

# *Assessment in Action:*

## A CEFR-based Toolkit for ESL Teachers

Level **A** and **B**



Spoken  
Interaction



Spoken  
Production



Listening



Reading



Writing

## Acknowledgments

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CASLT would like to thank the members of the working committee who played an active role in the development of the original resource.

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The Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers (CASLT) encourages excellence in second and additional language teaching and learning throughout Canada by creating opportunities for professional development, by encouraging research, and by facilitating the sharing of information and the exchange of ideas among second language educators.

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# The Assessment in Action Toolkit

## What is the Assessment in Action: A CEFR-based Toolkit for ESL Teachers?

The Assessment in Action Toolkit (AAT) is a set of adaptable tasks that teachers can use in the classroom to support assessment as, of, and for learning at their students' level in the language being taught. The tasks are designed for ESL classrooms but can be adapted for other languages.

## Who is the AAT for?

The AAT is for all language teachers who would like to enrich their repertoire of assessment tools, including those seeking to align their teaching and assessing practices to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR).

## What is the CEFR?

The CEFR defines levels of language proficiency that help teachers and students to identify where students are in their learning and to measure their language development over time.

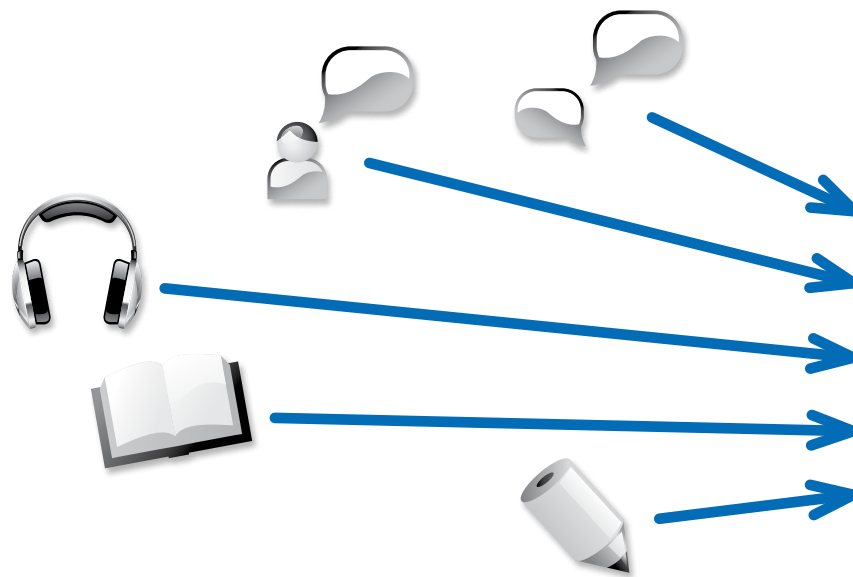
The proficiency levels are defined as “can-do” statements that range from beginner user A1 to near-native user C2 in five communicative activity types: spoken interaction, spoken production, listening, reading, and writing. The CEFR generally proposes an action-oriented approach; language proficiency is described in terms of what students are able to do in the target language. The CEFR is used in over 40 countries worldwide and is increasingly used in Canada.

## Why the AAT?

Many educators have expressed an interest in using Canadian-made CEFR-based resources in their language classrooms. Because few materials are available, CASLT launched a project to update the original CASLT Formative Assessment Toolkit and align it with the CEFR.

## How is the AAT organized?

The AAT consists of 35 tasks. Each task corresponds to one sub-level of the CEFR proficiency levels and one communicative activity type. The breakdown is as follows:

