Introduction to the Cambridge Life Competencies Framework

There have been many initiatives to address the skills and competencies our learners need for the 21st century – each relating to different contexts. At Cambridge, we are responding to educators that have asked for a way to understand how all these different approaches to life competencies relate to English language programmes.

We have set out to analyse what the basic components of these competencies are. This is to help us create an underlying framework to interpret different initiatives.

We have identified six life competencies, which are linked to three foundation layers of the Framework.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Creative Thinking</th>
<th>Learning to Learn</th>
<th>Collaboration</th>
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<tr>
<td>Critical Thinking</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Social Responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Development</td>
<td>Digital Literacy</td>
<td>Discipline Knowledge</td>
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The Learning Journey

The competencies vary depending on the stage of the learning journey – from pre-primary through to learners at work.

Defining COMMUNICATION Competencies

Communication is an essential professional and life skill, enabling us to share information and ideas, as well as express feelings and arguments (Cenere et al., 2015). It is also an active process influenced by the complexities of human behaviour in which elements such as non-verbal behaviour and individual styles of interpreting and ascribing meaning to events have significant influence. Mastering effective communication is a skill which can be developed and honed and is distinct from mastering the core linguistic features of a language.

We have identified three core areas within the area of Communication:

- **Using appropriate language/register for context** refers to a learner’s understanding that there are formal and informal contexts/situations which require them to vary language, expressions and adapt their communication style so that they are appropriate to the context they are in. Learners can use language for effect by employing a variety of language and rhetorical devices to be more persuasive in an argument, to engage and catch attention and add emphasis or humour.

- **Managing conversations** is related to a learner’s ability to converse with others effectively and efficiently by knowing how to initiate, maintain and end conversations appropriately. Learners are aware of key communication strategies that can help them and their peers convey their messages. This will ensure that they are also able to support others to communicate successfully.

- **Participating with appropriate confidence and clarity** refers to a learner’s ability to communicate effectively with appropriate fluency, confidence and pace. This may include using appropriate tonal and structural variation, facial expression and eye contact, as well as an ability to structure content to create coherent and cohesive texts.

We are developing Can Do Statements (see page 6) to describe what can be expected of a learner at each stage of learning for each competency. The Can Do Statements are phrased as what a learner should be able to do by the end of that stage of learning. We have started to develop Can Do Statements as descriptions of observable behaviour.

The Framework provides different levels of detail – from the broad Competencies to the specific Can Do Statement.
COMMUNICATION Can Do Statements

In this section, we have provided some examples of Can Do Statements which detail what learners can be expected to do for each competency by the end of that stage of the learning journey. These Can Do Statements will vary in their suitability for learners in different contexts, and so are provided as a starting point in the development of a curriculum, programme or assessment system.

The Can Do Statements at each level generally assume that the learners have developed the skills at a previous stage of learning, although this is not true of the Higher Education and At Work stages, which are treated as being in parallel.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STAGE OF LEARNING</th>
<th>CORE AREAS</th>
<th>CAN DO STATEMENTS</th>
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</table>
| PRE-PRIMARY       | Using appropriate language and register for context | • Understands and carries out basic instructions for class/school.  
• Expresses basic likes/dislikes and agreement/disagreement.  
• Uses simple, polite forms of greetings, introductions and farewells (i.e. saying hello, please, thank you and sorry).  
• Adjusts language for playing different roles (e.g. a teacher, an animal or a character from a story).  

Managing conversations | • Listens while others are talking.  
• Shares and takes turns when speaking.  
• Responds appropriately to questions.  
• Uses basic communication strategies, such as asking for repetition or making a self-repair, in a very simple way.  
• Speaks with clarity when participating in group activities.  

Participating with appropriate confidence and clarity | • Asks and answers simple questions.  |

| PRIMARY           | Using appropriate language and register for context | • Talks about their day, their family, their interests, and other topics suitable for primary school.  
• Appropriately asks for permission, apologies, makes requests and agrees or disagrees.  
• Uses polite forms of greetings and address and responds to invitations, suggestions, apologies, etc.  
• Changes sound levels and pitch of voice when doing drama or acting a role in a play to communicate different emotions.  

