#### CEFR Companion Volume implementation toolbox

Video scripts for “How to use the CEFR Companion Volume”

This is the script of the videos in the VITbox module on “How to use the CEFR Companion Volume”. The scripts follow the order of the videos, starting with a presentation of the resources the CEFR Companion Volume and related documents offer and can be used in teacher education and in professional development. It is followed by a presentation focusing on the CEFR Companion Volume descriptors.

## Video 1. The CEFR Companion Volume – resources and their use in professional development programmes

**Slide 1**

The CEFR Companion Volume is an extremely useful tool that can be used for professional development activities and provides a variety of resources to support teaching, learning and assessment. In addition to the book publication, several additional tools offer valuable resources for professional development workshops. The CEFR Companion Volume has caused a paradigm shift in language education; the resources at our disposal will help us manage the necessary changes in our own contexts.

**Slide 2**

In professional development we can draw upon the book publication, but also the online database of illustrative descriptors and the CEFR website the Council of Europe has put at our disposal. This presentation will provide ideas on how these tools can be exploited effectively for professional development activities.

**Slide 3**

We will first have a look at the book publication; that is to say, the CEFR Companion Volume, but we will also look back at the main aims of the CEFR.

**Slide 4**

Both the CEFR and the CEFR Companion Volume represent a framework and provide general guidelines; they have never been intended to be prescriptive. Instead they invite the user to put the concepts into practice, to adapt them to the user’s context or contexts, and to develop then context-related programmes, curricula, tasks & activities. In our case, this means applying the framework to university and vocational training contexts.

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This means that programme developers, teacher educators and teachers need to select the aspects relevant in their specific contexts, develop suitable curricula, select the mode(s) of communication they want to address and select and use the relevant scales and descriptors. They need to develop meaningful scenarios, tasks, activities for teaching, learning and assessment, which are relevant in their contexts. They can then pilot, revise and optimise their programmes and materials. But the Companion Volume should also inspire them to try out new approaches; for example, plurilingual approaches.

**Slide 6**

The Council of Europe invites us to make a proactive and more creative use of the CEFR framework and of the approaches presented in the CEFR and in the CEFR Companion Volume. The CEFR Companion Volume stresses that the CEFR is not supposed to be a standardisation tool. Both publications, the CEFR 2001 and the 2020 CEFR Companion Volume, point out that the CEFR provides a common basis and that institutions and teachers need to elaborate their syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations etc. for their specific contexts within this European-wide framework. It is a framework that we can fill with individual programmes, while we all speak the same language.

**Slide 7**

In professional development, teacher educators might ask workshop participants first to get acquainted with the CEFR Companion Volume and the invite them to discuss during the workshop, for example, the following aspects:

* which aspects of the CEFR Companion Volume participants consider to be relevant in their contexts;
* which aspects they consider to be less relevant;
* which new aspects they might want to investigate further or try out;
* the possible impact on their curriculum design;
* a possible impact on assessment.

These questions can be used as a reflection tool to initiate a discussion on the ideas presented in the CEFR Companion Volume.

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The 2020 publication of the CEFR Companion Volume presents the theoretical framework of the CEFR. This means that it provides an introduction to the action-oriented approach and its key features, summarised especially in Chapter 2 entitled “*Key aspects of the CEFR for teaching and learning*”. This chapter presents the new aspects of the CEFR Companion Volume, it also offers an introduction to the concept of the four modes of communication; furthermore, it highlights plurilingual and pluricultural competence as key aspects in language teaching and learning, and it offers ideas on how to use the illustrative descriptors and how to implement the new framework.

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This slide shows the topics addressed in Chapter 2. This chapter summarises the key principles and underlying theoretical framework in just 18 pages. Furthermore, the information presented here is easy to digest, and can therefore be used as a good introduction to a workshop or seminar.

**Slide 10**

This chapter can, for example, be used as a pre-task for a workshop. Teacher educators can ask participants to read this chapter prior to the event. This then allows participants to reflect upon and discuss specific aspects of the chapter during the workshop.