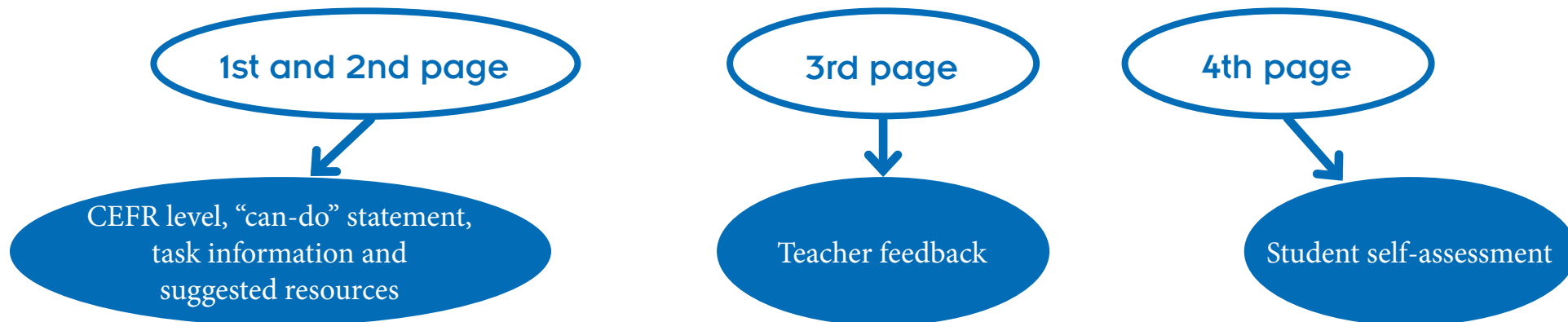


Communicative activity type	Levels						
	A1.1	A1.2	A2.1	A2.2	B1.1	B1.2	B2
Spoken interaction	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Spoken production	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Listening	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Reading	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Writing	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

The AAT also includes a template for teachers to use, to adapt, to create, and to personalize assessment activities for specific classes or groups of students.

## What does the AAT look like?\*

Each task comprises a four-page template that includes:



(\*) See pages 9 to 12

## Content of 1st page

### CEFR level

Each task corresponds to one of the seven proficiency levels defined by the CEFR for the organization of language learning, which are reproduced in the self-assessment grid on page 8 of this publication. The AAT will focus on levels A1 to B2, which are more suited to school students. These levels have been divided into sub-categories A1.1 to B2 to offer more flexibility to teachers when assessing their students' language competencies.

CEFR Levels			
A Basic user	A1	A1.1	A1.2
	A2	A2.1	A2.2
B Independent user	B1	B1.1	B1.2
	B2		
C Proficient user	C1		
	C2		

### Communicative activity type

The tasks require the use of the communicative activity types as defined by the CEFR. Each task type is designed for formative assessment purposes and focuses on one communicative activity. The communicative activity types defined by the CEFR are all identified by their own symbol as displayed here.



## The “can-do” statement

The “can-do” statement defines the purpose of the task and is presented to the students before they start the task so they know what they are working towards achieving.

## What is the task?


The task establishes the communicative purpose of the activity and describes what the students will do to demonstrate what they “can do.” The purpose of the task is for students to engage in a language activity that has a real-life purpose, such as expressing an opinion, asking for information, presenting others, etc. In other words, students should be able to recognize that their language use in the classroom has outside applications.

## How can it be done?

The scenario suggests a context in which the task can be carried out in the classroom. The scenario can be adapted to suit the theme, unit, or curriculum used by the teacher.


## How did it go?

The criteria allow teachers and students to assess their performance in regards to the “I can” task. The criteria are discussed with the students before they start the task so they know what is expected of them and how they can assess their own performance. Additional criteria can also be added.



**A1.1**  
**Spoken interaction**

**I can ask and answer simple questions about myself.**



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**1 What is the task?**  
Students ask and answer questions to share basic personal information.

**2 How can it be done?**  
**Scenario.** Ask and answer questions to share basic personal information such as age, phone number, and where they live in a simulated social setting such as at a “meet and greet”.

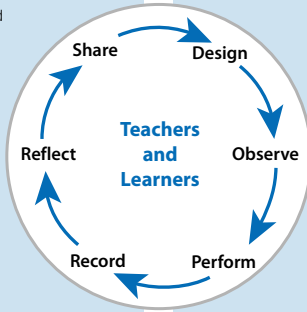
**3 How did it go?**  
**Criteria.** The student:

1. Knows enough words to talk about himself/herself or his/her family (range);
2. Can use short phrases that he/she memorized (accuracy);
3. Can use words and very short phrases (fluency).

**Assessment in Action**

**Preparing for the task**

- Model a conversation that includes the key questions and answers (name, age, phone number, where you live).
- Elicit and record the questions and answers students heard.
- Model and practice role-playing a conversation in pairs.



**Teachers and Learners**

**Doing the task**

- Each student finds a partner.
- Students engage in a conversation to exchange personal information.
- Indicate when it is time to change partners.
- Students engage in a dialogue with a new partner.
- Discuss the exchanges.

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## “Assessment in Action” wheel

Assessment is an ongoing process that is integral to all aspects of the task, from the design of the task to planning for further learning. The “Assessment in Action,” which also comprises assessment “as,” “of,” and “for” learning, is reflected in the assessment wheel, which provides a process to follow in assessing your students’ language competencies.

### Design

The task is designed so that the teacher can plan how to gather evidence related to what the student does, and how the student does it, in order to achieve the “can-do” statement purpose of the task. Students could be involved in this process.

### Observe

Observation of students as they prepare and do the task is an important way for teachers to learn about their students’ strengths and about steps the students need to take during their learning.