Managing conversations | • Takes turns appropriately in a conversation.  
• Interrupts others politely.  
• Tries to use alternative words or expressions if they are not understood.  
• Asks for clarification when they have difficulties in understanding what others have said.  
• Shares ideas with a peer before writing and speaking tasks in order to improve the quality of their work, where necessary.  

Participating with appropriate confidence and clarity | • Contributes in lessons by asking questions, attempting responses and explaining understanding.  
• Shares their thoughts with others to help further develop ideas and solve problems.  
• Can tell a story or describe something in a simple way.  
• Uses simple connectors such as ‘and’, ‘but’ or ‘because’ to link groups of words.  

| SECONDARY         | Using appropriate language and register for context | • Uses appropriate forms of address, greetings, and farewells.  
• Presents points clearly and persuasively.  
• Uses language for effect (e.g. exaggerations or cleft sentences).  
• Adapts language according to who they are speaking/writing to (e.g. to a friend or to someone they don’t know).  
• Demonstrates understanding of which topics are appropriate for conversation in different contexts.  

Managing conversations | • Effectively manages conversations using appropriate language to:  
– show understanding;  
– signal lack of understanding;  
– seek repetition;  
– seek clarification;  
– control speed and volume of others’ speech;  
– check own understanding;  
– check others’ understanding.  
• Can use simple techniques to start, maintain and close conversations of various lengths.  
• Uses appropriate strategies to deal with language gaps by:  
– signalling a gap;  
– appealing to conversation partners for assistance;  
– using non-linguistic means (e.g. pointing or drawing);  
– using an appropriate synonym;  
– guessing/coming up with a ‘new’ item from existing language knowledge.  
• Paraphrases what others say in order to help communication.  
• Invites contributions from others in a conversation.  
• Uses appropriate strategies to develop a conversation (e.g. showing interest, giving non-minimal responses, or asking follow-up questions).  

Participating with appropriate confidence and clarity | • Speaks with suitable fluency.  
• Writes at a suitable pace.  
• Starts and manages conversations with confidence.  
• Speaks effectively with unfamiliar persons.  
• Uses facial expressions and eye contact appropriately to support verbal communication.  
• Can develop a clear description or narrative with a logical sequence of points.  
• Uses a number of cohesive devices to link sentences into clear, coherent discourse.  |

| HIGHER EDUCATION | Using appropriate language and register for context | • Demonstrates awareness of differences in communication styles between individuals and between cultures.  
• Demonstrates awareness of how suitability of conversation topics can vary according to context and culture.  
• Expresses a point of view, elicits and politely responds to others’ points of view.  
• Persuasively puts across a point of view, backing it up with evidence and anticipating counter-arguments.  
• Expresses themselves clearly and politely in a formal or informal register appropriate to the situation and the person concerned.  

Managing conversations | • Can engage in a discussion on different topics using appropriate language.  
• Uses appropriate strategies to deal with language gaps by:  
– signalling a gap;  
– appealing to conversation partners for assistance;  
– using non-linguistic means (e.g. pointing or drawing);  
– using an appropriate synonym; or guessing / coming up with a ‘new’ item from existing language knowledge.  
• Intervenes when it appears that there is a misunderstanding in a conversation or discussion.  
• Anticipates possible areas of communication breakdown in an interaction and is able to use appropriate strategies to deal with this.  |