**Slide 11**

Possible reflection tasks could, for example, be:

* a discussion about the impact of the action-oriented approach a) on teaching and b) on testing and assessment;
* Participants could also discuss the impact of the concept of the four modes of communication on curriculum design and on assessment. One question that might come up is whether in assessment we should in the future test the four modes of communication instead of testing the four language skills – which might then lead to a discussion about the relationship between the four modes of communication and the four skills.
* Furthermore, participants could develop ideas on how to enhance plurilingual and / or pluricultural competence in the classroom and how these should or can be integrated into the curriculum.

**Slide 12**

This slide provides the link to the online version of the CEFR Companion Volume, which allows for easy access to potential workshop participants. As the action-oriented approach, which is the underlying principle of the CEFR, is only addressed briefly, participants might to learn more about it; for this purpose the publication “*The Action-oriented Approach. A Dynamic Vision of Language Education*” published in 2019 by Enrica Piccardo and Brian North can be a useful resource for the revision of curricula and syllabuses.

**Slide 13**

The following section provides suggestions on how to use the CEFR online database of illustrative descriptors.

**Slide 14**

This link provides access to all illustrative descriptors of the CEFR Companion Volume in different languages in the form of a spreadsheet. This Excel file can be downloaded for use in workshops or for curriculum development.

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This spreadsheet allows users to view and to select the descriptors that might be relevant in their context; that is to say, it allows users

* to select the descriptors of a specific level
* to choose the mode of communication,
* the activity, strategy or competence
* the scale
* and finally the relevant descriptor(s)

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Here is an example. I selected all descriptors available for “mediation”, that is to say, across all levels, activities / strategies / competences, and scales. Users can then narrow their search down to a specific CEFR level and or specific “activities / strategies / competences”, and then select the descriptors they find relevant in their context.

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Here is an example of a task for a workshop with teachers or student teachers, in which they are asked to develop a classroom activity or task addressing a specific CEFR level and mode of communication. Teacher educators may ask participants to select the mode of communication, the activities / strategies / competences and the scales relevant in their context and then choose useful descriptors. These can then be the starting point for developing a classroom activity, but also for developing an examination paper.

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For this activity teacher educators can also use a template which they hand out to workshop participants. When filling in this form participants need to describe their classroom task or activity. It requires participants to reflect on the different categories mentioned earlier. (This template is available in the VITbox toolbox and teacher educators can adapt it to their individual contexts.)

**Slide 19**

Finally, the Council of Europe website offers an exhaustive database of additional material that can be exploited for professional development purposes.

**Slide 20**

Users will not only find the online versions of the CEFR (2001) and the CEFR Companion Volume published in 2020,

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but they also get access, for example, to publications covering specific aspects addressed in the CEFR Companion Volume, to videos presenting the key concepts of the CEFR Companion Volume, to recorded webinars, to ideas for implementation and to the database of descriptors mentioned earlier.

**Slide 22**

And finally, the ECML website also provides useful tools relating to the use of the CEFR, the CEFR Companion Volume and their implementation in various contexts. It is worth searching this extremely rich database of resources when preparing a professional development programme.

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To summarise, both websites offer a) resources addressing specific aspects of the CEFR and the CEFR Companion Volume, b) their implementation as well as c) examples of good practice. They are highly valuable tools for professional development workshops.

**Slide 24**

Here are the references to the resources that help to implement the content of the CEFR Companion Volume:

Council of Europe CEFR website:   
<https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages>

Council of Europe (2001): *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*. Cambridge: CUP; English text available at:   
<https://rm.coe.int/1680459f97>

Council of Europe (2020): *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment. Companion Volume*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe; English text available at:   
<https://rm.coe.int/common-european-framework-of-reference-for-languages-learning-teaching/16809ea0d4>.

Council of Europe (2020): CEFR Descriptors (searchable database of descriptors):   
<https://rm.coe.int/cefr-descriptors-2020-/16809ed2c7>.

Piccardo, Enrica / North, Brian (2019): *The Action-oriented Approach. A Dynamic Vision of Language Education*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

European Centre for Modern Languages: VITbox Resources, available at:   
[www.ecml.at/companionvolumetoolbox](http://www.ecml.at/companionvolumetoolbox).

