(d) ðə dɛsk/

The stressed words are written in red or any other colour. The teacher could elicit from students that they are all nouns and that they are objects and places in the room. They will notice that prepositions and articles are much weaker. The teacher might also look at tricky consonant clusters. For example, the article *the* beside the word *carpet* is barely pronounced at all. The teacher could go on and look at form. All the three sentences have the same form: There is/are + noun + preposition + object. This could be kept on the black board during the following practice activities.

After the teacher has taught some trickier prepositions, it would be time for students to practice with a second test, almost as identical as the first one.

One group would now swap and look at picture B, and the other group would get a new picture, picture C (figure 3).

### Materials for test 2

Picture B



Picture C



Figure 3

(Adapted from Speaking Extra: A Resource Book of Multi-Level Skills Activities, (Gammidge, 2004)).

The teacher gives students some time to look at these pictures before they start speaking. Then once again, the teacher would group one student from Group 1 with another student from Group 2, and they would play “spot the difference” with the two pictures.

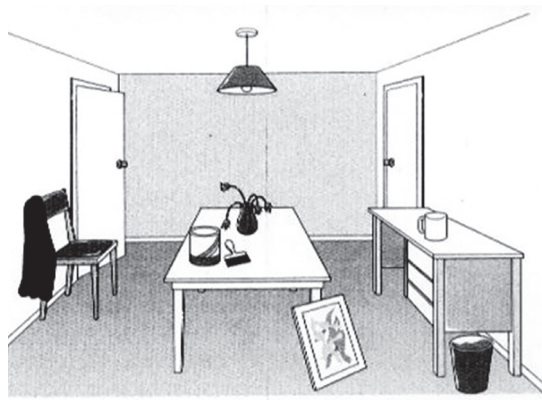
This time there would be some of that language clarification on the board, students will be more focused on using the prepositions correctly, and the teacher will have taught the prepositions that they did not know the first time they did the speaking activity; expecting therefore their speaking performance to be more fluent and more accurate.

Finally, the lesson would finish with a more personalized freer speaking task.

In the sample freer communicative practice, the teacher asks learners to describe their own living rooms in their own home, and they must talk to a partner about them in order to find three things that are the same and three things that are different. This is motivating for learners because they are talking about themselves, their own language and where they live. It will give them a chance to recycle the language that they have just been using, and it will build fluency because it is repetitive.

Now you can see below the **same lesson approached in a more controlled way.**

This time, the first test would not be spoken; it would be a written gap fill. The teacher starts off with the warmer using those fragments of pictures to elicit vocabulary from the students, in order to prepare them for the rest of the lesson. However, this time all the students will be looking at the same picture (figure 4).



**Figure 4**

They would still be grouped in groups 1 and 2, and both groups would be given gap fills to complete, but the gap fills will be slightly different. The missing words in the paragraphs are the same for both groups, but the order of words in the sentences is slightly different.

### Initial Test-Gap-fill

#### Group 1

There's an open door \_\_\_\_\_ the left-hand side of the room, and there's a chair \_\_\_\_\_ it. There's a jacket hanging \_\_\_\_\_ the chair. There's another door \_\_\_\_\_ the open door, which is shut. There's a table \_\_\_\_\_ the room, and there's a paint pot, a paint brush, and a vase \_\_\_\_\_ the table. There's also a painting leaning \_\_\_\_\_ a table leg. There's a desk \_\_\_\_\_ of the room, and there's a mug \_\_\_\_\_ it, and a wastepaper bin \_\_\_\_\_ it.

#### Group 2

There's an open door \_\_\_\_\_ the left-hand side of the room, and \_\_\_\_\_ it, there's a chair with a jacket hanging \_\_\_\_\_ it. \_\_\_\_\_ the open door, there's another door which is shut. \_\_\_\_\_ the room, there's a table, and \_\_\_\_\_ the table, there's a paint pot, a paint brush, and a vase. There's also a painting leaning \_\_\_\_\_ a table leg. \_\_\_\_\_ of the room, there's a desk, with a mug \_\_\_\_\_ it, and \_\_\_\_\_ the desk there's a wastepaper bin.

For this kind of gap fill activity, sometimes students need less or more support, and it is important to know how to add or take away that support. For example, for this activity, if you wanted to make it slightly easier, you could include a word box at the bottom of the activity.