Participating with appropriate confidence and clarity | • Participates actively in discussions and debates on topics of interest.  
• Varies tone of voice and sentence and discourse structure to engage listeners/readers.  
• Presents their point of view in a task, even with no preparation.  
• Organises spoken and written text logically and thematically, paying attention to coherence and cohesion as well as styles and registers.  
• Supports and expands main points with details and examples and provides an appropriate conclusion.  |
STAGE OF LEARNING | CORE AREAS | CAN DO STATEMENTS
--- | --- | ---
**AT WORK** | Using appropriate language and register for context | • Adapts register to different types of conversation partner (e.g. colleagues, managers and customers).  
• Keeps a discussion moving by periodically summarising and moving to the next topic.  
• Sums up the outcomes of a discussion and elicits confirmation.  
• Can communicate effectively with speakers in their community and speakers of the target language taking into account social, cultural and linguistic differences.  
• Varies sentence patterns to achieve effect when speaking or writing (e.g. adding emphasis and humour).  
• Draws on a range of discourse functions (e.g. questions, commands) to gain others’ attention or to make an important point.

Managing conversations | | • Interrupts a colleague appropriately in a meeting when necessary.  
• Changes topic of conversation in an appropriate way.  
• Successfully chairs a meeting (e.g. keeps to the agenda, clarifies actions etc.).  
• Can initiate, maintain and end conversations effectively and appropriately.  
• Takes an active part in conversations and discussions by using appropriate language and effective turn-taking.  
• Can use context to understand unknown language.  
• Asks for clarifications, re-formulations or examples when lacking key language.  
• Provides constructive feedback.

Participating with appropriate confidence and clarity | | • Proposes courses of action, elicits ideas from others and responds to others’ proposals politely.  
• Organises and executes spoken and written forms of communication effectively (e.g. writes effective emails and business letters and gives effective presentations).  
• Creates coherent and cohesive texts making appropriate use of a variety of organisational structures and a wide range of cohesive devices.

Practical Guidelines for Teaching Communication Competencies

In an increasingly interconnected world, communication is an essential skill that enables us to get our ideas, needs and feelings across to others in meaningful, useful ways. It allows us to access information, opportunities and develop relationships. In the language classroom, learners need extensive practice and feedback in order to use new language confidently and fluently. This is often facilitated through productive, communicative activities like asking and answering drills, role-plays and the multitude of activities that require learners to engage with one another in order to get or share information. Due to their communicative nature, these activities also present an opportunity to work with, and develop, communication competencies.

Learners reach for communication strategies during many classroom activities because of an inherent need for them. Not having these strategies to draw upon may result in learners hitting communicative blocks more frequently and being less able to benefit from time spent in the classroom. Communication strategies have a broad range of benefits for language learners within the classroom and beyond. For example, being able to continue with a speaking task despite not knowing key vocabulary, avoid misunderstandings by checking what has been said, or tell more engaging stories.

Learners and teachers benefit from developed communication skills by:
• expressing themselves appropriately and enabling a positive, productive learning environment;  
• being more able to collaborate effectively with others;  
• being more able to take more responsibility for their learning, articulate their needs, access information and support;  
• being more able to engage in and benefit from communicative language practice activities;  
• experiencing increased motivation as a result of success in communicative activities.

Ben,  
Director for Language Research, Cambridge University Press
Suggestions for classroom practice

The ideas presented here are intended as a general indication of the types of activity that might develop this competency in the classroom, and are not a definitive list.

GENERAL SUGGESTIONS

Communication skills are so inherently embedded within language teaching and learning; the question is not so much whether they have a place in the language classroom, but rather, the extent and ways in which teachers provide an overt focus on them.

Familiarisation with communication strategies

It should be noted that before spending significant amounts of time practising particular communicative strategies within classroom activities, it is helpful for learners to understand what these strategies are. This understanding is important as it informs and supports subsequent attempts to use them. It can help learners become more able to independently practise and reflect on their performance – rather than relying on teacher feedback.

Allowing time

Once a strategy is established (what it involves, its potential benefits) and practised, learners will be better placed to use it in later lessons, with increasing independence. This is a key point; time and effort may need to be invested in developing learner recognition of communicative strategies which can initially distract from other teaching and learning aims.