## Video 2. How to use the CEFR Companion Volume

**Slide 2**

Introduction

The *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment (CEFR)*, published in 2001, provided a description of language-related competences and language use organised in the form of illustrative descriptors. The aim of the document was to help with curricula development and to give students, teachers, examiners and other stakeholders a useful and transparent tool in second and foreign language education. This publication presented language use in terms of strategies used by learners to activate their language competences in order to communicate with other language users. The document introduced common reference levels with descriptors which show the progress in language learning from A1 and A2 levels which show the beginners’ language competences, through B1 and B2 levels which describe the language abilities of independent users to C1 and C2 levels which present the language repertoire of the advanced users of a language. The aim of the document was to promote quality and comparability of teaching, learning and assessment of foreign and second languages. It also promotes plurilingual and pluricultural education.

**Slide 3**

The new document, the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment – Companion Volume,* was first published as a draft in 2018; the revised final version came out in 2020. The new document summarises the key ideas of the original CEFR vision in Chapter 2. It explains and elaborates on the key notions of the CEFR and has enhanced the scales and descriptors, especially at A1, C1, C2 levels and the so-called “plus levels,” and developed a new pre-A1 level. The updated and extended version of the CEFR illustrative descriptors in this publication replaces the 2001 version of the descriptors.

**Slide 4**

As regards the conceptual framework, the document focuses on the action-oriented approach to language learning and use, where the learner is the so-called “social agent” who uses all his or her linguistic resources and knowledge of cultures to build communicative competence and intercultural competence. The language user is also seen here as a communication mediator who facilitates communication between other language users in collaborative tasks in which new meaning is shaped.

The document, similar to the original CEFR, describes language use and the progress in language proficiency in terms of four modes of communication: reception, production, interaction and mediation. But it puts emphasis on mediation, which was discussed only briefly in the original CEFR document.

**Slide 5**

Rationale, significance and originality:

* The CEFR Companion Volume provides the user with 4 new categories of mediation: mediating texts, mediating concepts, mediating communication and mediation strategies, with 20 new scales.
* It offers descriptors for plurilingual and pluricultural competences.
* It specifies “plus levels” and adds a new “Pre-A1” level.
* It provides more elaborate descriptors of listening, reading, online interaction, using telecommunications, and expressing reactions to creative texts.
* It enriches the descriptors of A1, and the C levels, particularly the C2 level.
* It adapts the descriptors to make them gender-neutral and also “modality-inclusive”.

So, to summarise this part of the presentation, the conceptual frameworks of the CEFR and the CEFR Companion Volume are the same but the new document enriches, develops, enhances and replaces the descriptors contained in the original CEFR document from 2001.

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CEFR Companion Volume structure

The CEFR Companion Volume consists of 6 chapters and 10 appendices which are followed by a list of figures and a list of tables.

Chapter 1 is an introduction which presents the aims of the document and a summary of updates, additions and changes to the illustrative descriptors.

As mentioned before, chapter 2 provides a summary of the key aspects of the CEFR for teaching and learning, that is:

* the aims of the CEFR;
* an explanation of the action-oriented approach to language teaching, learning and assessment;
* a description of plurilingual and pluricultural competence;
* the structure of the CEFR descriptive scheme; that is, the overall language proficiency, seen from the point of view of competences; that is, general competences, communicative language competences, communicative language activities and communicative language strategies and also the overall language proficiency in terms of four modes of communication: reception, production, interaction, mediation;
* an explanation of language mediation;
* a description of common reference levels and illustrative descriptors;
* and information about possible ways of implementing descriptors for curricula, aligning teaching and assessment as well as a list of books and web sources that might be useful for using the CEFR in foreign and second language pedagogy.

The following three chapters present the scales and descriptors for the following language use aspects:

* chapter 3: The illustrative scales of communicative language activities and strategies;
* chapter 4: The illustrative descriptor scales: of plurilingual and pluricultural competence;
* chapter 5: The illustrative descriptor scales of communicative language competences;
* and chapter 6: The illustrative descriptor scales of signing competences.

The descriptor scales are presented in a tabular form and they are accompanied by explanations and comments. For convenience, they are also available in an online searchable form on the Council of Europe website.

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/cefr-descriptors>

The appendices are a useful resource of additional scales such as:

* salient features of the CEFR levels;
* qualitative features of spoken language;
* self-assessment and written assessment grids;
* examples of language use in different domains of descriptors of online interaction and mediation activities;
* as well as information about the development and validation procedures of the extended illustrative descriptors.

