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The Cambridge Life Competencies Framework

Introduction

Introductory Guide
for Teachers and
Educational Managers

Better
Learning

Why teach Life Competencies?

Our world is changing fast and we need to prepare our students with the skills and experiences that go beyond learning an additional language.

We see the growing need to work together with people from around the world, to think creatively and solve problems, to analyse sources more critically, to communicate our views effectively, and to maintain a positive mindset in an increasingly complex world.

The Cambridge Life Competencies Framework supports teachers in this challenging area. We understand that the engaging and collaborative nature of the language classroom is the perfect place to develop and embed these key qualities, and so our framework provides guidance on how this can be achieved.

What do we mean by 'Life Competencies'?

Often referred to as '21st century skills', life competencies include the knowledge, skills and attitudes we need to participate effectively in the world around us, and to fulfil our potential – in our education, our careers and our lives in general.

We require the ability to be able to work well with other people, even when they are in other parts of the world. We need to be good at communicating our ideas and opinions, whether that's speaking up in small meetings or writing posts to millions of readers. We need the creativity to generate new ideas and the imagination to find solutions to problems.

It's also important that we can separate facts from opinion and evaluate the reliability of information we hear, and from there construct persuasive arguments. We need to be experts at learning – we will be challenged to learn new skills throughout our lives.

We must be able to better understand how our actions impact on others, in our society and in the world around us. And, we need to strengthen our ability to manage our emotions, persevere in the face of adversity and believe in our own ability to succeed.

Why integrate Life Competencies into English language teaching?

Life Competencies can be integrated into any subject, but they are particularly suitable for teaching English. Learning an additional language already involves many of the skills we're talking about such as communication, collaboration and critical thinking. This means there is lots of scope to develop these skills further, in an integrated way, through the teaching of English.

Nasser,
Student, Saudi Arabia



How does the Cambridge Life Competencies Framework help?

The Cambridge Life Competencies Framework is a way of making sense of the different skills we want our students to develop, in addition to learning English. There are so many different views on which skills are important, and how to develop them, that it can become overwhelming and difficult to understand what they mean for teachers.

By providing a map of some of the most important life skills, the framework allows you to gain a deeper

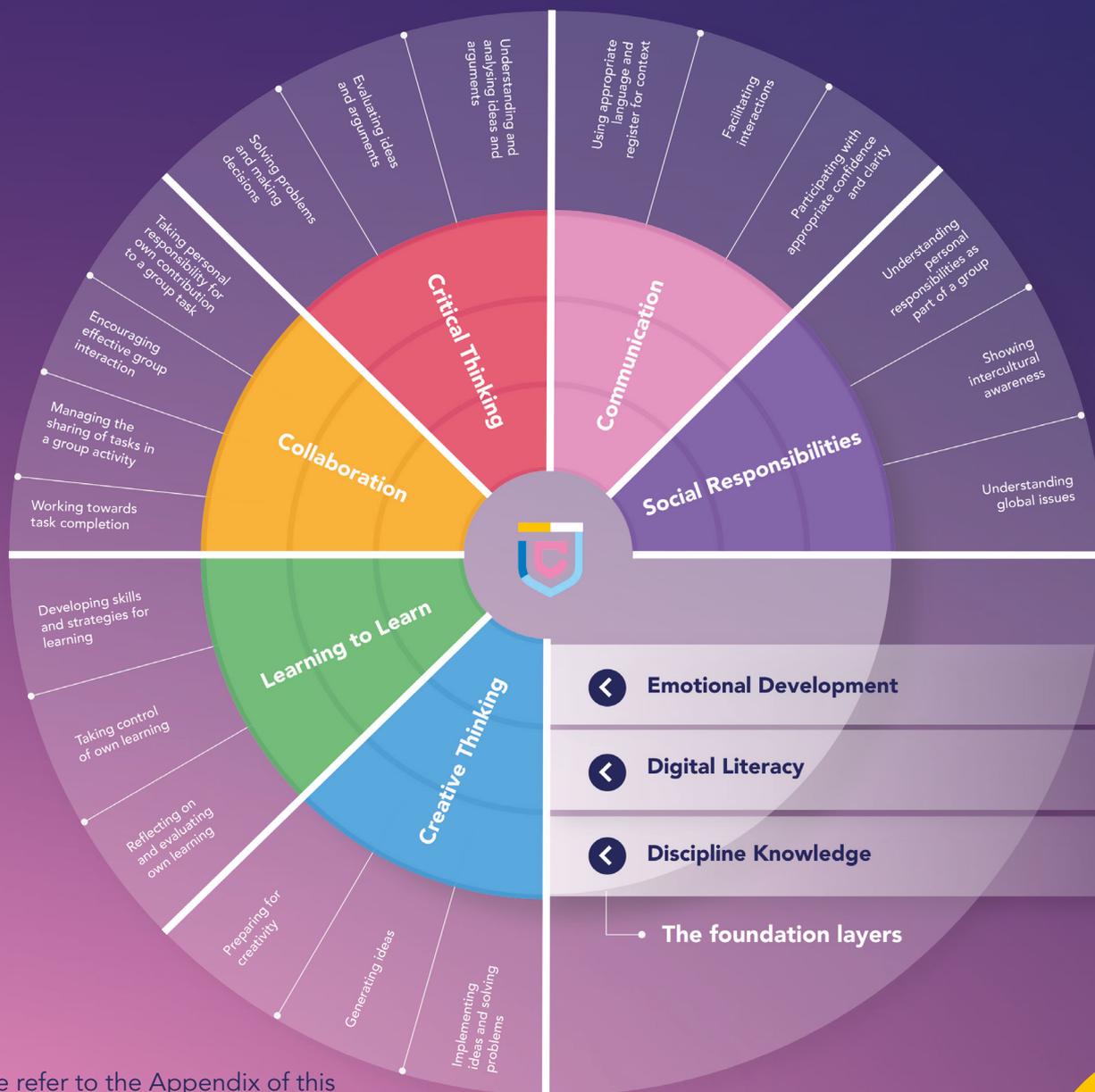
understanding of what each of the competencies involve. It allows you to integrate them more systematically into your teaching, by thinking more carefully about which specific skills you are developing, and what you want your students to be able to do.

