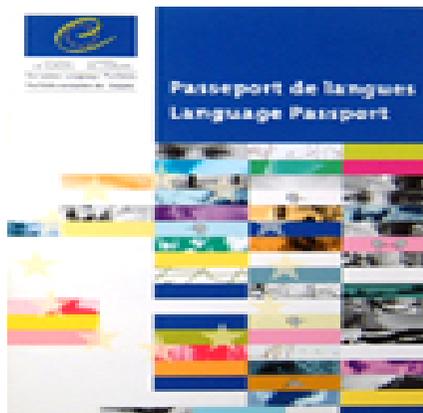


**The European Language Portfolio (ELP)
and
Responsibilities of ALTE Members**
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European Language Portfolio (ELP)

The European Language Portfolio was developed and piloted by the Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe, Strasbourg, from 1998 until 2000 (*Recommendation N° R (98) 6/Resolution on the European Language Portfolio.*)

What is a European Language Portfolio?

It is a document in which those who are learning or have learned a language - *whether at school or outside school* - can record and reflect on their language learning and cultural experiences.

The Language Passport section provides:

- **an overview of the individual's proficiency** in different languages at a given point in time.

The overview is defined in terms of:

→ skills and the common reference levels in the Common European Framework, according to the ALTE Code of Practice – *The Association of Language Testers in Europe*.

It records:

- **formal qualifications** and describes **language competencies** and significant language and intercultural learning **experiences**.

It includes:

- ❑ **information on partial and specific competence.**

The Language Passport allows for:

- ❑ self-assessment
- ❑ teacher assessment
- ❑ assessment

by educational institutions and examinations boards.

It requires that information entered in the Passport states on:

- ❑ what basis
- ❑ when
- ❑ by whom the assessment was carried out.

To facilitate pan-European recognition and mobility a standard presentation of a Passport Summary is promoted by the Council of Europe for ELPs for adults.

The portfolio contains a:

- language passport which its owner regularly updates.

THE ELP IS COMPOSED BY:

- 1) a **GRID:** is provided where his/her language competences can be described according to common criteria accepted throughout Europe and which can serve as a complement to customary certificates;
- 2) a detailed **LANGUAGE BIOGRAPHY** describing the owner's experiences in each language and which is designed to guide the learner in planning and assessing progress.
- 3) a **DOSSIER** where examples of personal work can be kept to illustrate one's language competences.

AIMS and FUNCTIONS of a European Language Portfolio

The European Language Portfolio project has two **main aims**:

1. to motivate learners by acknowledging their efforts to extend and diversify their language skills at all levels;
2. to provide a record of the linguistic and cultural skills they have acquired (to be consulted, for example, when they are moving to a higher learning level or seeking employment at home or abroad).

WHAT IS THE ELP'S FUNCTION?

1. Reporting

It displays the owner's capabilities, but in relation to foreign languages.

Its purpose **is not to replace** the certificates and diplomas that are awarded on the basis of formal examinations **but to supplement** them by presenting additional information about the owner's experience and concrete evidence of his or her foreign language achievements.

This function coincides with the Council of Europe's interest in:

- facilitating individual mobility
-
- relating regional and national qualifications to internationally agreed standards

Clearly, the importance of the ELP's reporting function will vary according to the age of the owner (usually much less important for learners in the earlier stages of schooling than for those approaching the end of formal education or already in employment).

That explains why the Council of Europe has introduced a standard passport for adults only.

2. Pedagogical

The ELP is also intended to be used as:

- a means of making the language learning process more transparent to learners, helping them to develop their capacity for reflection and self-assessment;
- and thus enabling them gradually to assume more and more responsibility for their own learning.

This function coincides with the Council of Europe's interest in fostering the development of learner autonomy and promoting **lifelong learning**.

The skills referred to in the *language passport* are:

1. UNDERSTANDING (LISTENING and READING)
2. SPEAKING (SPOKEN INTERACTION and SPOKEN PRODUCTION)
3. WRITING

THE COMMON EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK LEVELS

A. BASIC USER

(A1: BREAKTHROUGH and A2: WAYSTAGE)

B. INDEPENDENT USER

(B1: THRESHOLD and B2: VANTAGE)

C. PROFICIENT USER

(C1: EFFECTIVE OPERATIONAL PROFICIENCY and C2: MASTERY)

HOW MIGHT YOUR LEARNERS USE THEIR ELP?

Some of your learners are looking for jobs.....

⇒ They would like to present their ELP to potential employers in order to show their foreign language abilities, experience and qualifications.

Is a good idea....make a note of at least three situations in which your learners could present their ELP...