Once students have completed the activity and checked their answers with a partner from their group, the teacher will go through the answers to clarify the missing prepositions and where they go. Everything can still be taught visually as well as with words if the teacher, for example, points back at the pictures to indicate the meaning of the prepositions. Once the teacher has taught the meaning of the prepositions, students can start to look at form. If you look at the two paragraphs again, you

will notice that in the first paragraph the sentence structures are very repetitive, they always begin with the structure *there is/are*. In the second paragraph, however, there is more variety; sometimes the sentence starts with a prepositional phrase. If learners from each group looked at both paragraphs, they would have a conversation about which one is better and why. Finally, the teacher would clarify the rule. The second paragraph is more natural; it's more natural to vary sentence structures rather than always use the same sentence structure. In English, it is also a good idea to present new information at the end of the sentence. So, if you've already referred to the table, you would say, next to the table there is a bin, or on the table there is a glass, so new information comes in at the end of the lesson, and it makes the language flow much better.

The teacher did not explain that rule right away. This time the learners were given two paragraphs and a puzzle to solve, they had to decide which one was better and why. So, the learners had to try and find out the rules by themselves. This can be very motivating. It's called guided discovery.

So, once this clarification has been done, the teacher could move to a more spoken focus of the language. This time they would set the *spot the difference* activity.

So, students from one group will be given one picture to describe with each other; students from the other group will be given another picture to describe with each other: They will then regroup and would have to find the six differences between the pictures.

The first test was more controlled, but this second one is much harder because this time they must speak with the language.

Finally, the same freer practice activity could be used.

So, these were two examples of a Test-Teach-Test lesson. There are three key elements for teachers to consider:

1. Assumptions: Getting the level of challenge right for the learners. Know what they know and what they may not know.
2. Your language analysis: Knowing MPF well enough to respond, clarify and upgrade language ability.
3. Task design: Finding, adapting, creating materials for this type of language lesson.

## Staging of a Test-Teach-Test class and why it can be an effective lesson shape

- **Lead-in:** *To engage students ready for learning / to review/ to activate useful lexis.*

It is used to engage students and to activate useful vocabulary.

- **Test 1:** *Preparation-to scaffold speaking activities at lower levels.*

It is used to assess how much of the grammar students know through a gap fill, or how well they can use the grammar to complete a speaking task.

- **Teach:** *To clarify the target language (prepositions of place) focusing on gaps in the students' knowledge.*

Teaching should then be reactive. It should focus on the problem areas that the students had.

In keeping with the CEFR band descriptors for A2 learners, the clarification should focus not only on grammatical accuracy but also on pronunciation and the ability to speak with appropriate rhythm and stress.

- **Test 2 (controlled practice):** *To focus students on accurate, repetitive production of the target language.*

This second test again assesses whether learners' communication has improved through the lesson, whether they are getting more accurate, whether they are speaking more fluently, and whether they are using these prepositions freely.

- **Freer practice:** *To develop spoken fluency with the target language in a more personalized context.*

The final speaking practice is more personalized and will motivate students to use the language to talk about their own lives. So, it's a very useful teaching shape to use when teaching language.

## Criteria for a successful language practice activity

- *It should be fun and involving for students.* First, practice activities should be fun and involving for students. They can often have a competitive element, or there can be secrets or guesses, or predictions, and all of these make activities fun.
- *It should require learners to use the target language.* The practice activities should require students to use the target language. In the model activity



that was described before there is no way to find the differences between those pictures without using a lot of prepositions; so, in that sense it is a very good practice activity.

- *It should be repetitive, to provide lots of practice.* At this level, A2 learners do not use language very accurately, and they do not have a great range of language; so, this practice will help the language to stick and will also help students to focus on accurate production.
- *It should be genuinely communicative.* There needs to be a reason for student A to talk to Student B. Just like in real life, they have real reasons to communicate with each other; through the *spot the difference* activity there is some problem to solve, there is an information gap that makes each student want to talk to his/her partner in order to achieve a goal. They are more motivated to know what each one knows, and they get there by practicing language.
- *It should be personalized.* This is particularly important for freer practice activities. They should be personalized. If we go back to the CEFR band descriptors, so many of them talk about how language can be used to communicate in real life settings. So, in freer practice activities, we need to give learners the opportunity to talk about themselves describe their home, describe the place where they live, and that way they will be motivated to use those prepositions with real communicative purpose.

