

Straightforward

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Your **Straightforward Guide to The Common European Framework and Learner Autonomy** is all about the Common European Framework and promoting learner autonomy inside and outside the language classroom.

You will find a number of practice activities and classroom tips for encouraging learner autonomy and developing your learner's learning skills.

For more information about **Straightforward** and more teaching tips and ideas visit the **Straightforward** website:

www.macmillanenglish.com/straightforward

Look out for the other booklets in the free Straightforward Guides series:

Straightforward Guide to Presenting Grammar

Straightforward Guide to Roleplays

Straightforward Guide to Dictation and Translation



Beginner
CEF: A1

Elementary
CEF: A1-A2

Pre-Int
CEF: A2-B1

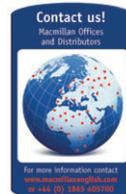
Intermediate
CEF: B1

Upper Int
CEF: B2

Advanced
CEF: C1


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Guide to the Common European Framework and Learner Autonomy

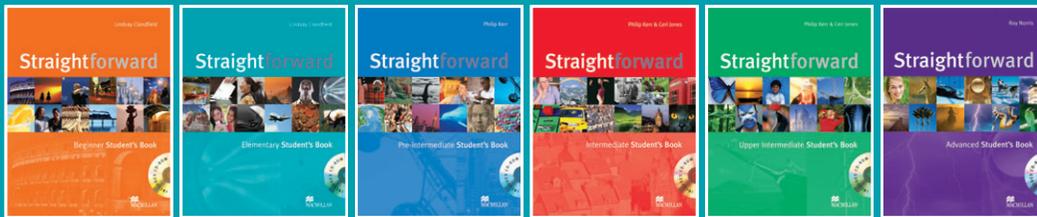

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Teaching made simple

The Straightforward Guide to the Common European Framework and Learner Autonomy

Contents

What is the Common European Framework?	2
Evaluation and 'can-do' statements	2
Learner autonomy and lifelong learning	3
Learner Autonomy and Learner Portfolios	4
Developing learning skills	4
Activities to encourage learner autonomy	6 - 12
Activities to develop learning skills	13 - 19
The Global Scale of the Common European Framework	20



Straightforward

Welcome to the Straightforward Guides. We hope that they will be particularly helpful for less experienced teachers, as well as providing a number of fresh ideas for everyone.

Each guide follows a simple, easy-to-use format.

The first section presents an aspect of language teaching practice in a clear, accessible way, with the busy teacher in mind.

The second section provides a selection of classroom activities that require only minimal preparation, along with tips on how to incorporate this kind of work into your day-to-day teaching.

This guide is all about the Common European Framework (CEF) and learner autonomy in (and outside) the language classroom. We look at what the CEF is, how it may affect you as an English language teacher, and how you can reflect the spirit of the CEF in your classroom.

We hope you and your students enjoy it!

Lindsay Clandfield and Philip Kerr
Authors of the *Straightforward* series

www.macmillanenglish.com/straightforward

What is the Common European Framework?

Evaluation and 'can-do' statements

It's probably one of the most influential documents of recent years in the world of language teaching. It's often referred to as the CEF (or equivalent acronym in other languages) or simply the Framework. Looking at the impact it is having across Europe and beyond, you might be forgiven for thinking that the Common European Framework is an enormous department of officials in Brussels, or at the very least a huge series of volumes on language teaching. In reality, it's a single, 260-page book.

The *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment* (its full title) - or the CEF / CEFR for short - was produced in the 1990s by the Council of Europe. It provides a series of descriptions of language competences that can be used to describe the level of a student of any language. It is published in many languages and you can download the English version for free from the Council of Europe's website at http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/CADRE_EN.asp

Since 2001, many national ministries of education and other organisations have decided to adopt the framework of levels from the CEF. Coursebooks and exams, both national and international, are now often described using these levels.

