



CAMBRIDGE

Learning to Learn

Introductory guide for teachers
and educational managers



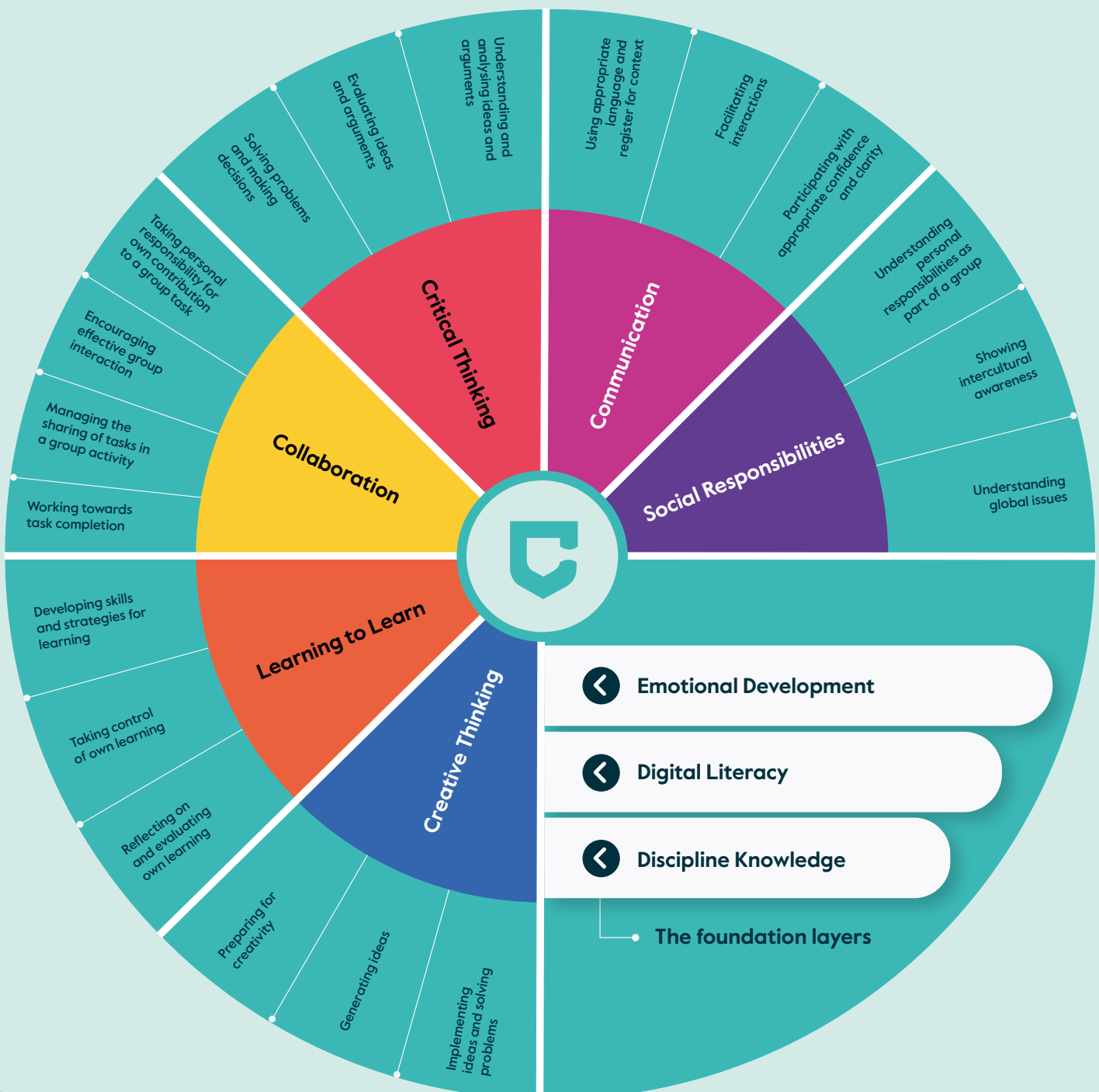
Cambridge
Life Competencies

Why teach Life Competencies?

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

We see the increasing 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.