### 2.3. Exploring & Exploiting Materials at Level A2

When we take a piece of material and we want to use it, but we are not entirely happy with it, what can we do? There is a useful framework for using material with some changes: **SARA**. It is a method for evaluating and using course book materials. This helps us to make decisions about what to do with materials.

**Select.** If you look at something in your course book and you like it, and use it without changing it, then you are selecting it.

**Adapt.** If you like the idea, but maybe you are not satisfied with the layout on the page, or the language is not quite right for your learners' level, or you don't like the task prompts you want to add more task prompts, so you can make some small adaptations to make the activity stronger.

**Reject.** If you find the material may not be suitable for your class at all, you just don't use it, you reject it.

**Add.** Finally, sometimes you want to include something important which is missing, so you need to add.

Using **SARA** is a very good way of helping teachers.

#### **2.4. General overview of the competence of an A2 learners' reading**

A learner with this level can understand a fairly short and simple text written primarily with high frequency familiar vocabulary, but with some less common maybe international vocabulary as well.

#### **Looking in detail at the different reading competencies of an A2 learner as described in the CEFR**

In terms of reading for orientation, the descriptors are all about environmental sign, language that we see all around us when we are walking through a city, for example, things that we see written in train stations, such as train timetables, menus in restaurants, warning signs on the street, maybe some directions on the street as well. A2 learners should be able to read from these signs and find specific information that they need to cope in this environment.

There are several descriptors about reading instructions, for example, something that a learner has bought like a medicine bottle or a recipe. As long as the instructions are short and accompanied by some visual support like pictures or diagrams, an A2 learner should be able to process these instructions.

In terms of reading for information, the band descriptors refer to the type of reading that we as teachers are most familiar with. When we use course books, we often present learners with a short-graded text that is quite similar to a news article for them to read. At this level, learners should be able to read and understand texts that talk about familiar contents –they describe people, jobs, places, everyday life, and culture.

Learners at this level should be able to read short new articles and understand headlines, and they should be able to read factual descriptions, as long as there is not a lot of unpredictable detail.

Learners are likely to be able to read more if it is in their field of expertise. For example, if somebody is a science major at university, then they are

likely to be able to read a document from their field of study at a slightly higher lever, as they will have more vocabulary to work with from that specific context.

### **What does this range of band descriptors tell us as teachers that we should be doing?**

These band descriptors are very useful because they give us a clear indication of the different types of texts that learners at this level should be able to understand.

We can look at this in detail through an example. Students are presented with the reading material with a recipe for making guacamoles. On the left-hand side of the page, there is a list of ingredients, and on the right-hand side, the method for preparing the guacamoles.

<b>List of ingredients</b>	<b>Method</b>
<p>2 ripe avocados ½ teaspoon Kosher salt 1 Tbsp of fresh lime juice or lemon juice 2 Tbsp to ¼ cup of minced red onion or thinly sliced green onion 1-2 serrano chiles, stems and seeds removed, minced 2 tablespoons cilantro (leaves and tender stems), finely chopped A dash of freshly grated black pepper ½ ripe tomato, seeds and pulp removed, chopped Tortilla chips</p>	<p><b>1. Cut avocado, remove flesh:</b> Cut the avocados in half. Remove seed. Score the inside of the avocado with a blunt knife and scoop out the flesh with a spoon. Place in a bowl.</p> <p><b>2. Mash with a fork:</b> Using a fork, roughly mash the avocado. (Don't overdo it! The guacamole should be a little chunky.)</p> <p><b>3. Add salt, lime juice, and the rest:</b> Sprinkle with salt and lime juice. Add the chopped onion, cilantro, black pepper, and chiles.</p> <p><b>4. Cover with plastic and chill to store:</b> Place plastic wrap on the surface of the guacamole cover it and to prevent air reaching it. Refrigerate until ready to serve.</p> <p>Chilling tomatoes hurts their flavour, so if you want to add chopped tomato to your guacamole, add it just before serving.</p> <p>Serve with tortilla chips.</p>

([https://www.simplyrecipes.com/recipes/perfect\\_guacamole/](https://www.simplyrecipes.com/recipes/perfect_guacamole/))

The text is quite short and most of the vocabulary is common and familiar: food items and items in a kitchen. It is also broken down into short sections to make it easy to understand for learners at this level.