CEF levels		Usual coursebook levels (including <i>Straightforward</i>)	Cambridge and IELTS examinations
Proficient user	C2		CPE IELTS 7.5 +
	C1	Advanced	CAE IELTS 6.5 / 7.0
Independent user	B2	Upper Intermediate	FCE IELTS 5.0 / 5.5 / 6.0
	B1	Intermediate	PET IELTS 3.5 / 4.0 / 4.5
		Pre-intermediate	KET IELTS 3.0
Basic user	A2	Elementary	
	A1	Beginner	

The CEF describes each of these levels using 'can-do' statements. A B1 student, for example, is described as follows:

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 and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
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See the last page of this booklet for the 'global' can-do statements for all six levels. In addition to 'global' descriptions of levels like this, the CEF also provides more detailed descriptions for the different language skills (speaking, reading, etc.). Even more detailed descriptions are provided for particular kinds of speaking, reading, etc. (e.g. informal discussion, formal meetings, transaction to obtain goods) and for particular ways of evaluating these skills (range, accuracy, fluency, interaction, coherence). In total, there are over 50 sets of descriptions that describe competences using the C2 to A1 framework! But don't worry, a basic familiarity with this level system is usually enough.

Learner autonomy and lifelong learning

You are most likely to need to know about these levels and the 'can-do' statements, but there is more to the CEF than this. The authors of the CEF recognise that the business of learning a language does not end in the classroom. It is, they say, a 'life-long task', but it is one that we can promote and encourage through what we do in the classroom. An important part of our work, therefore, is to encourage our students to be autonomous or independent. This can involve:

- the setting of reasonable and achievable learning objectives
- the ability to choose and use appropriate learning materials and tasks
- the ability to self-evaluate

The majority of the practical suggestions in this Guide are designed to promote learner autonomy of this kind.

Learner Autonomy and Learner Portfolios

One of the first practical spin-offs of the CEF was the European Language Portfolio, which was also developed by the Council of Europe. It is a document in which students can record and reflect on their language learning experiences and it typically includes:

- a language 'passport' with a history of the student's language learning experiences and qualifications
- a self-evaluation of the student's competences
- examples of the student's work
- reflections on the student's language learning experiences

In addition to providing a record, the Portfolio is also intended to motivate students.

More information about portfolios and examples of language 'passports' can be downloaded at the European Language Portfolio page of the Council of Europe's website at www.coe.int/portfolio. Portfolios to accompany each level of Straightforward are also available. On the opposite page you can see part of the 'Language passport' from the Straightforward Intermediate Portfolio. You can get more information and samples to download at <http://www.macmillanenglish.com/straightforward/portfolios.htm>. The activities in the first part of this guide are designed to encourage learner autonomy. Many are based on ideas included in these portfolios.

Developing learning skills

If we want our students to become more autonomous, they will need certain skills. Some students will develop these without our help, but most will benefit from guidance. It will be helpful, for example, to know what reference sources (such as dictionaries and grammar books) are available and how to get the most out of them. Different students study and learn in different ways, but they don't necessarily know which way is the best for them unless they have discovered and experimented with alternatives.

The last group of activities in this guide is designed to provide learner training of this kind.

Language passport

My school/college

I go/went to _____.

Write the names of some teachers who have helped you. Say why they were good.

School subjects

The subjects I studied: _____

My favourite subjects: _____

My most difficult subjects: _____

I would like to learn more about: _____

I never want to have any more lessons on: _____

Examinations, qualifications & experience

Examinations I have passed:

Qualifications I have:

Things I have learnt outside school:

Work experience:

Experience of other cultures (travel, meeting people, reading, etc.):

Activities to encourage learner autonomy

Using 'can-do' statements

The CD-ROMs that accompany the Straightforward Teacher's Books contain self-assessment checklists ('can-do' statements) that are designed for use after each level of the book. These are in Word format so that you can edit them to suit your needs (e.g. by adding or deleting entries). The Straightforward Portfolios also contain short checklists that correspond to each unit of the book.

Here are some ideas of things that you can do with this material:

- After completing a unit from the book, ask the students to complete the corresponding checklist. Collect in these lists in order to get feedback on what the students are finding easy or difficult. Make changes to what you have planned for subsequent lessons in the light of this feedback.
- Put the students in groups and ask them to compare their checklists. Ask them to give a short report to the rest of the class on the things that most people have in common and the things where there are great differences in the students' self-evaluations. If there is a consensus that there are particularly problematic areas, put the students in groups again and ask them to come up with ideas for (1) what they can do outside the classroom to improve the situation, and (2) what you can do together in the classroom to improve the situation. Again, ask them to report back to the whole class. You can then agree collectively on a plan of action.
- Ask students to complete the checklists before they do the corresponding unit from the book. Ask them to complete the checklists again after covering the unit in class. Ask them for feedback on the differences between the 'before' and the 'after'.
- Towards the end of the year when students are beginning to think about end-of-year exams, ask them to look through their checklists and to draw up a list of priorities for their revision. In a subsequent lesson, organise the class into groups of students who share the same priorities. Ask them to draw up action plans. Can the necessary work be shared in any way? Is there any way that they can help each other?

