

# DynEd Course and Test Alignment with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

## Introduction

The **DynEd Courseware** and **Assessment Tests** align with the **Common European Framework of Reference for Languages** (CEFR) levels from A1 to C2. DynEd's courseware and assessments focus on communicative competence and are designed to provide a complete educational package that will facilitate a learner's progress from a beginning level to an advanced level. The **DynEd Certification Program** is a comprehensive, goal-based system that guarantees that learners who complete the courseware and exams for a CEFR level are indeed able to function in English at the appropriate CEFR level.

## DynEd Courseware

DynEd's courseware is unique, based on modern neuroscience theory, and how the human brain learns. DynEd's foundation is Recursive Hierarchical Recognition (RHR), an approach developed over several decades and follows many innovative language-acquisition principles:

- Language learning is a skill, more similar to playing a musical instrument than to memorizing. Language learning and English automaticity develop best through hierarchical repetition and practice. Each DynEd lesson requires students to practice variations of key language, multiple times during a lesson.
- Listening and speaking should be taught before reading and writing so that learners acquire their new language the same way they acquired their native language. DynEd students always hear new language before seeing it written out.
- An inductive methodology is more effective than a deductive methodology. At DynEd, learners encounter new language in a clear context, with contextual clues communicated by icons and audio. All new language builds on previously learned language and is repeated in clear patterns frequently enough that learners master it much more effectively than if they were simply given rules, as in traditional grammar books. DynEd's 'spiral syllabus' ensures that learners reencounter concepts until they have been completely acquired. These concepts follow the guidelines laid down by the Council of Europe in the CEFR guidelines. In the CEFR level descriptions, key concepts are introduced at lower levels, but reappear at higher levels.
- Accelerated Language learning leverages the brain's need to make sense of things. The brain uses patterns and fills in incomplete patterns automatically. DynEd employs language-pattern recognition to accelerate acquisition as learning proceeds from familiarity, to recognition, to comprehension, to mastery and automaticity.
- DynEd's courseware is available only as part of a program of blended learning. Learners are presented with new language and practice it in the DynEd courseware. In the live classes, teachers give learners the opportunity to use the new language in communicative activities.

- To truly master a language, a learner must have available a range of content that reaches from true beginner, meaning that the learner knows no English, up to the top of CEFR's C2 level. Unlike most courseware, DynEd provides truly authentic English at the C1 and C2 levels, including the course, *Advanced Listening*, in which learners listen to and analyze challenging college lectures from Stanford University to develop mastery of English at the highest levels.
- Language is most effectively taught as a series of concepts, such as duration and frequency. In DynEd's courseware, learners encounter the key concepts of English in a rational order in which each concept contributes to the understanding of subsequent concepts. This philosophy is consistent with the view of language expressed by the Council of Europe in all of their documents related to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

More detailed information about RHR is available on the DynEd website in the whitepaper below:

Knowles, P.L., 2008. *Recursive Hierarchical Recognition: A Brain-based Theory of Language Learning*;  
 First published as a plenary paper in FEELTA/NATE Conference Proceedings

## DynEd Tests

Both of DynEd's Assessment Tests are computer-adaptive, variable-length tests. The tests respond and adjust to student performance. If a student is doing well, the test will ramp up quickly to higher-level items. For higher-level students, the test will continue until a student has completed 60-75 items for each part of the test, or 135-140 test items for someone taking both Part 1 and Part 2. For students at a lower-language level, the test will move more slowly and will end once a student misses a significant number of items at any stage of the test or if the ongoing total score falls below specified cut-off points. For the beginner, the test may stop after only 10 or 15 items, placing the student at the lowest level and reducing unnecessary frustration at having to face a large number of test items that are too difficult. In such a case, the test may only take two or three minutes. Test items are randomly selected from a database of relevant questions, not all of which are used in a particular test session. This ensures variation for each student and from one test session to another.