Concerning the tasks used to support A2 competencies; the teacher could recreate a supermarket using pictures on the blackboard.

Learners would essentially go shopping with the ingredient list, so they would have to go to the board and pick the pictures of food, which are mentioned in the ingredient list. That could be the first task the students use to follow this recipe. The pictures are used to illustrate what they must do.

A more detailed task would ask learners to read the method. They would use the pictures that they have taken from the blackboard along with some other pictures of things in a kitchen like a fridge, a bowl, a fork, and a knife. They would have to take these pictures, and mime or act out making the guacamole, as they read the method in detail.

You can see clearly how this task would hit the CEFR band descriptors of being able to follow a simple recipe if there are pictures to illustrate the most important steps and to understand instruction as long as they are simple and short and divided up in the way that they are in the example.

### **Why would that text and those tasks be effective when teaching learners at A2 level?**

First, it is very easy for the teacher to assess whether the learners have understood or not. If they must come up and take pictures of a blackboard, the teacher can clearly see whether they have understood what food is mentioned in the ingredients list.

When they are working at their table miming the method to make the guacamole, the teacher can see if they are using the right pictures, and if they understand what they must do.

The tasks relate closely to the CEFR band descriptors of being able to follow a simple recipe and being able to read simple instructions when they are divided up. The task definitely targets these competences of an A2 learner.

The CEFR helps us by giving us a range of different texts students should be able to understand, and this shows us what types of texts would be useful to bring into the classroom to do develop the reading

skills in this level; for example, a menu, a web site for a museum, a web site which gives timetables and sells tickets for travelling.

With all these texts, there is a lot of visual support as well as language on the page. The texts are written in short and manageable chunks. There is also a lot of information that learners would be able to search for and pick out, things like numbers, place names, opening times, particular ingredients, phone numbers, and this is exactly the sort of information that the CEFR descriptors state that A2 learners should be able to find in short English texts.

### **An example of a text from a Cuban textbook**

The Plaza de Armas is Havana's oldest square and the best place to begin any walking tour in the city. In the center of the square is a statue of Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, The Father of our Homeland. The majestic building on the west side of the Plaza is the Palace of the Captain-Generales, perhaps the best example of baroque architecture in the city. Today, the palace houses the Museum of the City. At one of the corners is El Templete, where there is a column which marks the spot where the city was founded in 1519 as "La Villa de San Cristóbal de La Habana".

Across the street from El Templete is the Castillo de la Real Fuerza, the oldest building in Havana, a powerful fortress to defend the city from the attacks of pirates.

Two blocks north is the Plaza de la Catedral, which forms part of the most harmonious collection of buildings in the city.

Directly opposite the Cathedral is another beautiful colonial building, the Casa del Conde de Casa Bayona, which today contains the Museum of Colonial Art.

Behind the Cathedral, between Empedrado and Chacón streets is the Seminario de San Carlos y San Ambrosio.

Just around the corner, you can find another beautiful colonial building: Palacio de la Artesanía.

La Bodeguita del Medio is another famous place in Havana. Writers such Alejo Carpentier and Nicolás Guillén visited the place to drink Cuba's national drink: the mojito.

This is just a glimpse of the heart of Old Havana (figures 5 & 6).



**Figure 5**



**Figure 6**

Students will be reading a text with a short description of Old Havana. The page includes two pictures at the bottom. It is a text giving information about the most important historical places in the city, and where people might like to visit. It also gives information on where things are in the city, how far they away are from each other.

For the tasks accompanying this text, there is a lead-in or pre reading Task 1. Task 2 is for an overall understanding of the text, and then the text is read for more detailed understanding in Task 3. The final task is productive, going beyond reading.

(Adapted from *Integrated English Practice 1*, Unit 10, pp.148-49 & p. 324.)

**Task 1: Activating background knowledge**

- a. What words and expressions do you expect to find in a text about a neighbourhood?

Nouns	Verbs	Adjectives	Adverbs	Expressions

- b. Have you visited Old Havana? What words and expressions do you expect to find in the text about it?

Nouns	Verbs	Adjectives	Adverbs	Expressions

- c. What place in the text would you give to the statement “This is just a glimpse of the heart of Old Havana?” Would you use it at the beginning, at the end or within the text?
- d. Write at least three questions you expect the text to answer.