Joint assessment

We can develop our students' ability to evaluate their own work objectively by giving them lots of practice!

- 1 When you set a written assignment, give the students the evaluation criteria at the same time. If, for example, you ask the students to write a letter of complaint (see Straightforward Intermediate Workbook, pages 80 – 81), you could use the evaluation grid below. Useful evaluation grids can be found in the Handbooks that accompany the Cambridge exams (PET, FCE, etc.). These can be downloaded at www.cambridgeesol.org/resources/teacher/index.html

Score	Content and organisation	Language
5	The message is clear for the reader and the main points are presented in a logical way.	The language is easy for the reader to understand and is appropriately formal.
4	The message is generally clear for the reader and the main points are presented in a logical way.	The language is generally easy for the reader to understand and is appropriately formal most of the time.
3	The letter contains relevant points, but these are not clearly presented.	Because of language errors, the reader must make an effort to understand.
2	The message is only partly clear for the reader and suffers from a lack of logical organisation.	Language errors make it difficult for the reader to understand.
1	The message is almost impossible to understand because of irrelevant content and a lack of organisation.	Language errors make the letter almost incomprehensible.
The scores (out of 5) for 'content and organisation' and 'language' will be added together to give a total score out of 10.		

- 2 Ask the students to use the evaluation grid to evaluate their own work before they hand it in.
- 3 Use the same evaluation criteria to mark the work yourself. Take both scores and add them together, then divide the result by two. Give this as the final score.

Variations

- Before the students hand in their work, encourage them to compare their work and their self-evaluations. This can be done in pairs and should only need five to ten minutes of classroom time.
- Give scores at the end of a block of study for the student's ability to self-evaluate.
- This technique can also be adapted to encourage students to self-evaluate their speaking.

Reflecting on classroom activities

- 1 At the beginning of certain classes (say every second or third class) distribute a worksheet to the learners. Ask them to keep a record of all the activities done in class and a note of who they worked with. At the end of class, tell them to rate the activities 1 to 3 on the following scales where 1=not at all and 3=very

Ask them to add one comment about something they found interesting in the class at the bottom of the worksheet.

Description of activity	Useful (1, 2 or 3)	Interesting (1, 2 or 3)	Difficult (1, 2 or 3)	Notes
In the 'Notes' column, you can add any information which you think will be useful – your reasons, etc.				

- 2 Collect these the next day (it should only take them 5 minutes). You can use this information to tailor activities to the students, and show them that you are responding to their feedback.

Using learner diaries

- 1 If you want to use learner diaries with a class, the students will need something to write in (unless, of course, you are using the Straightforward Portfolios). Small exercise books are ideal for this. This kind of activity will be unfamiliar to many learners so it is important to explain the point of it (i.e. to encourage them to reflect on the way they learn). Tell them that you will not normally correct their language errors. If you have used diaries before (or you know another teacher who has), it is a good idea to show the students some examples.
- 2 You will probably want students to spend ten to fifteen minutes a week on their diaries, but some will want to do more. At the beginning, devote some class time to this – many teachers give ten minutes at the end of a class.
- 3 Diaries can be completely unstructured, but most students respond better to prompts and suggestions. The list below will give you some ideas. You can find many more in the Straightforward Portfolios.

- *You are starting a new course of English? What do you hope will be good about the course? What are your worries about the course?*
- *In your English class, do you usually work with different people or always the same ones? Do you work well with other people?*
- *In what ways is this course different from courses you have taken before? Are you working in different ways? Are you learning faster?*
- *Look back through the last two units. What were the most important things you learnt? What was the best lesson you had?*
- *What is the most interesting thing that has happened in your English class so far?*
- *Have you written a diary before? How is this diary helping you to think about how you learn English?*
- *Do you feel that students in your class learn in different ways? Do you ever talk with other students about how they are studying? Do you like different kinds of activities and exercises?*
- *Apart from your Student's Book, what reading (if any) do you do in English? Could you read more? What? Would it be useful?*

- 4 Collect in the diaries periodically, read their entries and respond to them. You should respond to the content of what they write, rather than the language they have used.