- A. What would you like to find in the ELP if you were an employer?
- B. What qualities would you particularly appreciate in an applicant?
- C. How do you think these qualities could best be expressed in the ELP?

HOW CAN THE ELP SUPPORT YOUR TEACHING?

The suggestion is:

- make brief notes under the following headings:
- How I Organize my Teaching?
- How I prepare my Teaching?
- How I use the Textbook?
- How I assess my learners?

IAL ExperienceMaking time...

IAL teachers are busy people who come under pressure from many directions.

At any one time they are responsible for several different classes.

For each class they have official learning targets to meet, which in practice mean one or more textbooks to work through.....So:

- A. they keep records of attendance and records of their learners' progress;
- B. they set and mark tests;
- C. they have to attend regular staff meetings to review policy and discuss problem cases;
- D. they write regular reports.

With all these different demands to cope with, there is all too little time for the kind of reflection that leads to experimentation and innovation in the classroom.

It is thus hardly surprising that these teachers often expressed concern that working with the ELP made additional demands on their time.

Alessandra said...

“...I learnt a lot about my students, their motivation and their potential, but I also needed more time to prepare my lessons, to cope with a new experience, to give feedback and to discuss with individual students.

I think the effort was worthwhile but I am not sure that I can maintain the additional effort needed unless it becomes part of my normal work load...!”

We cannot pretend that introducing the ELP will not make additional demands on teachers’ time in the short run.

Any change or innovation requires extra effort to begin with, and that means extra time.

But we are confident that if the pedagogical function of the ELP takes root, it will quickly bring about a reorientation in learners that is very beneficial to teachers.

Many teachers involved in our Institutions (IAL FVG) described the ELP's pedagogical function as *making the language learning process more transparent to learners, helping them to develop their capacity for reflection and self-assessment*
And thus enabling them gradually to assume more and more responsibility for their own learning.

When these things happen, teachers do not become less busy, but life becomes easier and teaching more enjoyable because their learners understand that they too are responsible for what goes on in the classroom.

There is likewise no contradiction between the ELP and the textbook, though the ELP's pedagogical function has unmistakable implications for the way in which the teachers use the textbook.

If they are to engage their learners in reflection and self-assessment and thus enable them to assume responsibility for their own learning, the teachers cannot use the textbook as a series of lesson scripts.

Feedback from our teacher...

Maddalena said...

“For to do so would be to impose on our learners the textbook author's learning targets and implied learning process. By working with the ELP we commit ourselves to an ongoing process of discussion and negotiation with our learners to which the textbook must always remain subordinate.

This means that we must use the textbook flexibly and imaginatively.

Sometimes it may be appropriate to allow our learners to choose which parts of the textbook we want to work with”.

Understanding and using the common reference levels and descriptors

The Council of Europe's common reference levels are fundamental to the ELP.

The summary of the common reference levels provided by the self-assessment grid in the language passport has given rise... to our teachers.....some kinds of problem...
For instance...

- I've got problems identifying particular levels.

- The descriptors are too general It would help if the range of knowledge in individual levels was specified more precisely.

The first problem can be solved by recognizing that each of the general descriptors in the language passport must be expanded in a way appropriate to the age, needs and interests of the learners in question.

→ The illustrative scales and the self-assessment checklists provide invaluable help, but it is also worth bearing in mind that the learners themselves can contribute to the process.

The expansion should produce lists of precise communicative goals that can be used to generate learning tasks.

Take, for example, READING at the lowest level, A1: *I can understand familiar names, words and very simple sentences, for example on notices and posters or in catalogues. ...*

This descriptor summarizes the most basic communicative use that it is possible to make of the reading skill. But the communicative behaviour in which such use is embedded will vary from one learner group to another.

For instance,

It will seem natural to most adult learners that they should develop this foundational reading skill by working with notices, posters and catalogues drawn from the real world...

....whereas...

In a primary classroom it may make a lot more sense for the teacher and learners to devise their own posters and notices naming classroom objects and reminding learners of frequently used phrases and classroom instructions.

Similarly, the descriptor for WRITING at level B1 – *I can write simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. I can write personal letters describing experiences and impressions* – will necessarily yield different topics and a different range of experiences and impressions from one learner group to another.

The second problem was that some teachers found the descriptors too general for learners to be able to identify their progress even over an extended period of time:

The levels in the Common European Framework are so broad that they do not allow the great majority of learners to appreciate the progress they have made over a considerable period, e.g., a whole school year. This demotivates the learners and they quickly lose

The first point to make in response to this problem is that :

→ the summary of skills and levels included in the ELP language passport covers the *whole range of possible foreign language proficiency*, from beginner to near-native speaker.