We understand that the engaging and collaborative nature of the language classroom is the perfect place to develop and embed these key qualities and the Life Competencies framework supports teachers in this challenging area.



What is the Cambridge Life Competencies Framework?

The Cambridge Life Competencies Framework has been created in response to educators who have asked for a way to understand how life skills, or 21st century skills, can be integrated into English language programmes. It is made up of 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.
Learning to Learn	Learners develop practical skills to support and take control of their learning and reflect on their own progress.
Collaboration	Learners work well together in groups through actively taking part in group activities, listening to others, sharing tasks and finding solutions to problems.
Critical Thinking	Learners identify patterns and relationships, evaluate ideas and use these skills to solve problems.
Communication	Learners choose the most appropriate language to use in different situations, manage conversations effectively and express themselves clearly and confidently.
Social Responsibilities	Learners recognise and describe different roles and responsibilities in a variety of groups and understand cultural and global issues.

In addition, there are three **Foundation layers**. Foundation layers are not separate competencies. Instead, they act as underlying dimensions that support and strengthen every other competency. They provide the essential capacities that allow learners to develop and apply all other life competencies effectively.

Emotional Development	Learners identify and understand emotions, manage their own emotions as well as develop empathy and relationship skills.
Digital Literacy	Learners create content, share and interact with others online and maintain their safety and wellbeing while using technology.
Discipline Knowledge	Learners' knowledge of the English language, as well as of other subjects, supports and strengthens their competency development.

The learning journey

The Cambridge Life Competencies Framework supports learners at all stages of their learning journey, from very young pre-primary learners right through to adults in education and at work. The framework maps out how learner behaviours typically found within each competency can change and develop as learners encounter new situations and circumstances in their lives both within and beyond the classroom.

The Cambridge Life Competencies Framework allows us to support learners throughout their education and into the careers of the future.

- Pre-Primary
- Primary
- Secondary
- Higher Education
- At Work

How the Cambridge Life Competencies Framework aligns with key themes in ELT

The Cambridge Life Competencies Framework consists of competencies that are strongly related to key themes in English Language Teaching (ELT) such as:

AI Literacy **Global Citizenship** **Mediation and Translanguaging** **Oracy** **Sustainability** **Wellbeing**

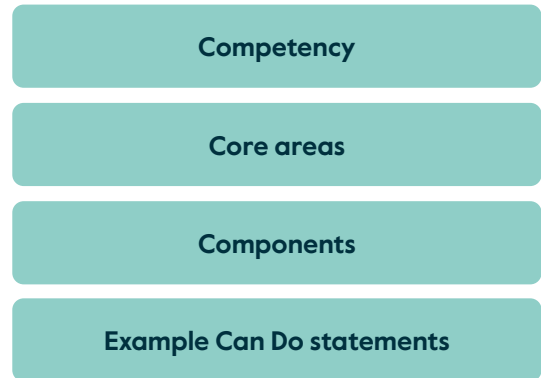
By developing the competencies in the framework, learners are also developing much of the knowledge, skills and attitudes they need to develop in the above areas.

This booklet will outline how the Learning to Learn competency aligns with these themes. To find out more about any of the themes, see our series of mini booklets.



Understanding the Cambridge Life Competencies Framework

The Cambridge Life Competencies Framework is made up of six **competencies** – **Creative Thinking, Critical Thinking, Learning to Learn, Communication, Collaboration** and **Social Responsibilities**. Each broad competency is broken down into **core areas** that describe these competencies in more detail. These are then analysed further into **components** that, along with example **Can Do statements**, describe the observable behaviours that learners are likely to be able to demonstrate by the end of each stage of learning if they have had the opportunity to develop in these areas.



Linked to the competencies are the three foundation layers of the framework – **Emotional Development, Digital Literacy** and **Discipline Knowledge**. Development of skills in these foundation layers underpins all other competencies.