We group all of these skills into six main competencies, with three foundational layers that weave through all of these skills.



Cambridge Life Competencies

A framework to develop skills for life



Please refer to the Appendix of this booklet for further detail on each area of the competency wheel.

Key features of the Cambridge Life Competencies Framework

The framework has six **Competencies** that describe how these essential skills develop and vary across different stages of education, as learners grow and change.

CREATIVE THINKING	Learners actively participate in creative activities, generate new ideas and use them to solve problems.
CRITICAL THINKING	Learners identify patterns and relationships, evaluate ideas and use these skills to solve problems.
LEARNING TO LEARN	Learners develop practical skills to support and take control of their learning and reflect on their own progress.
COMMUNICATION	Learners choose the most appropriate language to use in different situations, manage conversations effectively and express themselves clearly and confidently.
COLLABORATION	Learners work well together in groups through actively taking part in group activities, listening to others, sharing tasks and finding solutions to problems.
SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES	Learners recognise and describe different roles and responsibilities in a variety of groups and understand cultural and global issues.

How can you truly understand what each Competency really means? The framework breaks down each competency into more detail, so that you can see much more clearly which skills your students need to develop to be good at that particular Competency.

Each Competency is divided into **Core Areas** – these are the broad skills and behaviours that make up each competency. These Core Areas are then divided into **Component** skills – these give more clarity to exactly what is meant by each core area, as shown in this example from Creative Thinking:

CREATIVE THINKING	Preparing for creativity	Participating in a range of creative activities
		Exploring issues and concepts
		Considering multiple perspectives
		Finding connections
	Generating ideas	Generating multiple ideas
		Elaborating on and combining ideas
		Imagining alternatives and possibilities
	Implementing ideas and solving problems	Experimenting with and refining ideas
		Implementing, presenting and explaining ideas and solutions

Along with this, the framework also lists **Can Do Statements** – these describe the observable behaviours that could be suitable targets or objectives for learners at each stage of their learning.

To help English language teachers, we also provide **Example Language** – suggestions for phrases and language that your students might find helpful, when developing each of the Life Competencies.

We demonstrate this below for Learning to Learn at the Secondary stage of learning:

Learning to Learn

SECONDARY

CORE AREAS	COMPONENTS	EXAMPLE CAN DO STATEMENTS	EXAMPLE LANGUAGE
Developing skills and strategies for learning	Engaging in directed activities	Follows instructions to complete homework as required.	When is the homework for?
	Using effective systems for finding, keeping and retrieving information	Organises notes systematically.	Does this go at the front or the back of my book?
	Using effective strategies for learning and retaining information	Records vocabulary in an appropriate way (e.g. in a vocabulary notebook or in a vocabulary flashcard app).	I use ... to learn vocabulary.
	Using effective strategies for comprehension and production tasks	Uses context to guess the meanings of unfamiliar words.	I think it means...
Taking control of own learning	Setting goals and planning for learning	Produces a revision plan to focus on key skills and knowledge in a systematic way.	I'm going to study every day before dinner.
	Taking initiative to improve own learning	Chooses ways to practise English outside the classroom (e.g. watching clips/TV/films in English, using English on social media, or reading novels/magazines in English).	I'm going to [watch/read]...
	Managing the learning environment	Reduces distractions when working (e.g. putting their phone out of sight).	I'm going to put my phone away.
	Managing attitudes and emotions	Overcomes affective reactions which might adversely impact on learning (e.g. anxiety, mood, friendship/relationship issues).	I'm going to take some deep breaths before I start.
Reflecting on and evaluating own learning	Keeping track of progress	Uses evaluation criteria (e.g. from an exam or coursebook) to create their own progress checklists.	
	Evaluating learning and progress	Plans for improving subject skills and/or knowledge by thinking about what could have been done better.	Next time, I'm going to...
	Using feedback to improve learning	Takes on board feedback from teachers and/or peers and uses it to improve.	Thanks. What else could I...?

The Learning Journey

The development of these skills looks very different for learners at different stages of their learning journey. You may be asking, 'what does Critical Thinking look like for five year olds?' or 'what about Collaboration for university students?' The framework helps teachers understand how their students may develop and demonstrate each Competency at different stages of learning.



Variation across the stages of learning is shown in this example, taken from the Component 'identifying and classifying information' from the Core Area 'understanding and analysing links and arguments', within the Critical Thinking competency:

CRITICAL THINKING		
Understanding and analysing links and arguments		
Identifying and classifying information		
	EXAMPLE CAN DO STATEMENT	EXAMPLE LANGUAGE
PRE-PRIMARY	Sorts, arranges and describes objects by shape, size, colour, weight, texture and position.	<i>It's a [square/circle/triangle].</i>
PRIMARY	Identifies characters, setting, plot and themes in a story.	<i>It's about [a man]...</i>
SECONDARY	Identifies the basic structure of an argument.	<i>This is the conclusion.</i>
HIGHER EDUCATION	Identifies the key points in an argument.	<i>The main point is...</i>
AT WORK	Summarises key points from business-related documents and presentations.	<i>The key point is...</i>

Life competencies in learning materials

English teachers are already teaching aspects of life competencies through the activities they use in standard course books and self-made activities. For example, speaking tasks are likely to include aspects of Communication and Collaboration and reading tasks are likely to involve an aspect of Critical Thinking. However, the framework helps teachers to be more systematic about including aspects of each Competency and enables them to enhance activities to include more of these aspects, when appropriate.

Here are some examples of how Cambridge has used the framework to develop activities in course books that promote the development of life competencies.



PRIMARY

Here, students practise various stages of creative thinking skills by making their own game. By discussing games they already know, they prepare for creativity through exploring issues and concepts and finding connections (part 1), and through brainstorming, they consider multiple perspectives (part 2). In creating the new game, they generate, elaborate on and combine multiple ideas (part 3). Finally, by presenting their new game ideas to the class and reflecting on the feedback, they present, explain and refine their ideas and solutions (parts 4 and 5).

Students also practise collaboration by working in groups. For this, they need to take responsibility for their own contribution, for example through actively contributing to a task. They need to encourage effective group interaction, for example through listening and responding respectfully, and through establishing ways of working together.

The Big Challenge 6B

How can we create our own language game?

Your challenge is to make a game to help you practice your English.

- 1 Discuss** What are some games that you like? What makes them fun? Are they puzzles, memory games, mime games? How could you use games like that to learn English?
- 2 Brainstorm** What ideas do you have for a new language game? In groups, make a list of your ideas and choose the one you like the best.
- 3 Create** What materials will you need to play the game? What are the rules? Is it a competitive game? How will you know who is the winner?
- 4 Present** your game idea to the class.
- 5 Reflect** Listen to feedback from your classmates. Do they have ideas to make your game more fun or more educational?

We made a spelling game. It's called **Score for More**. It combines spelling and basketball. You need a box and a foam ball. The referee reads a word out loud. Then, the player on the first team tries to spell it. If they get it right, they get to take a shot. If they get the ball in the box, the next person on their team takes a turn. If they don't score, it's the other team's turn!

Why is language special? Look back through the unit. Share your ideas with the class.

