# CEFR Companion Volume implementation toolbox

Written Interaction

This is the script of the video in the “Written Interaction” module. The script follows the order of the video. The video starts with a very brief introduction that explains the idea of language interaction and then focuses on the distinction between written production and written interaction. Next, differences between spoken and written interaction are discussed. Finally, a summary of the main ideas presented in the descriptor scales for written interaction is provided.

# Slide 1

Written Interaction

# Slide 2

Interaction plays a central role in human communication. According to CEFR Companion Volume, “interaction can be considered to be the origin of language, with its interpersonal, collaborative, and transactional functions” (CEFR CV 2020: 70). The interpersonal function of language is the use of language to communicate with other people, to take on roles, to express and understand feelings, to give opinions and judgments. The interpersonal function is about the social world, especially the relationship between the speaker and the listener. The collaborative function of language helps us to cooperate with others, brainstorm ideas, think critically, to build up on other language users’ ideas as we plan, organize, and carry out tasks. Finally, transactional language is the language that is used to make a transaction, that is to achieve a specific result or objective; for example, when we write a letter of complaint to obtain a refund.

Interaction is also fundamental in educational and professional contexts. This is reflected in the descriptors for interaction strategies, for example:

* the ability to initiate, maintain, and end a conversation or discussion in the scale for *Turn- taking*;
* or the ability to facilitate the flow of discussion by confirming comprehension, giving feedback, summarizing the main points to move the discussion forward, or inviting others to speak in the scale for *Cooperating.*

Interaction involves two or more language users who create discourse in a joint effort. The central point in the discussion of language interaction is spoken interaction, which has been described in CEFR Companion Volume using 10 updated and extended descriptor scales. This focus is understandable as the majority of interaction activities are carried out by the medium of speech, for example through a conversation, discussion, information exchange, or an interview.

Written interaction also plays an important role because in some cases it is appropriate, more effective, or even necessary to use the medium of the script. What is more, over the past two decades written interaction has taken an increasingly significant role, because of the fast development of the internet and online communication tools. Rather than further develop the category of written

Interaction, the CEFR Companion Volume presents the new category of online interaction, which will be dealt with in another VITbox presentation.

# Slide 3

In this presentation,

* I am going to show the differences between written production and written interaction;
* then I will discuss briefly the differences between spoken and written interaction;
* and finally, I will summarize the main ideas presented in the descriptor scales for written interaction.

# Slide 4

Both the original *CEFR* document as well as the *CEFR Companion Volume* distinguish between written production and written interaction*.* In the process of **production,** the text is usually produced for a particular reader or audience with a particular purpose in mind, but the writer does not usually receive direct feedback. For instance, a short story or a book will receive delayed feedback in the form of reviews or the number of copies sold but that will not affect the short story or the book, which are finished products.

In **interaction,** on the other hand, at least two individuals participate in a written exchange in which production and reception alternate like in a dialogue. Participants of written interaction do not only produce texts and receive feedback information on their texts in turn but the texts they receive make them form expectations about what might be going to happen in the next stage of the interaction. The reader may also ask for clarification if the received information is not clear. The writer may give explanations or supply additional information or arguments to persuade the reader of his or her views.

For example, receiving an email from a friend about joint holiday plans will certainly provoke a response because it is important to decide on several crucial aspects, such as the destination of the holiday, holiday type, transport, time, cost, responsibilities, and many other things. The writer of the email and the receiver will probably need to exchange several emails to finally negotiate a satisfactory holiday plan.

Thus, in contrast to written production, the process of text creation in interaction is less controlled and the subsequent stages of communication exchange are shaped together by all the participants of written interaction.

# Slide 5

Interaction through the medium of written language includes such activities as:

* personal and professional correspondence by letter, e-mail, or fax;
* filling in forms with personal details;
* passing and exchanging messages;
* writing notes to, for example, friends, service people, or teachers.

Interaction may of course involve a mixture of media: spoken, written, audio-visual, online, paralinguistic, and paratextual. In the situation of planning a joint holiday, the exchange of emails might not be sufficient or effective enough to make the final decisions. It might be necessary to make a phone call or even meet and discuss some important details concerning accommodation or travel.

# Slide 6

Both in written interaction and spoken interaction discourse is co-constructed; that is, created in the act of communication by the participants of this communication. However, the processes behind these two types of interaction differ to some extent.

In spoken interaction the response is immediate. Productive and receptive processes overlap. The exchanges between interlocutors usually happen directly one after another without any interval, sometimes they even overlap. While one interlocutor is producing an utterance, the other interlocutor is processing it, making expectations of the remaining part of the speaker’s message, and planning the response or even interrupting.