**Task 2: Getting the gist**

- a. Have a quick glance at the text. Read the first paragraph, one in the middle and one at the end and answer: What is the text about?
- b. Tell whether the following statements are True (T), False (F) or Not Stated (NS) in the text.

- \_\_\_ Havana was founded in the xv century.
- \_\_\_ There are different architectural styles in Old Havana.
- \_\_\_ The oldest building in Havana is beside El Templete.
- \_\_\_ Pirates used to attack the city.
- \_\_\_ The Plaza de Armas is situated north of the Plaza de la Catedral.

**Task 3: Questioning and interacting with the text**

- a. Correct the false information with evidence from the text.
  - \_\_\_ Havana was founded in the xv century.
  - \_\_\_ There are different architectural styles in Old Havana.
  - \_\_\_ The oldest building in Havana is beside El Templete.
  - \_\_\_ Pirates used to attack the city.
  - \_\_\_ The Plaza de Armas is situated north of the Plaza de la Catedral.
- b. What is the purpose of the text?
  - \_\_\_ to inform      \_\_\_ to entertain      \_\_\_ to give a suggestion
- c. What words and expressions from your guesses in questions *a* and *b* did you find in the text?
- d. As you try to infer the meaning of these words:  
*ongoing* restoration program.  
 The palace *houses* the Museum of the City.

#### **Task 4: Going beyond reading**

- a. What importance do you attach to the ongoing restoration program of Old Havana?
- b. Draw a map of the area described in the text. Trace the tour as it is presented in the text.
- c. Summarize the text.

#### **Some advantages of the text and the tasks**

First, the text is on a very familiar topic for the learners; it is related to a city they might live in or know very well, a lot of the buildings and the names of the buildings are familiar to them, which is quite useful as reading material for the classroom.

Concerning the tasks, a good thing is that they develop a broad range of reading skills: getting learners to think about genre and where information is presented in different text types; using predictions (it gets learners to think of three questions that will be answered by reading the text); the gist task tests overall understanding; there is another task that helps the learners to understand the purpose of the writer, which is important too. There is a lot of specific information and the tasks target that. Finally, there's some work on vocabulary.

In those tasks, there is a progression from easier to harder and a nice range of reading skills being practiced.

However, these tasks have some problems, which are described below:

- There is lack of contextualization. The pre-reading tasks are focused on language and not much of the context being developed. There is little personalization because students are not asked what they feel or what they like about old Havana, maybe they have visited it before, so they might have some opinions that could be exploited in the classroom.
- The second problem is that the gist task is very generic. The question "what is the text about?" is not really targeted to this text specifically.
- The instructions could be simplified. There is a problem with some of the language. The teacher should not use high level vocabulary.
- There is lack of variety.
- Correcting false statements from a True/False reading task lacks challenge. There is a problem with True/False tasks in general. First,



they are very easy. Normally, when you get learners to correct false statements, all they must do is find or locate specific information and lift the language from the text to correct the false statements, but they are not actually showing understanding of the text; It is not mentally challenging for them to do that kind of a task.

### **Some possible adaptation**

First, think about context. How could you contextualize the text through the lead-in?

The text is written for anyone interested in visiting Cuba, anyone interested in history who wants to see the sites of Old Havana. Students are all from Cuba and that is a good thing; you should exploit this to arise their interest. Also, other colourful pictures of places mentioned in the text could be used in the lead-in.

In terms of the lead-in task, you could try having students discuss questions in small groups like: How much do you know about old Havana? Look at the pictures, can you recognize the places? Are these the best tourist attractions of the city, can you think of any other “must see” historical places in Havana? You can see in these questions there is no focus on language students might find in the text, they are all focused on students’ feelings about the topic. This gets learners to evaluate, as the questions are very personalized, and it should get learners going, speaking a bit at the beginning of the class.

A typical initial reading task could be this one: “Read the text quickly. Does it recommend the same places you talked about in Havana? Are there any recommendations which surprise you?”

The language is simpler, and this gist task gives a smooth transition to the reading task as such. The questions are personalized, and they link back to the discussion the students had in the lead-in stage. Learners should be able to read the text quite quickly to answer the questions.

Maybe there is a need for some language work. Normally, when learners at this level are reading a text, there is some vocabulary that might be a problem, so there is often a need to do a little bit of pre-teaching.