Variations

- With very low level classes, students will have to write in their mother tongue. As their writing ability progresses, encourage them to use more English.
- If the technology is available to you, you can use audio diaries.
- From time to time, use the students' diary entries as the basis for class discussions.

Class discussion on learning

- 1 Towards the beginning of a course hold a discussion on how people learn. At a very basic level this could involve the following kinds of questions:

- *Do you think you are good at learning things?*
- *How do you remember new words?*
- *What strategies have you used to study (e.g. before a test)?*
- *In class do you prefer to take notes or just listen?*
- *Do you need to see things written down to help you remember them?*
- *Do you find that using pictures and other visual aids helps you to learn?*
- *Do you prefer to work alone or to work with other students?*
- *What advice would you give another student about the best way to learn English?*

Think of your own answers to these questions too.

- 2 Ask students to discuss these questions in pairs or small groups (in their own language if they are low-level English students). Then hold a plenary feedback session. Write up the suggestions on the board, including some of your own.
- 3 During a course hold similar follow-up discussions on how students feel they are learning. This can be done in conjunction with **Reflecting on classroom activities** or **Learner diaries**.



Class newsletter

Aside from being a potential avenue for learner training, a class newsletter can be great for building a positive group dynamic and good feelings within the class.

- 1 At the beginning of the school year explain that you would like to have a periodic class newsletter. Ask students what kind of information they could include, adding some suggestions of your own. Here are some ideas:
 - poems or stories written by the students
 - important news about the school or the class that the students would find interesting
 - photos
 - results of a class survey that could be undertaken during the year
 - a list of the class's favourite words or phrases in English
 - tips for an upcoming exam
- 2 If you have access to a digital camera, take some photos of the class – including a group photo with the teacher and photos of students doing tasks in groups.
- 3 You may end up doing the first newsletter yourself, getting submissions from the students and adding your own. Future newsletters could be created by the class themselves, through the creation of a newsletter committee. This passes the responsibility onto them. Two to three newsletters should be enough for a school year, although you could always do more.

Variation: Instead of a class newsletter, you could make a class webpage. There are many free and easy-to-use tools now on the internet for this. Content on the site can include video and audio material and can be much more dynamic. Examples include:

- www.freewebs.com** (make your own free webpage)
- www.ning.com** (make your own free social site, like Facebook)
- www.blogger.com** (make your own free class blog)

Classroom management to encourage learner independence – some tips

- 1 Look continually for ways of reducing the ‘distance’ between you and your students. Formal, traditional teaching styles are unlikely to encourage your students to become more independent. Little things can make a big difference. If you have a tendency to remain glued behind your desk, try to get physically closer to the class. Be aware of your body language – even leaning forwards (rather than backwards) can help.
- 2 Remember that a good rapport with your class is necessary for any kind of move towards learner independence. Be prepared to sacrifice time devoted to ‘getting through the material’ in order to build rapport.
- 3 Experiment from time to time with the seating arrangement of the classroom (when possible). It is hard to foster any sort of learner independence if the students are always seated in rows looking at a standing teacher at the front of the room.
- 4 Before checking the answers to an exercise, ask students to check with a partner first and discuss briefly. This begins to wean them off the dependence on you as a source of all the right answers.
- 5 Avoid the ‘one right answer’ syndrome by asking a question and immediately saying “that’s right” when hearing someone in the class shout out the answer. When you hear an answer, cross-check with other students. Here are some useful phrases for cross-checking:
“Roberto said the answer was [X]; what do you think Julia?”
“Do you agree, Ivan?”
“How many people agree with Ivan?”
“Why isn’t it [Y]?”
- 6 Give students time to answer questions, especially in open-class mode. This is sometimes called “thinking time”. It helps to count to five silently in your head while waiting for an answer.
- 7 Many tasks in the Straightforward books are divergent (they do not have a fixed end point or single right answer). Be prepared to accept many different kinds of answer for these tasks, and give equal praise for all of these.
- 8 Remember to respond to the content of what students say – not just the language they use to express it!
- 9 If students ask you a question that you don’t know the answer to, tell them that you don’t know, but that you will try to find out. Follow this up in the next class, telling students how you got the information.
- 10 If your students are not used to working in pairs or groups, give them specific instructions at the beginning of the task. For example, in a group task explain that each member of the group should submit two sentences each to the task, (or two words, or two ideas...). This helps head off the complaint that many students have of group work, that some students in the group don’t pull their weight.