### Perform

Performing the task gives the students the opportunity to display what they can do (“can-do” statement) and also “how well” (criteria) they can do it. It is on this performance that the students are assessed for formative purposes.

### Record

Observations, insights from conversations between students and teachers, and evidence from examining student performance and production (what they write and say) during the task are recorded by teachers using tools such as the teacher feedback sheet and by students using tools such as the self-assessment sheet. These may be used for different purposes such as:

- Describing how the student demonstrates his/her CEFR language level;
- Deciding on next learning goals and next steps to reach them.

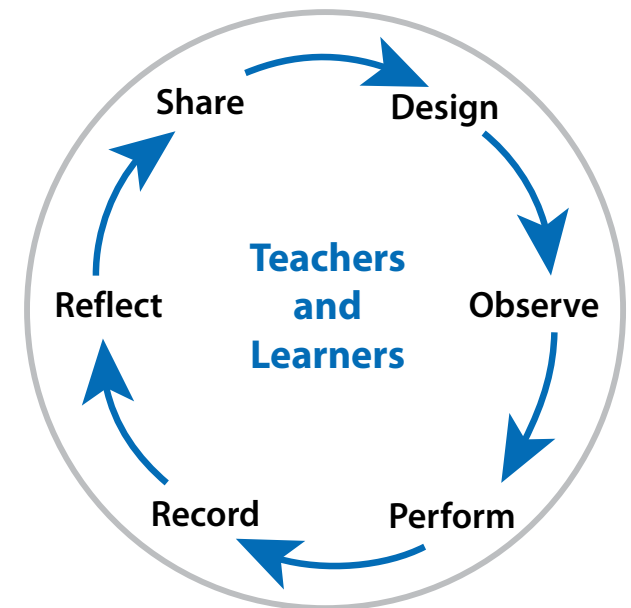
The teacher focuses on recording what the students can do, which is based on the criteria outlined in the task.

### Reflect

Reflection is an activity for both the teacher and the students. The teacher reflects on student performance; his/her observations and conversations with the students will be helpful for planning future learning activities. The students reflect on their performance in relation to the criteria in order to recognize what they did well and what they need to work on next. Self-reflection is a vital component of autonomous learning and a central part of the CEFR and the language portfolio.

### Share

Students and the teacher describe the performance based on the criteria. They share their observations and comments on what went well and which strategies were successful. Students and the teacher also identify and agree on the next steps for learning. The exchange sets the course for students in their learning but also for the teacher in designing future tasks to help students achieve their goals.



“Assessment in Action” wheel



## Preparing for the task


Preparing for the task involves:

1. Communicating the “can-do” statement of the task;
2. Communicating the purpose of the task;
3. Practising the strategies students can use to do the task;
4. Negotiating the expectations or criteria of the task;
5. Using the students’ interests, knowledge, experience, and perspective as a starting point and reference for the task. After all, the “can-do” statements are all about the students, their world, and what they can do with language;
6. Focusing on the language the students need to accomplish the “can-do” statement;
7. Modelling and practising so the students know what the task is, how it can be done, and have time to practise and prepare for the task;
8. Monitoring the students to gauge whether or not support is needed to ensure understanding and success.

## Doing the task


Doing the task includes:

1. Making adaptations to the task to accommodate students’ differences;
2. Allowing the students to have a say in when they will be assessed;
3. Setting up optimal conditions for successful completion of the task (time, material, safe learning environment, etc.)
4. Observing students and recording notes for assessment purposes;
5. Giving students time to complete their self-assessment;
6. Sharing feedback with individual students on their performance;
7. Receiving feedback from the class in terms of the task, level of difficulty, level of interest, etc. to help in future task design.



**A1.1**  
**Spoken interaction**

**I can ask and answer simple questions about myself.**



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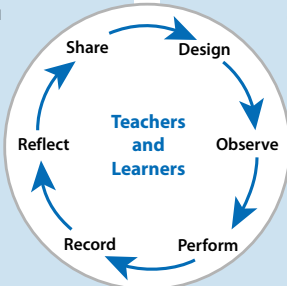
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**Teachers and Learners**

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# Content of 2nd page

## Sample language

The focus of the language is on some sample structures students may need to accomplish the “can-do” statement task purpose. These are a starting point only and may vary depending on each situation. Related vocabulary and grammar play a secondary role to using language forms/structures to communicate the intended message.

## Considerations

Considerations are suggestions or items to think about when designing and performing the task.

## Learner strategies

Students can use strategies to help them complete their task. Students may use other strategies. Students are not assessed on their use of strategies but they can reflect on which ones they used, if any, to accomplish the “can-do” statement.

