
The European Language Portfolio

An introductory guide for companies and other organisations

The European Language Portfolio sets recognised international standards for measuring and comparing language competence - across a range of languages. More and more language learners will use it to record their skills in foreign languages and it provides an effective instrument which enables companies, in particular small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), as well as other organisations to:

- Select staff
- Design and assess language training programmes
- Improve the quality of in-company language skills
- Standardise company language requirements
- Sustain on-going language learning amongst staff
- Reward language skills



Following a decision by the **European Parliament** (2241/2004/EC), the **European Language Portfolio** is promoted by **Europass**, a unique European scheme for the transparency of qualifications and competences, by the inclusion of the Language Passport as one of the Europass documents in order to:

- **facilitate** labour mobility in Europe,
- **give value** to language learning,
- **contribute** to inter-cultural understanding and
- **enhance** mutual respect and tolerance.

What is the Portfolio and how can it be used?

The European Language Portfolio (ELP) is a personal language-learning tool containing three parts: a Language Passport, a Language Biography and a Dossier.



The Language Passport (cover shown above) gives an overview of the holder's current level of language proficiency and summarizes their learning and intercultural experiences. It has a reporting function.

The Language Biography documents the holder's personal language learning history and intercultural experiences. It also contains instruments for self-assessment of language competence.

The Dossier is a collection of work that illustrates what the learner has done and is able to do in different languages.

All ELPs that have been validated by the Council of Europe can be found on the website. They all respect the following principles:

- They are based on the standardised European levels and descriptors to be found in the Common European Framework of Reference (please see the back page for a global overview)
- They have both reporting and pedagogic aims and functions
- They combine testing and assessment with self-assessment
- They are multilingual and will always include at least one of the Council of Europe's official languages - English or French
- They belong to the holder, not to institutions or teachers
- They are easily understandable, employing simple "can-do" statements describing what a learner can actually do with a specific language skill at a particular, standardised level.

There are numerous different ELPs designed for different regions, age ranges, and purposes but all share the same core features. All ELPs for adults, including those for universities and vocational purposes, contain a standard Passport.

The ELP is a means of documenting and presenting skills and intercultural experiences in different languages, whether acquired at school, outside, or in the workplace.

It is also a companion to learning, giving learners the means to assess their own language knowledge, to reflect on their language learning, and to set realistic and achievable language learning priorities and targets.

Employers can use it:

- **to assess** whether employees or job applicants have the appropriate language skills for the job they will have to do
- **to establish a profile** of the language level or particular skill needed for a specific job
- **to set consistent aims and standards** for language training programmes relating to the organisation's specific needs.

What level of language is required by companies?

Most jobs do not need a perfect knowledge of foreign languages - often **partial competences** are enough. In some cases one of the first of the six general levels - A1 or A2 - is all that is needed. Some jobs require higher levels of understanding and speaking, but writing is not important. The ELP provides instruments (in particular **the checklists in the Language Biography**) to help organisations to define the skills needed for different jobs. A summary of the levels is on the back page of this pamphlet.



Is the information about levels reliable?

The information about levels in the Portfolios is based on a number of elements - on assessment, testing and self-evaluation (using the *self-evaluation grid* which is a part of the passport). This will usually be complemented by the results of public examinations; many of these are already calibrated to the European levels. The descriptors are standardised and, because they refer to how one *really* uses the language, they have been shown by research to be highly reliable.

Staff selection

As the use of the ELP increases, more and more job applicants will be presenting the Passport as evidence of their language skills. Employers should start by looking at the **profile of language skills**

The image shows two pages of a language passport form. The left page is titled 'Profil linguistique / Profile of Language Skills' and contains a table for recording language skills. The table has columns for languages (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2) and rows for skills (Reading, Listening, Spoken Production, Interaction, Writing). Shaded cells indicate the applicant's proficiency level in each skill for each language. The right page contains additional information, including a section for 'Langues apprises / Languages learned' and a table for recording the level of proficiency in each language.