Along with this structured breakdown, we provide **example language** that learners may use to express the actions and behaviours found in each of the core areas at each stage of learning. These have been informed by both our Functional Language Phrase Bank, a collection of spoken data from expert speakers of English from children to adults, and input from experienced ELT practitioners from around the world. See this example for one core area within Learning to Learn at the primary stage:

Competency	Core area	Components	Example Can Do statements	Example language
Learning to Learn	Reflecting on and evaluating own learning	Keeping track of progress	Shows awareness of own progress in learning English (e.g. by using progress checklists).	I've learnt how to ...
		Evaluating learning, progress and strengths	Reflects on what they did well in a lesson.	I'm getting better at ...
		Using feedback to improve learning	Listens and responds positively to feedback, and understands why a correction was given.	Next time I will ...

By clearly defining these areas of development in a structured and detailed way, we can ensure that our teaching and learning materials take a systematic approach to delivering and developing these skills in our learners, as they progress. This means that teachers can be assured that our resources bring out the best in their students, without creating extra work.

It should be noted that the framework was developed primarily from research and frameworks that centred neurotypical expressions of Competencies, as neurodiversity and neurodivergence were less well understood when the framework was first created. Users of the framework should therefore adapt the framework flexibly, recognising that learners may demonstrate Competencies in diverse ways beyond those described in the framework. Further guidance on this will be published in due course.

What is Learning to Learn?

The rate of change for what we need to know and be able to do at work is accelerating, and it is essential that we continue to learn new skills and knowledge throughout our working lives. Even within schools, developing effective learning skills underpins our students' success in all subjects, and is critical to building their autonomy and self-direction. Education and training need to focus as much on the skills of learning as on the outputs of learning.

We have identified three **core areas** within Learning to Learn:

Learning to Learn	Developing skills and strategies for learning
	Taking control of own learning
	Reflecting on and evaluating own learning

- **Developing skills and strategies for learning** includes important techniques such as making notes, storing and retrieving information as well as techniques for learning and remembering information. In an ELT context, learners also benefit from using strategies to help them understand and communicate in English. There are various methods for engaging in these techniques, and learners need to experiment and choose the one which best suits their own personal style, needs and resources.
- **Taking control of own learning** implies developing self-regulatory strategies, becoming autonomous, maintaining motivation, and staying focused on the task at hand in order to achieve the best results. To accomplish this, learners need to be clear about their learning goals.
- **Reflecting on and evaluating own learning** involves learners reflecting on their own learning in order to assess what worked for them and what did not. This reflection can inform decisions regarding whether to persevere with certain courses of action or to make changes. As a result, learners are able to identify and use effective learning techniques and strategies. In addition, learners who keep track of and evaluate their own progress in learning are more able to continuously improve, helping them succeed in reaching their learning goals.

Within these core areas we break things down further, defining the components that make up each core area:

Learning to Learn	Developing skills and strategies for learning	Engaging in directed activities
		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, creating habits and planning for learning
		Taking initiative to improve own learning
		Managing the learning environment
		Managing attitudes and emotions and demonstrating resilience
	Reflecting on and evaluating own learning	Keeping track of progress
		Evaluating learning, progress and strengths
		Using feedback to improve learning

How does Learning to Learn align with key themes in ELT?

Learning to Learn skills support the development of the following key themes in ELT:



AI literacy: Learning can be enhanced by AI when used strategically and when based on a strong understanding of Learning to Learn principles.



Oracy: Enhancing Learning to Learn and metacognitive skills enables learners to reflect on their speaking experiences, helping them to continuously improve their Oracy skills.



Global citizenship: Developing autonomous learning skills helps learners stay informed about global issues and equips them to engage critically.



Sustainability: Developing the skills for autonomous and lifelong learning will help learners stay informed about sustainability challenges and support them in reflecting on which sustainability-related skills they need to develop in the future



Mediation and translanguaging: By reflecting on and managing their own learning, learners can make strategic use of mediation and translanguaging to enhance both understanding and communication.



Wellbeing: Developing regulation, goal-setting, and reflective skills helps learners build confidence, resilience, and adaptability to support their overall wellbeing.

See our series of mini booklets on these themes to find out more.

Spotlight on Wellbeing

Wellbeing skills help learners manage their learning, stay motivated, and adapt positively to challenges. As such, they play a vital role in becoming confident, resilient and self-directed learners.