Now let’s focus on how to use the CEFR Companion Volume.

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1. How to use the CEFR Companion Volume

First of all, the descriptors can provide a detailed, flexible resource for:

* “relating learning aims to real-world language use, thus providing a framework for action-oriented learning” (CEFR Companion Volume 2020: 42).

The action-oriented learning and assessment imply the use of language tasks that would resemble authentic activities that students will engage in real-life situations. Such tasks always have a specific purpose and are often collaborative. Although the participants will use the language to perform the tasks, they will focus on the purpose, the outcome or the product of the task such as planning a holiday or, preparing a presentation. So the primary focus of the classroom activities should be on learning to use the language to perform the task rather than learning about the language and its elements. The CEFR Companion Volume descriptors can be a very useful resource for designing such tasks.

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1. How to use the CEFR Companion Volume

Secondly, the descriptors can be a detailed, flexible resource for:

* “providing transparent ‘signposting’ to learners, parents or sponsors” (CEFR Companion Volume 2020: 42).

Descriptors can be a useful source for developing a variety of documents that can be used to inform all the stakeholders in the teaching, learning and assessment process. I will mention just some of them.

* Firstly, they can be adapted and used to develop syllabuses and course descriptions to inform learners, employers and institutions about the objectives and outcomes of the language course.
* Next, the descriptors can be used for developing classroom activity rubrics and in this way help language learners achieve the goals of the activities.
* They can also be changed into task guidelines which may help develop receptive, productive, interactive or mediation strategies.
* Another way of using the descriptors is to adapt them flexibly to produce test specifications for the internal use of the test developers and raters and for external use; for example, by university admission officers or employers.
* Finally, the descriptors can be adapted for use in certification for the test takers, employers or other institutions to be able to interpret the test results and recognise what the person who holds the certificate can do in situations which require the use of the foreign or second language.

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1. How to use the CEFR Companion Volume

Descriptors can provide a detailed, flexible resource for developing learner profiles.

Levels of proficiency and scales of activities are helpful to organise the teaching and learning process, track the progress of language learners, and make self-assessments in order to answer the questions about what language tasks one can do and how well they can be done.

However, the question “What proficiency should we require from candidates?” may have a variety of answers depending on the target language use situation, that is the situation in which our candidate is likely to use the language in real-life situations. The characteristics of the target language use situations specify the language ability profile that the candidate will need to develop.

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The CEFR descriptor scales are a large resource which can be used to develop various profiles. Descriptor scales can be used, firstly, to identify which language activities are relevant for a particular group of learners and, secondly, to establish which level those learners need to achieve in those activities in order to accomplish their goals.

Fig. 1 on this slide shows the desired profile for reception, interaction, production and mediation activities of a fictional postgraduate student of natural science. The labels around the edge of the circle are the descriptor scales that are considered to be relevant, and the proficiency level which is considered to be relevant for this language user on each descriptor scale is indicated by the blue shading. Such profiles with only those activities considered to be relevant are very useful in the context of very intensive LSP training.

**Slide 11**

Sometimes the target language use situation requires the use of more than one language. In such a situation we can build plurilingual profiles for the language users. The proficiency levels in a number of languages almost always develop in an uneven way for any individual language learner. So perhaps a tabular and linear form of the profile would present the information more clearly. An example of such a plurilingual proficiency profile can be seen in Fig. 2.

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What is more, the tabular profiles can be used to present the current proficiency within one language. Language competences and skills very rarely develop in an even and parallel way. Some language users develop, for instance, reading comprehension much quicker than written production or mediation competences. This uneven development of competences depends on a number of factors, such as the learner needs, the personal and professional background or experience in using the language. Fig. 3 shows an example of such a profile of partial language competences of a language user.

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1. How to use the CEFR Companion Volume

Descriptors can provide a detailed, flexible resource for:

* “offering a ‘menu’ to negotiate priorities with adult learners in a process of ongoing needs analysis” (CEFR Companion Volume 2020: 42).