Including communication skills in everyday practice

It is important to note that existing learning activities and procedures can be adapted to accommodate the development of communication skills. This is an approach and a process; one that needs to be incorporated within communicative activities, with specific strategies revisited, honed and built upon; doing so leaves learners better equipped for success in both the language classroom and the real world.
YOUNG LEARNERS

Learners at this age tend to be more communicative generally – they can be confident and motivated to speak – but often lack the skills to work more effectively together in groups. Raising learners’ awareness of effective communication strategies, and engaging in tasks that promote these skills, are key to supporting young learners in this area. Young learners can be introduced explicitly to these communication strategies as outlined in the Cambridge Life Competencies Framework. This could involve useful language and phrases for different contexts.

**Ground rules**

An example is setting some ‘ground rules’ for classroom communication amongst peers or between learners and teachers, such as:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ground rules for classroom communication</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Speak clearly</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Listen carefully</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Ask questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Show you’re interested – nod, smile, keep eye-contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Say if you don’t understand something – use phrases like:</td>
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<tr>
<td>a. Sorry, could you please repeat that?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. I’m sorry, I don’t understand. Could you explain, please?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Could you speak more slowly/loudly, please?</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Wait for your turn to speak</td>
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</table>

These ‘ground rules’ can be made more meaningful to learners if they are decided together as a whole class.

**Storytelling**

For promoting communication in the classroom, storytelling is a useful method that can be exploited in numerous ways. For example, introducing young learners to greetings, making polite requests or asking for permission. The context provided by a well-chosen story can help convey the meaning of useful phrases. Further questions can establish the situations in which they are used, supporting the child’s developing awareness of language function and register.

Primary learners could also practice retelling the story to develop their communication skills. By adding a self- and peer-assessment element to this activity, learners are more motivated to retell the story accurately and clearly. This type of assessment can also help to develop receptive skills and learner independence. The success of this approach depends upon the establishment of clear, appropriate and achievable success criteria and the ability to review learner output. The ability to record and listen back to their answers using digital tools (e.g. tablets) can support this.

**Over to you**

1. Choose one of the example activities in this section and try it out with your class.
   - When planning the activity, you may find the ‘General suggestions’ guidance above helpful.
   - Following the activity, reflect on what worked well and what could be improved next time, particularly focusing on the extent to which learners were able to develop their communication skills.
2. Using your course book or other materials, choose a few activities that you may be using in your classes in the next week or so. Consider how you could make these activities more communicative.

TEENAGE LEARNERS

Motivation is a key factor for engaging learners in communicative activities at this age, and it will be important for activities to have a clear communicative purpose and include topics that are of interest to them. One way of doing this is to create situations in which learners can be successful.

**Recognising and praising good learner-generated models**

Teachers should monitor carefully during communicative tasks in order to pick up on good learner-generated models which can be acknowledged and shared to the benefit of the broader class. In addition, teachers can highlight examples of unprompted effective communication strategy use in the classroom – these are often both meaningful and memorable for learners. However, care should be taken with teens who may be more self-conscious.

For example, in a discussion about holidays, a learner who is observed to be actively listening and developing conversation with a classmate by asking further questions about their trip could be praised by the teacher. The experience could then be discussed (use questions such as ‘What did they find out?’; ‘Was it interesting?’), shared with the class and extended to a whole class activity.

**Noticing communication strategies**

Learners should be encouraged to notice communication strategies used in a variety of texts as a way of developing them in their own speaking and writing. Ideally teachers should choose texts that contain multiple examples of the strategy being focused on. They should ensure the texts are appropriate for the learners’ age, interests and language level, so learners can focus on the strategy rather than struggling with trying to understand meaning. Here is an example:

- Learners work towards an understanding of appropriate forms of address and salutations in emails by analysing a selection of models. This analysis could involve reading tasks that focus on the relationship between writer and recipient, the email’s purpose and the phrases used.
- Learners then write their own emails based on what they have learnt from the models.