In the context of **Learning to Learn**, wellbeing involves setting meaningful goals and building positive habits, managing attitudes and emotions to cope with difficulties, and reflecting on strengths and progress to sustain motivation. These skills help learners take control of their own learning and support long-term personal and academic progress.

Wellbeing skills align particularly well with the **Learning to Learn** components of **setting goals, creating habits and planning for learning, managing attitudes and emotions and demonstrating resilience**, and **evaluating learning, progress and strengths**.








We have highlighted **Example Can Do statements** from these areas of the framework that can be used to support Wellbeing. Look out for the following icon in the following pages:

To find out more about how the Cambridge Life Competencies Framework supports Wellbeing, see our mini booklet.








Learning to Learn across the learning journey

Core areas may be realised in different ways across the different stages of learning. In order to demonstrate this, each **core area** and **component** is contextualised by an example **Can Do statement**. This illustrates what kinds of behaviour students who are competent in this area might display by the end of each stage of learning. These example Can Do statements can be used as a starting point in the development of a curriculum, programme or assessment system and will vary in their suitability for learners in different contexts. The example language is provided for teachers to consider what kind of language they could encourage their students to use in these kinds of tasks.








Pre-primary

Core areas	Components	Example Can Do statements	Example language
Developing skills and strategies for learning	Engaging in directed activities	Follows instructions and class routines.	Like this ... ?
	Using effective systems for finding, keeping and retrieving information	Asks simple questions to find out information.	What's this?
	Using effective strategies for learning and retaining information	Engages with memorising tasks.	There was a [ship/flower/hat].
	Using effective strategies for comprehension and production tasks	Uses pictures to help understand a story.	He looks happy.
Taking control of own learning	Setting goals, creating habits and planning for learning	Chooses which activity to complete when given a choice. 	I'm going to [read this book].
	Taking initiative to improve own learning	Asks the teacher for help. 	What does ... mean?
	Managing the learning environment	Organises learning equipment tidily so that it can be found when needed. 	I usually put my [crayons/ruler/eraser] in here.
	Managing attitudes and emotions and demonstrating resilience	Regulates affective reactions (e.g. disappointment, mood or conflicts with other children). 	I can try again.
Reflecting on and evaluating own learning	Keeping track of progress	Uses basic checklists to show what tasks they have completed. 	Done!
	Evaluating learning, progress and strengths	Changes learning behaviour if it does not seem to have the desired effect (e.g. starts putting hand up to answer a question when they notice the teacher does not pick them to give an answer when they shout out). 	Oops! It's wrong to shout!
	Using feedback to improve learning	Acts on language feedback from teachers or parents. 	I'll try again.








Primary

Core areas	Components	Example Can Do statements	Example language
Developing skills and strategies for learning	Engaging in directed activities	Follows instructions to complete tasks in class as required.	I've finished!
	Using effective systems for finding, keeping and retrieving information	Searches for information on a specific topic when doing a project.	I found out that ...
	Using effective strategies for learning and retaining information	Memorises and repeats key words and phrases.	I can remember it now.
	Using effective strategies for comprehension and production tasks	Looks at pictures, titles and subtitles to get the gist of a text before reading it.	I think it's about ...
Taking control of own learning	Setting goals, creating habits and planning for learning	Identifies the learning objectives for the lesson or task. 	We're learning about/to ...
	Taking initiative to improve own learning	Asks other children for help. 	Could you explain it to me?
	Managing the learning environment	Works productively with others without becoming distracted. 	
	Managing attitudes and emotions and demonstrating resilience	Regulates affective reactions (e.g. anxiety, disappointment, mood or conflicts with other children). 	When I feel upset, I ask for help.
Reflecting on and evaluating own learning	Keeping track of progress	Shows awareness of own progress in learning English (e.g. by using progress checklists). 	I've learnt how to ...
	Evaluating learning, progress and strengths	Reflects on what they did well in a lesson. 	I'm getting better at ...
	Using feedback to improve learning	Listens and responds positively to feedback, and understands why a correction was given. 	Next time I will ...