Activities to develop learning skills

Finding reference materials 1 – reference materials fair

- 1 Tell your students that they are going to organise a “Reference materials fair” together. The objective of this fair is for them to share resources and ideas on how to improve their English outside of class. Set a date for the event.
- 2 Put students into small groups. Tell each group they are responsible for finding something outside the class that can help them learn English. This could be a book or a website. For the fair they have to bring the material into class (for a website, this could be a print-out of the main page) and prepare a short oral presentation of 2-3 minutes that addresses the following questions:

What is the material?

Where can you find it?

How can it help you learn English?

- 3 Bring in some examples yourself. These could include:

A monolingual dictionary

A bilingual dictionary

A dictionary on CD-ROM

A thesaurus

A grammar book

A self-study exercise book

A website to help learn English (see the activity on the next page)

- 4 On the day of the fair, have groups set up a small display of their materials. Get each group to take turns making a short presentation about their chosen materials.

Finding reference materials 2 – online materials hunt

- 1 Tell students that you want them to find for homework a website or websites that help them learn English.
- 2 To do this, they should use a search engine like Google. Give them a few examples of useful terms to use in their search. For example: English, grammar, vocabulary, online, free, interactive, listening, material, students, games, practice
- 3 Tell them to complete the following form for each site they find.

Name of site:
URL (web address)
Focus (Grammar? Vocabulary? Reading or writing? Listening?)
Number of stars:

- 4 The next day ask students to share with each other the sites they found. Collect in the forms and prepare a 'Top sites to practise English outside class' handout to give to the students.

Dictionary skills 1 – know your dictionary

For this activity, students will need their own dictionary, or you will need a class set of dictionaries for students to use.

- 1 Ask the students to take out their dictionaries. Tell them you want them to find out what features the dictionary has and how it can help them learn English better.
- 2 Write the following list of dictionary features on the board one at a time. Ask students to find an example of each one and share their findings with a partner.

Spelling

An example of two different spellings of the same word (e.g. British and American)

Pronunciation

An example of phonetic script

An example of how the stressed syllable is marked

An example of different pronunciations for the same word

Definitions

An example of a register note (e.g. formal, informal, literary)

A sample sentence for a word

Examples of derivatives of a word (words created from other words)

Collocation

An example of how collocation is illustrated in the dictionary

Other information

An example of two commonly confused words

An example of a common error to avoid

Subject-specific vocabulary

Information about frequency of a word

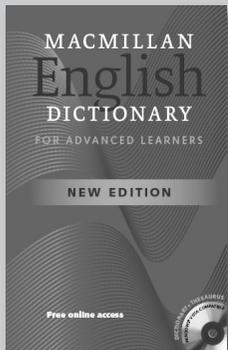
The website of the Macmillan English Dictionary contains lots of ideas about using dictionaries, including lesson plans for higher-level classes, written by Lindsay Clandfield and Philip Kerr. See www.macmillandictionaries.com/resources/resources.htm

Dictionary skills 2 – dictionary race

- 1 For this activity, make sure you have enough English-English dictionaries for each student in the class or for every two students in the class. Prepare a series of questions that students will have to use the dictionary to answer (see example questions below).
- 2 Tell students that you want them to work on their dictionary skills. Specifically, you want them to be able to find things quickly in the dictionary.
- 3 Display the questions on a projector, or distribute them as a handout. The objective is for the students to find the answers as quickly as possible to all the questions. Tell the class that the activity will end after the first three people finish the race. Students should put their hand up when they have finished.
- 4 Stop the activity after the third person finishes. Ask students to check their answers in pairs, then go through them together as a class.

Dictionary race

How many entries are there for the word *corridor*?
 What is *cos* an abbreviation of?
 What kind of word is *scarce*?
 Find three possible phrasal verbs with *put*.
 What are some expressions used with *information*?
 Which adjective is more frequent, *nice* or *pleasant*?
 Provide three words that begin with the prefix non-?
 Which is the correct spelling, *definitely* or *defīnately*?



Macmillan English Dictionary New Edition

The second edition of the Macmillan English Dictionary contains a wealth of new material, while building on the innovative features that won it two awards.