AB pages 117–19

135

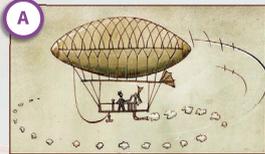
SECONDARY

Here, students engage in creative thinking by creating a timeline around an invention. They prepare for creativity by researching the information they need for this task, thereby exploring issues and concepts and finding connections. By finding or making their own timeline pictures, they learn to experiment with and refine their ideas. Students also practise collaboration skills by working in groups. They need to manage the sharing of tasks by agreeing what needs to be done and managing the distribution of tasks.

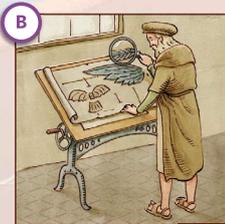
Lastly, students engage with critical thinking by identifying, gathering and organising relevant information for their timeline, thus solving problems and making decisions. In addition to evaluating ideas and arguments for their own timelines, they are also asked to evaluate specific information when looking at their classmates' timelines (exercise 7).

OWN IT!

HIGH (AND NOT SO HIGH) ACHIEVERS THE EARLY HISTORY OF FLIGHT



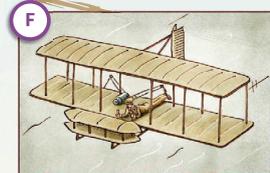
2 The brilliant Italian scientist and inventor Leonardo da Vinci has looked into how birds fly. Using his discoveries, he designs the world's first flying machine – the ornithopter. But he has the intelligence not to try it himself! Later, other people try out similar designs, but no one gets very far.



3 Frenchman Denis Bolar has come up with his own flying machine that uses wings with springs. Poor Bolar tries to show off his idea, but kills himself when the springs break.



4 French businessman Joseph-Michel Montgolfier and his brother, Jacques-Étienne, have invented the world's first hot-air balloon. Now they make a second flight with passengers. But they don't put themselves on board. The three lucky passengers are a hen, a duck and a sheep!



PLAN

5 Work in groups. Choose one of the inventions in the box or choose your own. Then complete the steps below.

the bicycle the computer
the Internet the skyscraper

- Decide what tasks you need to do to complete your timeline and how long each will take.
- Set long-term and short-term deadlines and include some extra time.
- Decide who will do each task.
- Research the information you need.
- Find or make pictures for your timeline.

PRESENT

6 Display your timeline on your classroom wall. Remember to include important dates, people and events, interesting pictures and the tips in *How to manage your time*.

CHECK

7 Look at your classmates' timelines. Which ones have interesting facts?

ADULT

Here, students practise creative thinking by giving a presentation about an invention or discovery. They need to generate multiple ideas, elaborate on them, and imagine alternatives and possibilities (exercises 1 and 2).

When working with a partner (exercises 3–5), students practise communication skills by learning to structure texts effectively, and by using appropriate language and presentation styles with confidence and clarity.

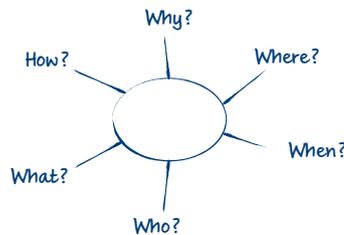
At the end of the task, students engage in learning to learn by reflecting on and evaluating their progress. The checklist tool helps them to keep track of and reflect on their progress (exercise 6).

SPEAKING TASK

Give a short presentation about an invention or discovery that has changed our lives.

PREPARE

- 1 Work alone. Make a list of inventions or discoveries that have changed our lives.
- 2 Choose one of the inventions and prepare an ideas map about it. Write questions on the diagram.



- 3 Work with a partner. Discuss your research questions and help each other answer the questions on the ideas maps.

PRACTISE

- 4 Work with a partner. Take turns to practise giving your presentation.
- 5 Give each other feedback using the questions below.

- 1 Was the presentation clearly organized and interesting?
- 2 Was there a clear description of the invention/discovery?
- 3 Were there examples of how the invention/discovery has changed our lives?

PRESENT

- 6 Work in small groups. Take turns to give your presentations. Discuss which one of your inventions has had the biggest influence on our lives.

TASK CHECKLIST

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| Did you use phrases with <i>make</i> correctly? | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Did you use passive and active forms correctly? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Did you outline the topic clearly? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Did you explain clearly how something is used? | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Development of the framework

Our Cambridge Life Competencies Framework has been developed by the Language Research Team at Cambridge University Press, working in collaboration with Cambridge Assessment and a wide range of academics and practitioners around the world. It is an ongoing collaborative project, evolving through stages of validation and teacher feedback. Go to cambridge.org/clcf to see how you can get involved.