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, creating habits and planning for learning	Makes 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 and demonstrating resilience	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. 	I made a checklist to see how well I can ...
	Evaluating learning, progress and strengths	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 ... ?

Higher education

Core areas	Components	Example Can Do statements	Example language
Developing skills and strategies for learning	Engaging in directed activities	Plans and successfully executes a research project.	I think we should first ... , then ...
	Using effective systems for finding, keeping and retrieving information	Takes systematic notes in class or lectures and from own reading.	I'm just writing down the key ideas.
	Using effective strategies for learning and retaining information	Makes good use of available resources (e.g. the teacher, the library, self-study centre, etc.)	I suggest [we look in ...].
	Using effective strategies for comprehension and production tasks	Practises both bottom-up (e.g. focusing on details) and top-down (e.g. focusing on the gist) listening strategies.	It seems like they're talking about ...
Taking control of own learning	Setting goals, creating habits and planning for learning	Plans their work focusing on the achievement of set goals. 	I need to ... in order to ...
	Taking initiative to improve own learning	Chooses appropriate study aids to use for different language learning skills. 	This [app] is ideal for [listening on the way home].
	Managing the learning environment	Manages learning environment (e.g. study space, noise level) so as to be able to study effectively. 	Sorry, I'm studying.
	Managing attitudes and emotions and demonstrating resilience	Manages affective reactions (e.g. test anxiety or disappointment after receiving a bad grade). 	Next time I will prepare differently by ...
Reflecting on and evaluating own learning	Keeping track of progress	Keeps a record of learning progress in order to evaluate and set new goals. 	I got great marks for [my essay/test].
	Evaluating learning, progress and strengths	Uses standardised evaluation criteria (e.g. from exams) to evaluate own performance. 	I'm going to try and [plan my essays better] in future.
	Using feedback to improve learning	Requests feedback on language skills from peers and instructors when appropriate. 	Tell me if I'm speaking clearly.

At work

Core areas	Components	Example Can Do statements	Example language
Developing skills and strategies for learning	Engaging in directed activities	Writes reports appropriate in style and organisation.	How formal should this be?
	Using effective systems for finding, keeping and retrieving information	Develops a reliable system for storing information.	I've uploaded my notes into the shared drive.
	Using effective strategies for learning and retaining information	Makes good use of available resources (e.g. colleagues, online resources, reports, etc.).	I'm going to find the report from last year.
	Using effective strategies for comprehension and production tasks	Deduces meaning of unfamiliar language from input texts.	I think it's a kind of ...
Taking control of own learning	Setting goals, creating habits and planning for learning	Sets achievable language learning goals (e.g. related to specific skills or exam results). 	I'm aiming to/for ...
	Taking initiative to improve own learning	Takes the initiative to participate in activities that support language learning. 	To improve my listening, I [listen to podcasts in the car].
	Managing the learning environment	Manages distractions (e.g. other people, phones, etc.) so as to stay focused on a task. 	Sorry, can I get back to you a bit later?
	Managing attitudes and emotions and demonstrating resilience	Is prepared to make mistakes in front of colleagues. 	That wasn't quite right but you know what I mean!
Reflecting on and evaluating own learning	Keeping track of progress	Keeps a record of progress in learning in order to evaluate and set new goals. 	I've just used ten new words in this report.
	Evaluating learning, progress and strengths	Identifies language learning needs and seeks out opportunities to develop in these areas. 	I plan to work on ...
	Using feedback to improve learning	Takes on board feedback from others and uses it to improve. 	OK. Thanks for the tip.

Learning to Learn in the classroom

Learners need to develop Learning to Learn competencies in order to be able to learn independently, without constant guidance from the teacher. That is not to diminish the role of the teacher in the learning process. In fact, teachers play an essential role in the development of their students' independent learning skills.

Acquiring Learning to Learn competencies is not a straightforward process; it requires careful scaffolding and multiple opportunities for learners to use, train and develop these competencies. The teacher's role is to provide this mediation and, alongside teaching language, help learners acquire the age- and stage-appropriate skills that they need to learn outside the classroom.

Suggestions for classroom practice

The ideas presented here are intended as a general indication of the types of activity that might develop this competency in the classroom, and are not a definitive list.