This provides an overview of the levels attained in the different foreign languages, with a different section for each language. The shaded areas indicate the different skills - reading, listening, spoken production and interaction, writing. The Portfolio also contains information about language courses taken, about stays in other countries and intercultural experiences of different kinds. This information can be used to get a fuller picture of the applicant's language skills and to choose applicants with the right linguistic profile, or **to identify language training needs**.

Using the Portfolio in language training programmes

The Portfolio and the scales can also be used to make language training programmes more efficient and to carry out standardised assessment of performance and achievement. This can be done at a general level by creating a job-related language profile, using the self-assessment grid and the **checklists** in the language biography.

These are sets of simple **“can-do” statements** showing the competences at different levels. For example at B2, one of the “can-do” statements for spoken production is “I can explain a viewpoint on a topical issue, giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.” By consulting the checklists a training manager or human resources manager can establish the level of language competence needed for the job. If more specific profiles are needed, the Common European Framework has a large number of different scales, all based on A1 to C2, some related to work situations.



Because the scale has been translated into the majority of European languages, and because the levels are standardised, employers can assess the language skills of job applicants from other countries - B1 or C1 will always have the same meaning, wherever the Portfolio is issued.

ELPs can be used not only to establish appropriate levels and skills required for foreign languages but also for non-native speakers of the national or regional language.

Equally importantly the ELP allows employers to create **language profiles** - either company-wide or for specific functions - and to establish the language level required in an accurate and standardised manner. Furthermore, it allows companies to determine when the specified requirements have been met. This **quality monitoring function**, however, is **not “top-down”** but involves the employees as well, through structured self-assessment and checklists both at a global level and at the level of specific skills.

A European Language Portfolio can be used as a **companion to staff language training** and in order to **set learning objectives** and **measure progress**.

Rewarding language competence

If the organisation gives bonuses or other rewards for language skills, the ELP provides a standardised basis for doing this. It is especially useful as a way of comparing levels of achievement in different languages, as the scale can be applied to any language.

The background to the Portfolio

The Common European Framework of Reference

The Council of Europe has developed the *Common European Framework of Reference*. This is a standardised description of competence in foreign languages at 6 levels - A1 & A2 for basic users; B1 & B2 for independent users; C1 & C2 for proficient users. The descriptors are written in everyday non-technical language and state what the user can do with the language.

For example, someone at **level B1**
can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc.; can deal with most situations likely to arise 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 & ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.

The complete global scale is on the back page of this guide. It has been translated into the majority of European languages, and this makes it possible to identify the level certified in an ELP - from a foreign job applicant, for example - even if you cannot understand the language it is written in.

In addition to the global scale, there are other more specialised scales, for the skills of reading, writing, listening, and spoken interaction and production, and for tasks such as telephoning or making presentations.

The scales and descriptors from the *Common European Framework of Reference* provide the theoretical basis for the levels and the "can-do" statements contained in the ELP.

How do I know it's a valid document?



All validated Portfolios will have the validation number on the inside of the cover page of the passport section. This is in the format xx/year, for example: 01/2000. You can check the validation number directly on the Council of Europe website (address below) under the heading "Portfolios". This provides an up-to-date list of all the portfolios officially validated by the Council of Europe.

It is always recommended that companies also ask for copies of all Certificates or Diplomas.

The European Language Portfolio is being used more and more widely in schools and adult education all over Europe and beyond as an instrument for reporting on, and certifying, language competence on the basis of the standard six-level scale (A1-A2-B1-B2-C1-C2).

Where can I get more information?

The website of the Council of Europe has a special section on the European Language Portfolio: <http://www.coe.int/portfolio>

This contains information about the portfolio, and downloadable files of the levels, the scales, the self-assessment grids and the checklists in a large number of different languages.

The Common European Framework of Reference for languages is published as a book in a number of different languages and can be downloaded in English and French from the Council of Europe website.

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The Common European Framework of Reference Summary Scale of Levels

Pro- ficient	C2	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.
	User C1	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
Indepen- dent	B2	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 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.
	User B1	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise 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 & ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
Basic	A2	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
	User A1	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.

This summary of the CEFR levels, and other more detailed scales, can be downloaded at <http://www.coe.int/portfolio> under the heading "Levels" in a large number of different languages.