### **Language work needed**

The Plaza de Armas is Havana’s oldest square and the best place to begin any walking tour in the city. In the center of the square is a statue of

Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, The Father of our Homeland. The majestic building on the west side of the Plaza is the Palace of the Captain-Generales, perhaps the best example of baroque architecture in the city. Today, the palace houses the Museum of the City. At one of the corners is El Templete, where there is a column which marks the spot where the city was founded in 1519 as “La Villa de San Cristóbal de La Habana”.

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This is just a glimpse of the heart of Old Havana.

Next, students can have a more detailed reading task. The teacher can have a map coded with all the different historical buildings of Old Havana, written on the left-hand side of the page, and numbers to show their location on the map.

### **A more detailed reading task**

Learners would need to look at the map and look at the text, which is a practical task, something that a learner of English might do, and it is a very useful skill.

Productive tasks could get learners speaking at the end of the reading lesson and using information that they read about. An example of a communicative follow-up task could be to ask learners to imagine they meet a tourist who asks for some advice of the best things to see in Havana. Learners would then work together to come up with a list of only four things that he needs to see. (You can refer back to the example

given under the heading: “*The role of tasks in speaking lessons and how they can fit into lessons*” about the Japanese tourist in Havana.)

### **Reasons why these tasks might work well**

The text lends itself to specific information tasks. It is a good text because it would help to target some of the descriptors from the CEFR. This text is densely packed with names in capital letters and descriptions of where they are located, so it helps learners to develop their reading for specific information when completing this authentic task.

If we think about the productive task, it requires learners to think critically about the text. When learners talk to each other, they would have to negotiate, argue, and discuss and then agree, this is good for practice and fluency development.

### **Staging for reading tasks in the classroom. The task cycle**

- *Introduce students to the task.* This could be done as a spoken instruction. If there are several questions, the questions might be written on the black board or a PP, the teacher should use clear spoken instruction to get the task across.
- *Check students understand what to do and give clear time limit.* It is important that learners see the task before they read the text or else, they would not be reading with a purpose in mind.
- *Give students the text and let them read individually.* It is important that reading is done in stages. The first-time learners tackle a task, they should read individually.
- *Monitor the students to check they are on task and how quickly they are completing it.*
- *Put the learners in pairs or small groups to check their answers.* At this stage they should be discussing and mediating with each other. At this stage, they would be referring back to the text to check understanding. This kind of peer check is especially important when learners are doing a detailed reading task.
- *Monitor the learners’ discussion.* Taking notes of the questions learners find harder and which vocabulary they have not understood.
- *Give feedback to the whole class.* At the end making sure they have all the answers but focusing on the harder questions. It’s important that learners know which the right answers are. Often, it is better for the teacher to check students have understood the answer rather than

seeing the answer key. You don't need to spend the same amount of time on every question; while monitoring, you might find you need to spend more time on the most difficult questions. If you add prompts for the most difficult questions, that should help learners to understand the text.

## 2.5. Assessing learners' language level and assessing their competence in lessons

Below are the most relevant CEFR band descriptors for an A2 learner's language level. (CoE, 2020)

- Can 'produce brief, everyday expressions in order to satisfy simple needs of a concrete type (e.g., personal details, daily routines, wants and needs, requests for information).'
- Can 'use basic sentence patterns and communicate with memorized phrases, groups of a few words/signs, and formulae about themselves and other people, what they do, places, possessions, etc.'
- Can use 'a limited repertoire of short, memorized phrases covering predictable survival situations; frequent breakdowns and misunderstandings occur in non-routine situations'.

In terms of an A2 learners' **general linguistic range**, they can complete simple transactions to satisfy their basic needs (e.g., giving personal details, talking about daily routines, what they want, what they need, and asking for information). To do this, they can use basic sentence structures and a small range of memorized phrases, like functional chunks, groups of a few words that they know how to use in specific places. They can manage with some familiar and predictable survival situations, although there are breakdowns of understanding that can occur in non-routine situations.

In terms of their **range of vocabulary**, they have sufficient vocabulary to express basic communicative needs and cope with simple survival situations, but they do not have a large range of vocabulary.

In terms of **Grammatical accuracy and overall phonological control**, an A2 learner is in control of a small range of simple structures, but still systematically makes basic mistakes and there are frequent breakdowns; however, in terms of intelligibility when communicating the simple message in a familiar context, an A2 learner can normally make

himself understood. The same goes for the pronunciation, which is generally clear enough to be understood, but there will be lots of pauses and hesitations and unnatural stress and rhythm when they speak for a longer term. Conversational partners will need to ask for repetition from time to time, i.e., collaboration from interlocutors is required. There is a strong influence from the other language(s).