General suggestions

Familiarisation

Familiarisation with the **Core areas**, **Components** and **Can Do statements** is helpful. Teachers could keep a copy of these to hand to refer to during planning. This way, as they look at their materials, they can identify which activities and features provide learners with opportunities to develop the skills described in the Learning to Learn competency. For example, the use of a template, such as the example below, could initially help learners develop effective vocabulary recording habits.

Word:	Word class:
Pronunciation:	Example sentence:
Definition:	Collocates:
Other words in family:	

Monitoring

In addition to monitoring learners' linguistic progress, teachers should ensure that they also monitor the progress learners make with Learning to Learn skills development, as teachers will then be better placed to gauge the level of scaffolding required for learning to be effective.

Rate of development

Remember that learners will be developing these skills over the course of their lives and the skills that they develop at any given age or stage will be used and built upon at later stages. Just like with linguistic development, the development of these physical, cognitive and affective skills requires patience, scaffolding and opportunities for practice. The rate of development will also differ from learner to learner. It is important to thus provide each learner with the appropriate amount of support and scaffolding, depending on their rate of development.

Activity cards

For more ideas on integrating the development of Learning to Learn competencies into your classroom, see our Cambridge Life Competencies **activity card** packs. We've created a pack of cards for each stage of learning, and each individual card tackles a component from one of the core Cambridge Life Competencies. The activities are designed for you to use together with your coursebook or teaching materials, to tweak or supplement tasks. Go to [cambridge.org/clcf](https://www.cambridge.org/clcf) to download your free pack.

Primary

For pre-primary and primary learners to begin developing Learning to Learn skills, teachers can establish and maintain a range of classroom routines.






For example:

- **Opening a lesson:** a familiar greeting chant, song, or movement sequences that signals “learning time”.
- **Managing materials:** nominating learners who hand out or collect worksheets and tools, so everyone can learn how resources are organised.
- **Switching tasks:** Using a simple cue (e.g. a bell, a clapped rhythm, a colour card) that tells children it’s time to tidy up and prepare for the next activity.

It will take time for these routines to become established, and consistency is vital. Instructions should be clear and include demonstrations; learners need time and practice to connect instructions with expectations. As learners grow more familiar with different classroom task types and activities, they also become accustomed to the routines these require. Once learners are comfortable with a routine, they will be able to engage in activities without repeated instruction or explanation, thus developing learner autonomy.

Reflecting on learning

As part of the beginning of their journey to becoming more autonomous, young learners need to develop the reflective and evaluative skills required to monitor their progress in learning. Teachers can scaffold this development by providing simple tools such as a post-task self-feedback form in which learners evaluate their performance in a given task. Learning materials increasingly include these, but even if they are not included, it is possible for teachers to make one which can be adapted for use across a range of task types. Here is an example:

My progress	
I followed all the instructions	
I gave my opinion clearly	
I asked my classmates for their opinions	
I agreed and disagreed with my classmates politely	
I helped my group to summarise the discussion to feed back to the whole class	

Developing familiarity with what is expected is important. The process of reflection and evaluation, and completing reflective tasks takes time to master and consistent use of such tasks over time will help learners become more competent at assessing themselves in this way.


With the example above, the first couple of times it is used, teachers would need to explain to or remind learners how to use it (e.g. if they think they have followed all the instructions, they then colour in all the smiley faces; if they think they have followed most of them, they then colour in four smiley faces, etc.)

Some of the sentences could be used across tasks, while others would change according to the task type. Once learners are accustomed to the procedure, they will need little prompting to carry out the task effectively. These kinds of tasks also provide the scope for learners to compare their performance over time for similar task types.

Activity card idea

Try out this activity from our Young Learners activity card pack (page 31). Learners hold up red, yellow, or green cards to show if they're fine, need a little help, or are stuck. This gives them a simple, visual way to manage their own learning and let the teacher know what support they need. To download this and other activity cards, go to cambridge.org/clcf.