**Using recordings to highlight progress**

A motivating sense of progress can be provided by encouraging learners to record themselves (if comfortable doing so) during tasks. Learners could be asked to speak about a topic, for example, their hobby, for a particular length of time with suitable fluency, using fillers to reduce excessive pausing. Learners record themselves using a device (e.g. a smartphone), listen back and self-assess. After self-assessing their performance, teachers could get learners to identify areas of focus before repeating the process. Finally, they prompt learners to reflect on their performance with questions such as the following:

- What were you happy with?
- What difficulties did you face?
- How did you overcome these?

As an extension, learners could then re-record themselves to build on weaker areas. Learners could also engage in peer-assessment based on the recordings. Encouraging learners to share and offer each other advice provides the basis for further speaking and language practice, while establishing a supportive learning environment.

**Over to you**

1. Choose one of the example activities in this section and try it out with your class.
   - When planning the activity, you may find the ‘General suggestions’ guidance above helpful.
   - Following the activity, reflect on what worked well and what could be improved next time, particularly focusing on the extent to which learners were able to develop their communication skills.
2. Using your course book or other materials, choose a few activities that you may be using in your classes in the next week or so. Consider how you could make these activities more communicative.
ADULT LEARNERS
Adults often have a higher level of communicative competence in their first language and experience of communicating effectively in a broader range of situations, and therefore bring this experience with them to the language classroom. This can mean that they may have more to learn from one another.

Sharing effective communication strategies
By carefully monitoring as learners participate in communicative tasks, e.g. a role-play of a meeting, the teacher may be able to identify and facilitate the sharing of effective communication strategies, e.g. ways of making suggestions and offering opinions, among learners.

Noticing communication strategies
Teachers should help learners to notice communication strategies being used in context. Potentially useful models exist wherever there is communication, so there should be no shortage of choice. Potential sources include:

- Course book texts and recordings
- Films and television
- Podcasts, radio and audio books
- Real-world audio recordings

Useful communication strategies can be highlighted with effective questioning. For example, a teacher helping adults on an English-for-work course may pause a recording of an interview to ask about the impression given by an interviewee who is looking downwards and avoiding eye contact with an interviewer (being prepared to highlight cultural differences). Additionally, teachers can ask questions or design tasks that lead learners to notice the strategy, the way it is used and its effect.

Providing useful phrases and language structures
Teachers should provide any phrases or language structures needed to help learners manage conversations. This language can be identified when first modelled, practised and then displayed (on the board or on worksheets – see example below), so it can be referred to, if necessary, during an activity. As learners will naturally stop referring to it when they no longer need to, this is a simple way of ensuring individual learners receive the levels of support and challenge they need.

Language for signposting
- Firstly,
- First of all,
- Secondly,
- Furthermore,
- Another point is ...
- It's important to remember that ...
- It is well-known that ...
- In short,
- Finally,
- To summarise,
- In conclusion,

Encouraging the use of communication strategies
Teachers should encourage the continued use of communication strategies by directing praise and encouragement towards learners’ attempts to use them (even if unsuccessful). They should also be specific in their praise and use this as an opportunity to reinforce the benefits and features of specific strategies, eliciting these from learners where possible and appropriate.

Over to you…
1. Choose one of the example activities in this section and try it out with your class.
   - When planning the activity, you may find the ‘General suggestions’ guidance above helpful.
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2. Using your course book or other materials, choose a few activities that you may be using in your classes in the next week or so. Consider how you could make these activities more communicative.
Grammar spotlight

2.35

Listen and choose the correct picture.

1. What clothes do George and Grandpa talk about?

2. What have George and his parents decided to do tomorrow?

Language practice 2

The weather’s really cold, so we have to wear warm clothes. Today we couldn’t go skiing because it was foggy.

Match to make correct sentences. Write the sentences.

1. There was a bad storm, a because there was a lot of snow.
2. They were wearing warm clothes so we could go sledging.
3. It snowed heavily, so we couldn’t play in the park.

GRAMMAR SPOTLIGHT

Conjunctions: so and because

STAGE 2

Draw a map with weather symbols.

- In groups, draw a map of the country you chose.
- Draw the weather symbols on your map for a day in winter.