In spoken interaction discourse is cumulative. In other words, as an interaction proceeds, the interlocutors, develop expectations, negotiate meanings, focus on relevant issues, exchange information, or reach agreements. They use repetitions and confirmations and build their utterances on what the other speaker said, sometimes uncritically. These processes are reflected in the form of the utterances produced, e. g. *In other words, …you mean …, right?* Or: *Actually, I think….* Or: *So, summing up what we have decided on so far….* Or: *Do we all agree on that?* Or: *I’d go along with that.*

In written interaction (e. g. correspondence by letter or e-mail) the processes of reception and production remain distinct. The text is produced by the author and then it is received by the recipient of the letter or email. The recipient’s answer is received by the author afterward. There is here an opportunity to ask for clarification or negotiate meaning but there is a clear separation of the processes.

# Slide 7

The CEFR Companion Volume provides us with three scales that describe a language user’s progression in written interaction. In addition to the scale for ***Overall Written Interaction***, two scales describe this progress in more detail: ***Correspondence*** and ***Notes, messages, and forms***. These scales were already developed in the original CEFR document but the CEFR Companion Volume presents their more elaborate and extended versions.

The scale of ***Correspondence*** describes the skills necessary to participate in an interpersonal exchange. The scale relates to both informal and formal correspondence through a letter or e-mail.

The other scale, ***Notes, messages, and forms,*** focuses on information transfer. Information transfer can be achieved using forms, by leaving or taking telephone messages, or by writing notes to other people.

# Slide 8

Progression up the scale of Correspondence activities in CEFR CV is characterized by the following qualities:

CEFR pre-A level is characterized by short phrases with personal information that are made with the help of a dictionary.

CEFR A levels are characterized by simple, personal text messages, emails, or letters about hobbies or preferences which are still composed with the help of a dictionary at the A1 level. At the A2 level, the range of message topics becomes wider including routine activities, invitations, thanks, apologies, arrangements, and confirmations. At the A2+ level, the language user can even respond in a short email to questions about a new product or activity.

CEFR B levels: Focus on a wider range of correspondence types, e. g. application, transactional or opinion letter/email, giving detailed accounts, and expressing thoughts about cultural events at the B1 level. At the B2 level language users can employ formality and conventions appropriate to the context, convey degrees of emotion, and write non-routine professional letters with a degree of fluency and effectiveness. They start understanding idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms.

CEFR C levels: At the C1 level one can interact in writing with effectiveness, complexity, accuracy, and flexibility, whereas at the C2 level language users can write virtually any type of correspondence in an appropriate tone and style.

# Slide 9

Progression up the scale of Notes, Messages and Forms activities in the CEFR CV is characterized by the following qualities:

Language users who are at CEFR Pre-A level can fill in simple registration forms with personal details such as name, nationality, address, and marital status.

At CEFR A1 level language users can write short messages e. g. about the time of arrival at a place or they can fill out a registration form. At the A2 level, they can fill in most everyday forms, e. g. to request a visa or to open a bank account. At the level of A2+ language users can take short messages related to areas of immediate need if it is possible to ask for repetition or reformulation.

CEFR B1 level focuses on taking routine messages in personal, professional, or academic contexts and writing notes on the phone or related to information of immediate relevance getting across points that are relevant for the language user. At the B1 level, a language user can take more complex notes if the caller dictates the points clearly and sympathetically. At the B2 level language users can take or leave complex notes in personal, professional, and academic contexts provided asking for clarification or elaboration is possible.

As regards CEFR C levels, there are no separate descriptors here. This does not mean that it is not possible to create such descriptors. Especially when we take into account specific professional or academic contexts which might require the knowledge and skills in a language for specific purposes. An example here might be filling out a form for an international project proposal.

# Slide 10

To conclude, the CEFR Companion Volume presents a collection of updated and elaborated descriptors for written interaction. The descriptors are organized into three scales: ***Overall written interaction***, ***Correspondence***, and ***Notes, messages and forms***. This collection is not exhaustive; its function is to serve as a reference tool for the curriculum development of a language course. They can be used for

personal language users’ learning objectives and guidelines or self-assessment reference material. The descriptors are adaptable to specific educational contexts and may serve as an inspiration for classroom task development.

# Slide 11

If you wish to learn more about written interaction, consider referring to the following books: Council of Europe. 2001. *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning,*

*Teaching, Assessment.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://rm.coe.int/1680459f97>

Council of Europe. 2020. *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment. Companion volume.* Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing. [https://rm.coe.int/common-european-framework-of-reference-for-languages-learning-](https://rm.coe.int/common-european-framework-of-reference-for-languages-learning-teaching/16809ea0d4) [teaching/16809ea0d4](https://rm.coe.int/common-european-framework-of-reference-for-languages-learning-teaching/16809ea0d4)

Caekebeke, Sander and Iris De Meersman. 2020. *Bachelor Degree: Written interaction*. ([https://scriptiebank.be/sites/default/files/thesis/2020-](https://scriptiebank.be/sites/default/files/thesis/2020-10/Written%20interaction%20in%20the%20TEFL-classroom.pdf) [10/Written%20interaction%20in%20the%20TEFL-classroom.pdf](https://scriptiebank.be/sites/default/files/thesis/2020-10/Written%20interaction%20in%20the%20TEFL-classroom.pdf)) (date of access: 29 October 2023).