Learning to Learn

 Taking initiative to improve own learning

Taking control of own learning

Traffic lights

Cut out circles of green, yellow and red card for each member of the class. Explain to learners that they should keep their circles on their desk. Explain the meaning of the different colour circles, and that learners should keep their circles in a pile with the relevant colour on top:

Red: I need help with this task and I can't do any more without help

Yellow: I need help, but I can do a different part of the task while I wait

Green: I'm okay and I don't need help with the task

Teaching online?

Learners could put a thumbs up emoji or smiley/sad face in the chat box, depending on how well they feel they're coping with the task.

Young

Over to you ...

1. Choose one of the example strategies in this section and try it out with your class.
 - Following the implementation of the strategy, reflect on what worked well and what could be improved next time, particularly focusing on the extent to which learners were able to develop their Learning to Learn skills.
2. Using your course book or other materials, choose a few activities that you may be using in your classes in the next week or so. Consider how you could use these activities to develop your students' Learning to Learn skills.

Secondary

Developing Learning to Learn skills with secondary learners involves equipping them with strategies to organise their ideas, monitor their progress, and make informed decisions about their own learning. At this stage, learners benefit from a wider range of tools and approaches that support increasingly complex tasks, encourage self-reflection, and promote independent thinking. By modelling these strategies, integrating them into lessons, and giving learners opportunities to choose and apply them, teachers can help build the confidence, adaptability, and autonomy that are essential for lifelong learning.

Organisational tools

As part of reflecting and evaluating on their own learning, secondary learners can organise their thoughts and ideas through the use of mind maps and other organisational tools. In order to reach this point, the teacher needs to introduce and provide opportunities for the learners to use this range of tools. For example, these could be used for:

- brainstorming
- taking notes while reading or listening
- subsequent discussions about the topic or theme
- organising ideas that emerge during group work activities

Here is an example template that learners could use/fill in during a listening activity:

Listen and complete to help you organise what you hear.	
Speaker 1:	
Speaker 2:	
Speaker 3:	
Summary:	
New vocabulary:	

The advantage of using a tool like this is that it provides learners with a scaffold to produce more useful notes and notice opportunities for learning, in this case new vocabulary from the listening.

Developing metacognition through discussion

As the range of such tools used with the learners grows, it is important to engage learners in discussion regarding which tool is best suited to a given activity so that in time they are able to make these decisions independently of the teacher, whether in class or during their self-study. This kind of discussion is an example of helping learners develop their metacognition, a key aspect of independent learning, which should ideally be incorporated into lessons on a regular basis. By drawing learners' attention to how they learn and the tools they use to complete different tasks, and by giving them opportunities to make decisions, teachers will, over time, enable them to become successful autonomous learners.

Activity card idea

Take a look at this activity from our Teenage Learners activity card pack (page 36). After checking answers or reading teacher comments, learners pause to reflect on how the feedback will guide their next steps and write down one action to improve. It's a practical way to make feedback meaningful. Download this and other activity cards at [cambridge.org/clcf](https://www.cambridge.org/clcf).

Learning to Learn

Using feedback to improve learning

Looking forward

When learners receive feedback (either in the form of correct/incorrect answers to a coursebook task, or written/spoken feedback from the teacher), encourage them to consider how this feedback influences them going forward, and what they can do to improve.



Reflecting on and evaluating own learning

Teaching online?

Why not invite learners to make a short audio or video recording of their thoughts on how the feedback they've received influences them going forward, and what they can do to improve.

Teen

Over to you ...

1. Choose one of the example strategies in this section and try it out with your class.
 - Following the implementation of the strategy, reflect on what worked well and what could be improved next time, particularly focusing on the extent to which learners were able to develop their Learning to Learn skills.
2. Using your course book or other materials, choose a few activities that you may be using in your classes in the next week or so. Consider how you could use these activities to develop your students' Learning to Learn skills.

Adult

Developing Learning to Learn skills with adult learners means equipping them to take ownership of complex, often self-directed tasks and to approach challenges with confidence, adaptability, and critical thinking. In higher education and workplace settings, learners are expected to plan, manage, and evaluate their own work to meet professional or academic standards. By breaking tasks into manageable stages, modelling effective strategies, and creating a supportive environment where experimentation and reflection are encouraged, teachers can help adult learners strengthen their autonomy and transfer these skills to varied real-world contexts.