Queenswood Hall

Photography Courses

Learn the latest photography techniques from the experts!

Every weekend during July and August

£250 including accommodation

Dear Ms Bolton,

I am writing to enquire about the photography courses at Queenswood Hall.

Please could you tell me if all the equipment is provided? I’d also like to know if the courses are suitable for beginners.

Finally, please could you let me know if there are still places available on next weekend’s course?

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Anna Rossi

Core Area: Participating with appropriate confidence and clarity

Can Do Statement: Uses simple connectors such as ‘and’, ‘but’, ‘because’ to link groups of words

SECONDARY

Open World Preliminary, page 123, ISBN 9788490365601

Can Do Statement: Adapts language according to who they are speaking/writing to (e.g. to a friend or to someone they don’t know)

4. Look at these pairs of sentences. Decide which sentence in each pair sounds more polite and is more suitable for formal conversations, letters and emails.

1. a. Is all the equipment provided?
   b. I’d like to know if all the equipment is provided.

2. a. How much does the course cost?
   b. Please tell me how much the course costs.

3. a. When will the course take place?
   b. Please could you let me know when the course takes place.

5. Change these direct questions into indirect questions.

1. When does the course start?
   I’d like to know when the course starts.

2. Is accommodation provided?
   Please could you tell me if accommodation is provided.

3. Can under-18s do the course?
   I’d also like to know if under-18s can do the course.

4. How should I pay for the course?
   Please let me know how I should pay for the course.

6. Look at this advert and notes. Write an email to Mr Collins asking him for the information in the notes.

Queenswood Hall

Photography Courses

Every weekend during July and August

£250 including accommodation

Dear Mr Collins,

I am writing to enquire about the photography courses at Queenswood Hall.

Please could you tell me if all the equipment is provided? I’d also like to know if the courses are suitable for beginners.

Finally, please could you let me know if there are still places available on next weekend’s course?

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Anna Rossi

Core Area: Using appropriate language/register for context

Can Do Statement: Adapts language according to who they are speaking/writing to (e.g. to a friend or to someone they don’t know)
Complete the dialogue with the suggestion sentences and questions from Exercise 3. Try not to use the same expression more than once.

**Man:** This festival is fantastic. What do you want to do first?

**Woman:** *(1)* we go to the food tent? I’d like to get some pizza.

**Man:** OK. Good idea. After that *(2)* visiting the art exhibition? I’d like to see some of the paintings.

**Woman:** Yeah, that sounds good. Then we *(3)* go and do a singing workshop.

**Man:** Oh, I’m not sure that’s a good idea. I’m a terrible singer!

**Woman:** *(4)* listening to the talk on poetry instead?

**Man:** Yeah, I’d love to! That’s a great idea!

**Woman:** *(5)* we do after that?

**Man:** Well, by then we will probably need to go home!

**Woman:** Hmm, I might want to see other things. How about we look at the gift shop after?

**Man:** Sure! That sounds good.

Work with a partner. Read the dialogue aloud. Did you choose the same phrases?

**Agreeing and Disagreeing**

When responding to suggestions it is important to be polite, whether you agree or disagree with the suggestion. When people reply with yes, it is rarely on its own. When people reply with no, they often add other words to make the meaning softer.

**Yes:** That’s a great idea!

**No:** I’m not sure that’s a good idea.

Look at the dialogue in Exercise 4. Underline the two ways to say “no” and highlight the five ways to say “yes” to the suggestions.

**Speaking Task**

Choose a group of events from a festival and persuade your group to go to them.

**Prepare**

1. Look at the events in Exercise 1 and your table in Exercise 2 in Critical Thinking. Add any new information to your table.

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**Further Reading**

Here are a number of books or articles that you could also look at:


You can find information about the other competencies in the Cambridge Life Competencies Framework at cambridge.org/clcf

✓ Collaboration
✓ Communication
✓ Creative Thinking
✓ Critical Thinking
✓ Emotional Development
✓ Learning to Learn
✓ Social Responsibilities

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