The profiling technique is also very useful for analysing the needs of particular groups of learners, especially groups in professional, vocational and special purposes educational areas. One of the characteristic features of Language for Specific Purposes pedagogy is that it is founded on the learner’s specific needs to learn the language. These needs are defined as being of a twofold nature: the needs which are determined by the requirements of the target language use situation and the needs which are determined by the individual learning needs of the learner, i.e., the learner’s motivation, learning style, available resources, the learner’s expectations of the course, and the time and place of the course (Hutchinson and Waters 1987: 60). The CEFR Companion Volume offers a considerable menu of descriptors which can be useful in negotiating priorities of the language course for specific needs.

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1. How to use the CEFR Companion Volume

Descriptors can provide a detailed, flexible resource for:

* “suggesting classroom tasks to teachers that will involve activities described in several descriptors” (CEFR Companion Volume 2020: 42).

The CEFR Companion Volume offers over 1800 illustrative descriptors of communicative language activities, strategies, and language-related competences. It also provides examples that elaborate the descriptors for online interaction and mediation activities for the four domains: personal, public, occupational and educational. The descriptors and examples of language activities aim to assist educators in selecting appropriate activities for their learners.

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1. How to use the CEFR Companion Volume

Descriptors can provide a detailed, flexible resource for:

* “introducing criterion-referenced assessment with criteria relating to an external framework (here the CEFR)” (CEFR Companion Volume 2020: 42).

Descriptors can also be useful as a starting point when developing transparent criteria for assessment. There are two types of descriptors:

* descriptors of communicative activities and
* descriptors of aspects of proficiency in language-related competences.

Descriptors of communicative activities can be used for developing criteria for teacher- or self-assessment of the learner’s performance on tasks which resemble real-life tasks. Such assessment criteria are made on the basis of the learner’s profile of language ability which was developed as the course syllabus or which was built during the course as a result of the ongoing analysis of the learner’s needs. Such criteria and the following assessment of the learner’s language performance, when the learner is doing the assessment task are aligned with the process of teaching and learning and encourage the action-oriented approach in language pedagogy.

The second type of descriptors illustrate aspects of proficiency in language-related competences. These descriptors can be a useful source for the preparation of qualitative assessment criteria. In other words, they allow the assessor to test how well the language learner is able to perform a particular task.

Illustrative descriptors should be adapted for the particular purpose. They could be simplified for “outsiders”; that is, the test takers themselves, admission officers or employers and other stakeholders who should know what the learner can do when communicating in a foreign or second language. The descriptors can be also made more elaborated, for “insiders”; for example, teachers or examiners. The detailed “insider” versions of descriptors help teachers or examiners to construct specific test tasks and rating criteria. However, for the purposes of constructing assessment grids, it is recommended to use simpler versions of descriptors and it is good practice to limit their number to usually 4 or 5 assessment criteria which are more practical to use during the test or examination. This simplified assessor-oriented set of 4-5 criteria should be shared with the learner to make the assessment process transparent and help the learner to produce their best language performance during the test. The table in the slide shows the different purposes of CEFR descriptors in language assessment.

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So to sum up

Descriptors can serve as an adaptable resource for:

* relating learning aims to real-life language use;
* providing transparent information about the aims of language learning and assessment to stakeholders;
* offering a set of guidelines while conducting needs analysis;
* inspiring teachers in the development of classroom tasks;
* introducing criterion-referenced assessment with criteria relating to the CEFR framework;
* and aligning language teaching, learning and assessment.

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1. Web resources

* Trim J. (ed.) (2001). “Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment – A Guide for Users”, Language Policy Division, Council of Europe, Strasbourg. <https://rm.coe.int/1680697848>.
* Piccardo E. (2014). “From communicative to action-oriented: a research pathway”. [https://transformingfsl.ca/wp-content/uploads/ 2015/12/TAGGED DOCUMENT CSC605 ResearchGuide\_English\_01.pdf](https://transformingfsl.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/TAGGED_DOCUMENT_CSC605_Research_Guide_English_01.pdf)
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If you are interested in learning more about how to use the CEFR and the CEFR Companion Volume in language teaching and learning. The Council of Europe’s website contains links to many resources and articles related to the CEFR; for example, a bank of supplementary descriptors, samples of performance videos, or calibrated assessment tasks. In addition, the ECML website contains a large number of materials from many CEFR-related projects.

**Slide 18**

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