**DynEd's tests follow a similar content design, scoring algorithms and adaptive methodology, although the questions and underlying logic are different.** Test results are not broken down into individual competencies, such as grammar, vocabulary, listening, reading and spoken Interaction. Instead, the test generates a single holistic measure of skill level that represents the overall placement of a student within the CEFR framework. Recognizing that listening is the foundational skill for the development of English fluency and communicative competence and is a reliable predictor of other linguistic competencies, the tests place emphasis on the ability of the test-taker to understand and respond to spoken language of increasing conceptual difficulty in real time. Also included are items which require processing text input of varying degrees of conceptual, grammatical and lexical complexity. This allows us to draw inferences about the learner's underlying linguistic competence and thereby their ability to perform successfully in communicative tasks and interactions. Listening comprehension is also seen as a reflection of the learner's level of vocabulary acquisition, grammatical awareness, and phonological processing—all key subskills in the development of English fluency.

## The Alignment Process

DynEd's courseware and tests have undergone extensive analysis to ensure that they are consistent with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). In order to ensure the alignment with CEFR, it was necessary to:

1. Review the content of the DynEd courseware and tests on a level-by-level basis.
2. Confirm their alignment with the standards set down by the CEFR.

**Step 1** was done by examining in detail the content in each unit or module of the DynEd courseware and each item in the tests to determine which concepts were presented, practiced or assessed. For the courseware, this was a relatively straightforward process as all concepts, skills and subskills are listed in the syllabus for each DynEd course. For example, the future perfect tense is taught in *Dynamic Business English* Unit Two.

For the DynEd tests, this was carried out by carefully examining each of the thousands of items in the tests. For example, item #255 in the DynEd Placement Test is a fill-in-the-blank item that is testing the future perfect tense:

If she stays another year, she \_\_\_\_\_ here for 20 years!

Correct answer: *will have been*

**Step 2** was done by taking the analysis of the units and modules in the DynEd courseware and of the items in both tests done in Step 1 and comparing the placement of each concept to standard reference works on CEFR to check its correlation. The primary work referenced was the document *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*. This is the main manual for CEFR from the Council of Europe, the organization that created the CEFR. We also consulted an associated document that deals entirely with testing issues, the *Manual for Language Test Development and Examining* (2011). In addition, the *English Profile* website, <http://www.englishprofile.org>, provides points of reference in aligning tests and curricula with the CEFR levels. The English Profile tools indicate the CEFR level at which learners are assumed to be familiar with a particular grammatical item or piece of vocabulary, along with an appropriate 'Can-Do' statement. These tables allow a comparison between an institution's course descriptors and test items with CEFR levels.

For example, the English Profile tools can be helpful in confirming that the Future Perfect tense, the structure used as an example above, is taught or assessed in an appropriate place in all DynEd content. Here is the English Profile table for the Future Perfect tense:

FUTURE	future perfect simple	B2	FORM: AFFIRMATIVE Can use the affirmative form with 'will'.
FUTURE	future perfect simple	B2	FORM: NEGATIVE Can use the negative form with 'will'.
FUTURE	future perfect simple	B2	USE: EVENTS COMPLETED IN THE FUTURE Can use the future perfect simple with 'will' to talk about something which is expected to be completed (or not completed) by a certain point in the future.

As this sample chart indicates, once a person reaches a B2 proficiency level, he or she should be familiar with both the form and primary uses of the Future Perfect Simple. In DynEd's courseware, the Future Perfect tense is presented and practiced extensively in *Dynamic Business English's* Unit 2, which is part of DynEd's B2 Certification Program. In our database of test items for the DynEd's test, the group of items assessing mastery of the future perfect tense is assigned to the B2 level. This allowed us to confirm that DynEd's treatment of the future perfect tense correlates to the guidelines set down by the Council of Europe in their CEFR documentation.

DynEd undertook to analyze all key concepts in the courseware and tests and correlate them to the guidelines for CEFR. The most important concepts and structures are summarized in the chart below. The list is, of course, not comprehensive; it is meant to show that the most important concepts correlate strongly. The CEFR descriptors for each level are taken from the Council of Europe's *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*.