Using the framework

How can the framework be used to improve English language programmes? Although you may be integrating aspects of many of the life competencies in your English classes already, using the framework can help you do so in a more systematic way. Here are some examples of what this could look like in practice:

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT	TEACHER DEVELOPMENT
Use Core Areas, Components and Example Can Do Statements at each learning stage to develop curriculum learning outcomes	Develop awareness of the Competencies that learners should be developing at each stage of learning
LEARNING MATERIALS	EVALUATION
Use Core Areas, Components and Example Can Do Statements to design suitable learning activities	Develop appropriate tasks and record-keeping to monitor success in developing life competencies

If you would like further information on using the framework in your context, please do get in touch by emailing language@cambridge.org.

How do I find out more?

Our **competency booklets** contain a detailed breakdown of each competency in the framework, including example Can Do Statements for each stage of learning. They also include practical tips for teachers on how to incorporate these competencies in their English classrooms – whether they are teaching young learners, teenagers or adults.

Our **stage of learning booklets** bring together the detailed breakdowns of each competency from the competency booklets, as well as relevant teacher tips tailored to young learners, teenagers and adults.

Visit cambridge.org/clcf to access the full range of competency booklets, watch short videos explaining each competency and find out how you can get involved in Cambridge Life Competencies Framework project



Appendix A – Cambridge Life Competencies Framework overview

Shown below are the **Competencies, Core Areas** and **Components** of the Cambridge Life Competencies Framework. These are common across all stages of learning – Can Do Statements and Example Language (not shown here) vary according to stage. These can be found in our Competency and Stage of Learning booklets.

CREATIVE THINKING	Preparing for creativity	Participating in a range of creative activities
		Exploring issues and concepts
		Considering multiple perspectives
		Finding connections
	Generating ideas	Generating multiple ideas
		Elaborating on and combining ideas
		Imagining alternatives and possibilities
	Implementing ideas and solving problems	Experimenting with and refining ideas
		Implementing, presenting and explaining ideas and solutions
CRITICAL THINKING	Understanding and analysing ideas and arguments	Identifying and classifying information
		Recognising patterns and relationships
		Interpreting and drawing inferences from arguments and data
	Evaluating ideas and arguments	Evaluating specific information or points in an argument
		Evaluating arguments as a whole
		Drawing appropriate conclusions
	Solving problems and making decisions	Identifying and understanding problems
		Identifying, gathering and organising relevant information
		Evaluating options and recommendations to come to a decision
		Justifying decisions and solutions
		Evaluating the effectiveness of implemented solutions
	LEARNING TO LEARN	Developing skills and strategies for learning
Using effective systems for finding, keeping and retrieving information		
Using effective strategies for learning and retaining information		
Using effective strategies for comprehension and production tasks		
Taking control of own learning		Setting goals and planning for learning
		Taking initiative to improve own learning
		Managing the learning environment
		Managing attitudes and emotions
Reflecting on and evaluating own learning		Keeping track of progress
		Evaluating learning and progress
		Using feedback to improve learning

COMMUNICATION	Using appropriate language and register for context	Using language appropriate for the situation
		Using a variety of language and communication strategies to achieve a desired effect
		Adapting language use according to different cultures and social groups
	Facilitating interactions	Using communication strategies to facilitate conversations
		Using strategies for overcoming language gaps and communication breakdowns
	Participating with appropriate confidence and clarity	Structuring spoken and written texts effectively
Using appropriate language and presentation styles with confidence and fluency		
COLLABORATION	Taking personal responsibility for own contribution to a group task	Actively contributing to a task
		Taking on different roles
	Encouraging effective group interaction	Listening and responding respectfully
		Establishing ways of working together
		Engaging and supporting others
	Managing the sharing of tasks in a group activity	Agreeing what needs to be done
		Managing the distribution of tasks
	Working towards task completion	Ensuring progress towards a goal
Identifying issues and challenges		
Resolving issues		
SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES	Understanding personal responsibilities as part of a social group	Understanding responsibilities within a social group
		Fulfilling responsibilities within a social group
	Showing intercultural awareness	Understanding aspects of own culture
		Understanding aspects of other cultures
		Interacting with others across cultures
	Understanding global issues	Discussing a range of global issues
Recognising personal impact on global issues		





Further Reading

For more information on this topic, please see:

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Language Research Team,
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Cambridge Life Competencies

A framework to develop skills for life

You can find information about the other competencies in the Cambridge Life Competencies Framework at cambridge.org/clcf

- ✓ Creative Thinking
- ✓ Critical Thinking
- ✓ Learning to Learn
- ✓ Communication
- ✓ Collaboration
- ✓ Social Responsibilities
- ✓ Emotional Development