Encouraging extensive reading – a class library

- 1 If you can, bring in a set of different books in English that are suitable for your learners' level. Alternatively, ask learners each to bring an English book to class.
- 2 Display the books on a table and ask students to come up and take a look at them. They should read the back cover blurb, look at the covers and tell you how many of the books they know.
- 3 Ask them to choose a book they would like to read. You could prepare a "sign out sheet". Ask students to write their name and the book they've taken on it.
- 4 Assign a time limit (a week, two weeks, a month) for them to read their chosen book. Tell them that once they've finished they have to return it with a short book report. Prepare a book report form similar to the one below.

Book report
Book title:
Author:
Report by:
What kind of story is it? (thriller, romance, drama)
What is it about?
Your rating * = not very good ***** = excellent
A comment about the book

Recording vocabulary

- 1 Tell students you would like them to keep a record of new words and phrases they encounter in their English class.
- 2 Ask them to take a blank page of their notebooks and to choose five to ten new items they would like to record there. When they have finished, ask them to compare their pages with a partner.
- 3 Elicit from the students how they have recorded these words. Did they make a list? Did they write a translation? Did they draw a picture? Explain that there are many different ways of recording vocabulary, and the best idea is to choose one which is the most memorable. Long lists of words and translations aren't the easiest way to remember new items for everyone, although it does work for some.
- 4 Go through some of the ways of recording vocabulary on the other page. Ask students to experiment with some different ones as the course goes on. Devote a little bit of time in class for this from time to time to build the habit. When you teach a new vocabulary set, try to present it visually in different ways as well.
- 5 A couple of weeks later, ask students to compare with each other what ways they have produced. Which way is most memorable for them?

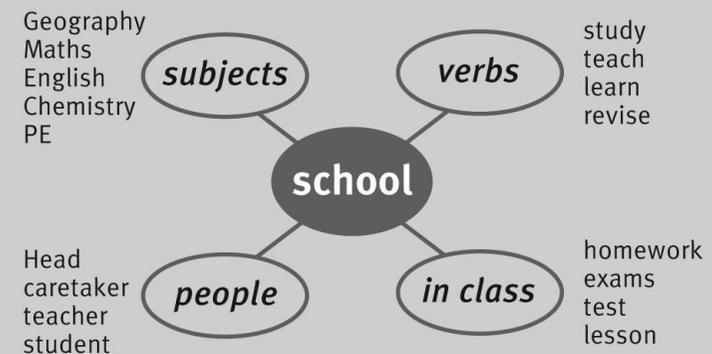
Note: The Straightforward Teacher's Books contain many different suggestions on ways of recording vocabulary. See the *Methodology Boxes* for more. For example:

Vocabulary records	Elementary p.80
Mind maps	Pre-intermediate p.16 (see opposite)
Using visuals to record lexis	Upper Intermediate p.62
Mind maps	Upper Intermediate p.66 & p.74

Remember, too, that there is a list of new vocabulary at the end of each unit of Straightforward!

Methodology Builder 6 Mind map vocabulary collection

- A *mind-map* is a visual way of showing how word meanings connect and relate to each other. Many people find words displayed like this easier to remember than the more traditional long word lists many students keep in their notebooks. The diagram may more closely reflect the way we store words in our brains.
- Make a *mind-map* by choosing a key word for the centre of the diagram. This word should usually be the word that summarizes the main theme of the words you are collecting. Then decide on other sub-headings and add them to the map as branches from the centre. Collect vocabulary connected to each of these sub-headings, for example:



- You can elicit words from students or present the items yourself. Encourage students to record new vocabulary in this way in their books.

The Global Scale of the Common European Framework

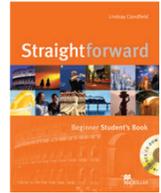
Proficient user	C2	Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.
	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.
Independent user	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.
	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 and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
Basic user	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.
	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.

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Beginner

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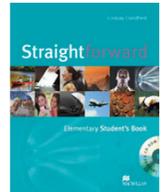
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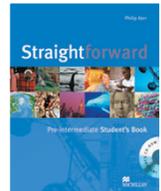
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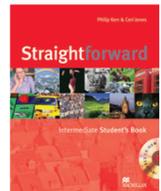
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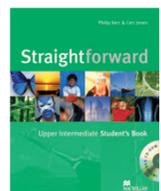
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