CEFR Level	CEFR Descriptors	DynEd Descriptors of What Learners Do at Each Level
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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students learn to greet others and introduce themselves.</li> <li>• Students learn to deal with daily situations to satisfy basic needs, such as expressing food preferences.</li> <li>• Students learn to give and elicit basic information about themselves and others.</li> <li>• Students learn to ask and answer basic questions about each other in an interview format.</li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students learn how to ask and answer questions about their daily routines, including those related to their homes and jobs.</li> </ul>

	familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students learn to give and elicit basic information in the past, present, and future.</li> <li>• Students learn to describe the phases of life and the basic conditions in which people live out their lives.</li> <li>• Students learn to express basic needs—for example, related to food.</li> <li>• Students learn the names of useful businesses and how to specify street locations.</li> </ul>
<b>B1</b>	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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students learn to talk about their life history, important dates, and periods.</li> <li>• Students learn to talk and answer questions about travel, future plans/hopes/dreams, and choices.</li> <li>• Students learn to cope with normal travel situations.</li> <li>• Students learn how to give reasons for their choices.</li> <li>• Students practice listening to a variety of audio messages.</li> <li>• Students learn to ask and answer basic questions about companies and their products, including location, customers and history.</li> </ul>
<b>B2</b>	Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialization. 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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students learn important vocabulary and concepts useful for talking about basic science and other academic subjects.</li> <li>• Students learn to use quantitative expressions to describe trends, such as increases and decreases.</li> <li>• Students learn how to describe and discuss technical information in a variety of types of graphs.</li> <li>• Students learn strategies for engaging fluently in discussions—for example,</li> </ul>

		<p>confirming information and using polite language.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students learn how to deal with controversial subjects such as trade.</li> </ul>
<b>C1</b>	<p>Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognize 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 organizational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students listen to authentic lectures by professors at Stanford University and learn important listening strategies, including pre-listening preparation, listening for main ideas and writing summaries of what was heard.</li> <li>• Students learn to give oral presentations about statistical and other complex information, using visual aids.</li> <li>• Students learn to discuss and compare a variety of products or options, giving advantages and disadvantages and their preferences.</li> <li>• Students learn how to link and organize sentences in oral presentations and writing using a variety of patterns and connectors.</li> <li>• Students learn important discussion strategies by listening to and analyzing videos of authentic panel discussions with fluent speakers.</li> </ul>
<b>C2</b>	<p>Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarize 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.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students study authentic lectures by professors at Stanford University with a focus on important listening strategies: understanding details, understanding the relationships between ideas, using context to understand unknown words and phrases, and using word stress and intonation to understand the nuances of a speaker.</li> <li>• Students write essays on topics related to the college lectures.</li> <li>• Students learn important discussion strategies by listening to and analyzing authentic panel-discussion programs.</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students learn to analyze an argument, focusing on the building of arguments and counterarguments.</li> <li>• Students practice notetaking and summarizing of complex information.</li> </ul>
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This type of analysis of DynEd’s course and test content was extremely time-consuming because DynEd has such an extensive storehouse of content in its courseware and tests. The time was well spent, however, as now DynEd has no reservations in stating that DynEd is completely consistent with the guidelines for CEFR levels (A1-C2). This includes the correlation of both the specific subskills of English, grammar, vocabulary and functions, and also the higher-level concepts, such as listening and reading.

## Conclusion

Since 1987, DynEd International has offered one of the most comprehensive lineups of award-winning English language teaching and testing solutions. Currently, thirteen million students in 55 countries learn and certify their English skills with DynEd. Our programs cover all proficiency levels and include a range of age-appropriate courses from early learners to students in universities, corporations, aviation programs and vocational-technical schools. DynEd courses and assessment tests are approved by ministries of education in several countries. DynEd's headquarters are in the San Francisco Bay Area, home to Silicon Valley, with regional offices in Beijing, Amsterdam, Tokyo, Jakarta, Panama City, Thailand and Hong Kong.