## Resources

This is a sampling of some possible classroom resources. The resources suggested for other tasks and levels may also be appropriate. Other resources may be added at the discretion of the teacher. The sample resources are subject to change without notice.

**A1.1 Spoken interaction** I can ask and answer simple questions about myself.

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- Sample language**
  - "Hi, how are you? Good, and you?"
  - "What is your name? My name is..."
  - "How old are you? I am 11..."
  - "What is your phone number? My phone number is 453-5136."
  - "Where do you live?"
- Considerations**
  - Consider...
    - ... repeating the activity over a couple of days so as to observe and assess all students.
- Learner strategies**
  - Ask for repetition.
  - Say: "I don't understand."
- Resources**
  - To create a dialogue visit:
    - [esljunction.com/conversation\\_questions/index.html](http://esljunction.com/conversation_questions/index.html)
    - [www.languageguide.org/bt/common/eng/](http://www.languageguide.org/bt/common/eng/)
  - For sample dialogues visit:
    - [en.wikiversity.org/wiki/Primary\\_ESL\\_-\\_What%27s\\_your\\_name%3F](http://en.wikiversity.org/wiki/Primary_ESL_-_What%27s_your_name%3F)
    - [eslprintables.com/vocabulary\\_worksheets/greetings/introducing\\_yourself/](http://eslprintables.com/vocabulary_worksheets/greetings/introducing_yourself/)
    - [eslfast.com/easydialogs/](http://eslfast.com/easydialogs/)

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## Content of 3rd page

### Rate student's performance

The rating is on a four-point scale but may be adapted to suit the teacher's needs and practice.

### Student completed the task

This comment indicates whether or not the student completed the task following the guidelines set by the teacher and students.

### Criteria

Teachers may choose not to use all the criteria for assessment and/or include additional criteria that he/she established with the students.

### Observations

Observations are descriptions of aspects of the student's performance. The observations are related to the criteria.

### Comments and next steps

The comments describe what went well and provide suggestions for the next steps for learning.

### Student showed that he/she can...

An overall rating is given to reflect how well the student demonstrated the ability to do the "can-do" statement.

**A1.1 Spoken Interaction** I can ask and answer simple questions about myself.

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**TEACHER FEEDBACK**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_

The student completed the task: Yes  Partially  No

Criteria to meet the "can-do" statement. The student...	Student's performance	Observations
... knows enough words to talk about himself/herself or his/her family (range).		
... can use short phrases that he/she memorized (accuracy).		
... can use words and very short phrases (fluency).		
Additional possible criteria:		

**Comments and next steps**

Something the student did well: \_\_\_\_\_

A suggestion for what to do next: \_\_\_\_\_

The student showed that he/she can ask simple questions about himself/herself.

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## Content of 4th page

The 4th page is the self-assessment page that will be filled by the student. Its various parts are to a large degree similar to the teacher feedback page, but it also allows the student to specify which of the "learner strategies" suggested on the 2nd page have been used to complete the task.

## How is the AAT used?

- 1. Select a level and communicative activity type:** The purpose of the task is for students to show to what degree they are functioning within the level selected and for the communicative activity type chosen. The task gives the students the opportunity to demonstrate their strengths and which elements of the task they can do.
- 2. Adapt the task:** The tasks are intended to be adapted to suit the unit or theme in the class and to complement existing curriculum. This can be done even if the curriculum is not CEFR-related. Each task has a suggested scenario, but the tasks are designed to be suited to the classroom situation, to students' interests, and to the targeted learning and content.
- 3. Prepare for and do the task:** The teacher will follow the task instructions and/or make modifications. The teacher should also review the "can-do" statement of the task, criteria, strategies, and student self-assessment with students before undertaking the task.
- 4. Fill in the teacher feedback sheet:** The information will provide insight into what the students can do and also *how well they can do it*.
- 5. Fill in the self-assessment sheet:** The teacher or students decide in which language the self-assessment will be completed and the students will complete it to the best of their ability.
- 6. Exchange feedback with the students:** The exchange will allow teachers and students to discuss how well the students performed and future steps for learning and teaching.

## When and how often is the AAT used?

A task performance can be assessed once the teacher and student think the student is ready to be assessed. A single performance provides a snapshot of what a student can do at a moment in time, but the more opportunities students are given to perform a task or tasks, the more accurate the portrayal of students' language competencies will be. In other words, the more frequently the tasks are performed and assessed, the more evidence the teacher has of what the students can do at their level of proficiency.

# Self-assessment grid\*

		A: BASIC USER		B: INDEPENDENT USER		C: PROFICIENT USER	
		A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
Understanding	Listening	I can understand 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.
Speaking	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.
Writing	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. 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 a 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.

\*Drawn from the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (© Council of Europe, 2000)