Planning research

For learners in higher education, research often forms part of coursework assessment requirements, with learners writing an essay or giving a presentation based on their findings. This is an example which requires the teacher to break the task down into its component parts to help learners develop the required skills, providing scaffolding for the completion of each part. Subskills which learners will need help with include:

- **Planning and organisation** – the teacher can provide handouts and guidance (for example, this extract of a handout shown below) which help learners to keep track of all the sub-tasks they need to do in order to complete their assignment. This also acts as a reminder of which marking criteria each task relates to.
- **Identification and evaluation of suitable sources** – learners will need to know how to quickly identify relevant and suitable sources which can be used in their academic writing.
- **Instruction in using research tools such as library databases and referencing software** – here, learners will need guidance regarding how to focus their searches by limiting the date, the resource type, and using appropriate key words relevant to the assignment in their searches.

Checklist for essay outline		
I have ...	Related marking criteria	✓
Found 10 or more academic, reliable, authoritative, current sources.	Source selection and evaluation	
Selected relevant information that is clearly linked to my essay topic/ title and the topics of my main body paragraphs from my sources.	Understanding of sources	
Paraphrased all the information that I took from my sources, using a mix of strategies (e.g. using synonyms, changing the grammar, changing the order of clauses).	Understanding of sources	
Written a clear thesis statement that shows my position ('This essay will argue that ...') and the scope of the essay ('focusing on ...').	Structural use of sources	
Included a counterargument, a clearly linked refutation and supporting points for my position in each main body paragraph.	Structural use of sources	


Creating a safe classroom environment

Part of Learning to Learn skills for learners in higher education or at work is the ability to be prepared to make mistakes in front of classmates/colleagues and to learn from this. A teacher can help with this by fostering a supportive learning atmosphere in lessons, so that mistakes are not seen as something negative but rather as a learning opportunity. Building on this, the teacher could encourage these learners to bring mistakes made in the workplace/institution back into the classroom so that causes can be identified and solutions suggested, and perhaps subsequently tried out. In this way, the teacher models using mistakes as learning opportunities and learners can become accustomed to this way of viewing them and using them, progressing on to doing so independently.

Activity card idea

Why not try the “Record & Reflect” activity from our Adult Learners activity card pack (page 35)? Learners record themselves doing a short speaking task, listen back, and use three reflection prompts: (1) What were you happy with? (2) What difficulties did you face? And (3) How did you overcome these? before repeating the task. It’s a quick, low-prep way to turn self-assessment and feedback into measurable progress. Download this and other activity cards at cambridge.org/clcf.

Learning to Learn

 Evaluating learning, progress and strengths

Recordings

Encourage learners to record themselves during speaking tasks (e.g. using a smartphone), listen back and self-assess. After learners have self-assessed their performance, get learners to identify areas to improve before repeating the task. Finally, prompt learners to reflect on their performance with questions such as:

1. What were you happy with?
2. What difficulties did you face?
3. How did you overcome these?

Teaching online?

Why not invite learners to upload their recordings to a digital portfolio, and to add their answers to the reflection questions in the comments.

Adult

Reflecting on and evaluating own learning

Over to you ...

1. Choose one of the example strategies in this section and try it out with your class.
 - Following the implementation of the strategy, reflect on what worked well and what could be improved next time, particularly focusing on the extent to which learners were able to develop their Learning to Learn skills.
2. Using your course book or other materials, choose a few activities that you may be using in your classes in the next week or so. Consider how you could use these activities to develop your students’ Learning to Learn skills.

Further reading

For more information on this topic, please see:

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Pinard, L. (2016). Looking outwards: using learning materials to help learners harness out-of-class learning opportunities. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, 10(2), 133–143.

Teng, M. F. (2025). *Metacognition in Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Vandergrift, L. & Goh, C. (2012). *Teaching and learning second language listening: Metacognition in action*. Oxon: Routledge.





Cambridge Life Competencies

You can find information about the other competencies and the foundation layers of the Cambridge Life Competencies Framework at cambridge.org/clcf

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

Find out more at
cambridge.org/english

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