Only a very small percentage of learners achieve levels C1 and C2, and they do so only after many years of learning.

It is thus hardly surprising that learners remain at the same Council of Europe level for months, or in some cases years, even though there may be plenty of evidence that they are making progress.

If they are using the ELP, the biography rather than the passport will be the chief focus for setting and reviewing learning targets, and the profile of language skills in the passport will be revisited only occasionally.

...note, incidentally, that there are several ways of filling in the profile of language skills.

One is:

- by ticking the boxes for the different skills and levels when those skills and levels have been achieved;
- another is by shading in the boxes gradually, as progress is made towards total mastery of each level.

It is appropriate at this point to draw attention to the fact that the levels and scales that underpin the ELP are not a linear measurement scale like a ruler, as the *Common European Framework* explains:

No existing scale or set of levels can claim to be linear in this way.

→ Talking in terms of the series of Council of Europe content specifications, even if Waystage [A2] is situated halfway to Threshold Level [B1] on a scale of levels, and Threshold half way to Vantage Level [B2] , experience with existing scales suggests that many learners will take more than twice as long to reach Threshold from Waystage than they needed to reach Waystage.

They will then probably need more than twice as long to reach Vantage from Threshold than they needed to reach Threshold from Waystage – even if the levels appear to be equidistant on the scale.

This is because of the necessary broadening of the range of activities, skills and language involved.

This fact of life is reflected in the frequent presentation of a scale of levels with a diagram like an ice cream cornet, a threedimensional cone which broadens towards the top.

Extreme caution should be exercised in using any scale of levels to calculate the “mean seat time” necessary to meet particular objectives.

The same kind of point can be made in relation to the **number of words** that learners need in order to be able to perform adequately at the different levels.

A vocabulary of about 850 words is required for A2

...about 1,500 for B1 (*The Threshold Level*).

But it has been calculated that in order to pass the Cambridge First Certificate Examination in English, which corresponds to B2, learners need a vocabulary of 4,500 words, with over 8,000 semantic values (Gairns and Redman 1986, p.58).

These facts are encapsulated in A1 A2 B1 B2 C1 C2.

The **third problem** some teachers reported had to do with judging when their learners could meet the requirements of a particular level:

This problem probably arose partly from the fact that we are used to working with norm-referenced tests that rank-order our learners, which makes it difficult for us to accept that even weak learners may meet the criteria embodied in the descriptors, however inadequately.

The Council of Europe's levels and descriptors and the ELP require that we think of learners not negatively (the extent to which they fail to achieve perfection) but positively (what they can actually do in the target language).

If our norm-referenced traditions of assessment make this difficult to come to terms with, it may be useful to compare achieving one of the levels to passing a driving test: everyone who holds a permanent driving licence can drive a car, but it is evident that some drivers are more proficient than others.

No doubt examinations at all levels will continue to rank-order learners according to their proficiency.

But when they work with the ELP learners can gradually develop their own norm as they learn to compare their proficiency now with their proficiency last month, last term or last year.

Future goals

Different models are being or will be developed in Council of Europe member States depending on the age of learners and national contexts.

The Council of Europe organised a series of seminars in 2001 to help member States which did not take part in the pilot scheme to develop and introduce their own portfolios. A number of International NGOs are also developing Portfolios for higher and adult education.

Last important international academic conference (ALTE 2nd International Conference) took place in Berlin 19-21th May...

It has been a contribution to the 50th Anniversary of the European Cultural Convention about debating issues of quality, ethics and transparency in language assessment.

For any informations:

<http://www.alte.org/berlin2005/index.cfm>

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Levels

(for the illustration of the levels, please see below)

Global Scale

Proficient User	C 2	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.
	C 1	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.
Independent User	B 2	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.
	B 1	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 User	A 2	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.
	A 1	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.

		A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
U N D E R S T A N D I N G	Listening	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 lectures 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 native speed, provided. I have some time to get familiar with the accent.
	Reading	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 everyday 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 particular 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.
S P E A K I N G	Spoken Interaction	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.	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.	I can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. I can enter unprepared into conversation on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life (e.g. family, hobbies, work, travel and current events).	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 and sustaining my views.	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 and opinions with precision and relate my contribution skilfully to those of other speakers.	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. If I do have a problem I can backtrack and restructure around the difficulty so smoothly that other people are hardly aware of it.
	Spoken Production	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 and 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 options.	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 an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points.
W R I T I N G	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.	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 interests. 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 write clear, smoothly-flowing text in an appropriate style. I can write complex letters, reports or articles which present a case with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points. I can write summaries and reviews of professional or literary works.