### **What are the Implications for teaching A2 learners?**

In terms of how we teach language in our lessons, we need to have a balance in our classes between studying and understanding new language, but also using it. We must remember that the CEFR band descriptors are always focused on real life authentic situations, so we need to provide learners to use their language in similar situations in the lesson.

### **Language clarification**

There are lots of different ways of clarifying language. Language clarification and practice needs to focus on understanding and meaningful use of language in a balanced way.

Clarification is not just about the grammar of language. In more traditional language lessons, teachers would spend a long time talking about verb endings, about how tenses are formed from different words, etc.; they would be doing a lot of modelling, drilling, and imitation, to try and get learners to learn the structures. However, we also need to consider what these items mean, and what they mean in real-life contexts.

Clarification also needs to focus on meaning, form, and phonology of new language. This will help learners to use it accurately and appropriately.

Teachers need to consider what A2 learners can already do with the language. What they teach an A2 learner should build on what these students already know. They should be teaching ideally just above the level that they already know, so they can take this new language and fit it in to what they already know, therefore increasing their range of grammar and vocabulary. A lot of research from Psychology and Second language acquisitions backs this up.

Finally, language should always be taught in meaningful communicative contexts that learners will be familiar with (basic communicative situations that learners can relate to). Therefore, think about some of the things from the CEFR band descriptors that learners need to be able

to do with the language. They need to be able to give their personal information to somebody else and describe or talk about members of their family or the place where they live, they need to be able to operate when they go and buy things from shops; so, you need to bring as many meaningful communicative contexts to the classroom as possible.

**Using informal tests to assess learners’ linguistic competence** (testing to see how much learners know and what you need to teach them)

Tests can be used to check learners’ understanding of vocabulary or grammar rules, because actually that is quicker than assuming a learner does not know everything and then teaching everything. Using a test can cut down the amount of time you spend clarifying language.

Teachers who use tests towards the beginning of their class need to look at the results of that test and react to them by only teaching the language that students struggle with.

So, one of the things that an A2 learner should be able to do is talk a little bit about how they feel. The example given in the table 10 describes a language test that could be used in class to get learners talking about their feelings in different situations.

**Table 10**

Word	Situation
1. Surprised 2. Guilty 3. Nervous 4. Optimistic 5. Enthusiastic	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>A</b></p> I must do a micro-teaching session this afternoon. I’ve never taught before, I don’t know whether my tutor will think my teaching is effective, so I’m feeling really _____.
6. Thrilled 7. Furious 8. Exhausted	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>G</b></p> My older sister has been training as a nurse, and she finished her degree this summer. On top of that, she has been offered a job at one of the top hospitals in Mexico City, working with a team she really respects. I am absolutely _____ for her because she has worked so hard for this.

Look at the target language, the words you want to teach your learners. On the left-hand side, there is a table with eight words, and they are all adjectives, some of them are about positive feelings, some of them are about more negative feelings.

If you wanted to test learners’ understanding of these words, you could do a matching task with a gap fill element (see the gap texts on the right-hand side).

In this task, there are eight words with eight real life situations. Maybe you could put these situations on the wall around the classroom; learners would take the words and match them to the different situations. That would be quite a fun interactive way of doing this test.

In the example above, you can only see two of the given situations and the answers on the left side. Imagine that you have eight of those situations and learners had to match the adjectives to the situations; as a teacher, you would be able to see which ones easier and which ones were harder for students.

### **Criteria for effective language tests**

Tests should be supportive. If there are ten items of vocabulary in a test, for example, some should already be known to the students, the rest should be harder; so, this will give the learners confidence when they take the test.

Tests should also be contextualized. It is not good starting a lesson immediately with a test like a gap-fill or a matching task, which can negatively affect learners' confidence and motivation. You need to establish a context first before you move to that test.

Finally, tests should tell teachers something they need or want to know about the students (e.g., Which of these words are harder for the students? Which of these words do I need to spend more time on? How well do my learners know how to identify syllable stress on these words? / How well can my learners use this language in a meaningful task?)

## **VI. Conclusions**

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