

The construct of Writing



Claudia Harsch and Jayanti Banerjee



Universität Bremen



Universiteit Utrecht



TESTING ENTERPRISES
Paragon

Overview

- Construct of Writing
 - Definition
 - Characteristics of written language
 - Theoretical Models
- Writing Construct in the CEFR
- Examples of Writing Constructs

What is a construct?

The *construct* is the theoretical definition of what it is we want to assess.

The *construct* is also the pivotal aspect for validity

- we need to define what it is we are targeting
- basis for test specs, blueprint to guide development
- reference for validation endeavours

“...there is no single definition of language ability that will be applicable to all situations... For each situation,... a definition ... must be developed that takes into account the test takers, the purpose of the test and the teaching situation.”

Weigle 2002: 41

RECAP - Characteristics of written language

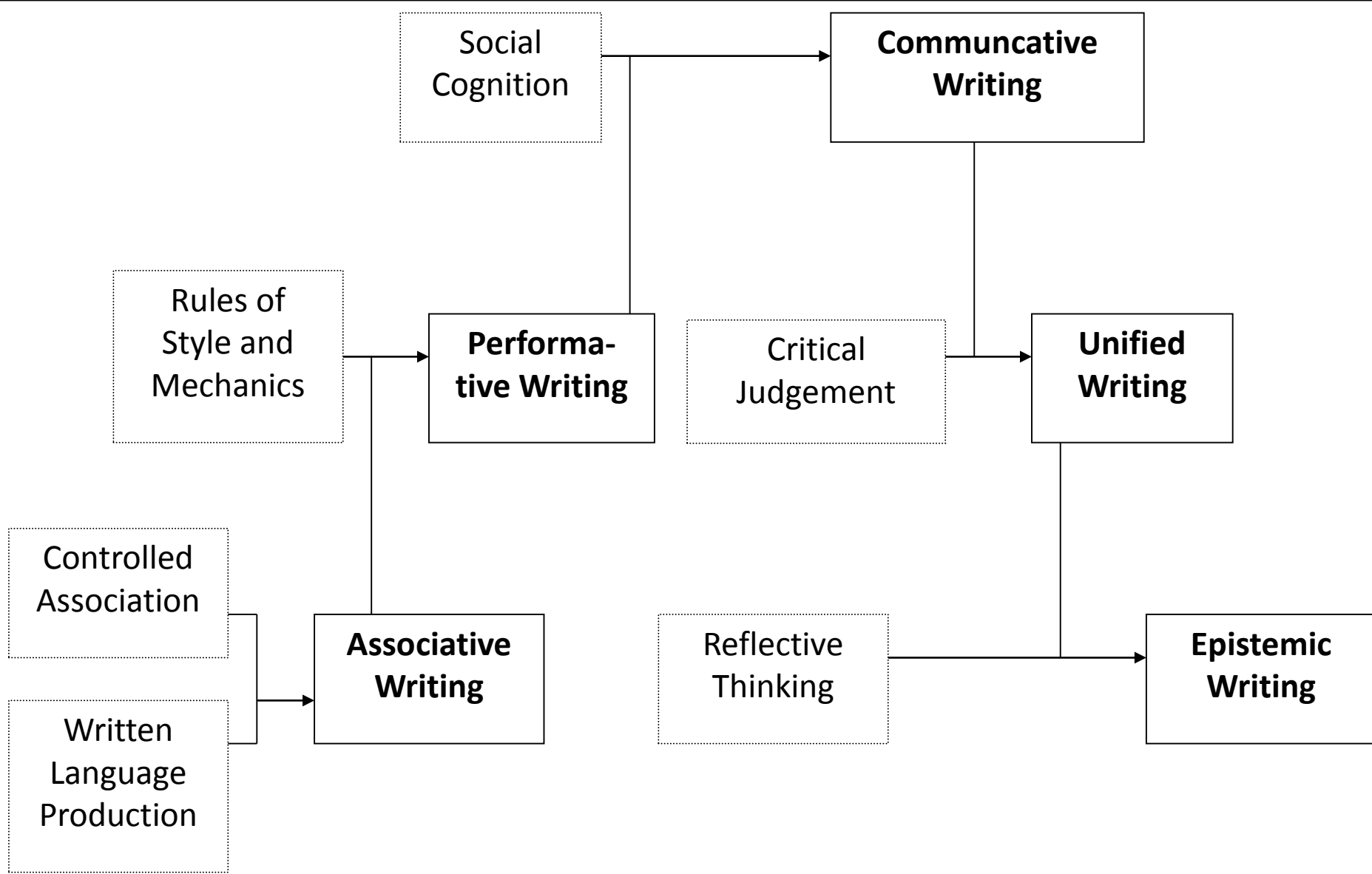
- Permanent – can be re-read
- Time for production – planning, editing
- Distance to reader – need to be more explicit (than in direct interaction)
- Context, communicative goals:
production vs. interaction
- Communicative functions
- Linguistics realisations:
complexity, formal style, vocabulary

The World of Writing

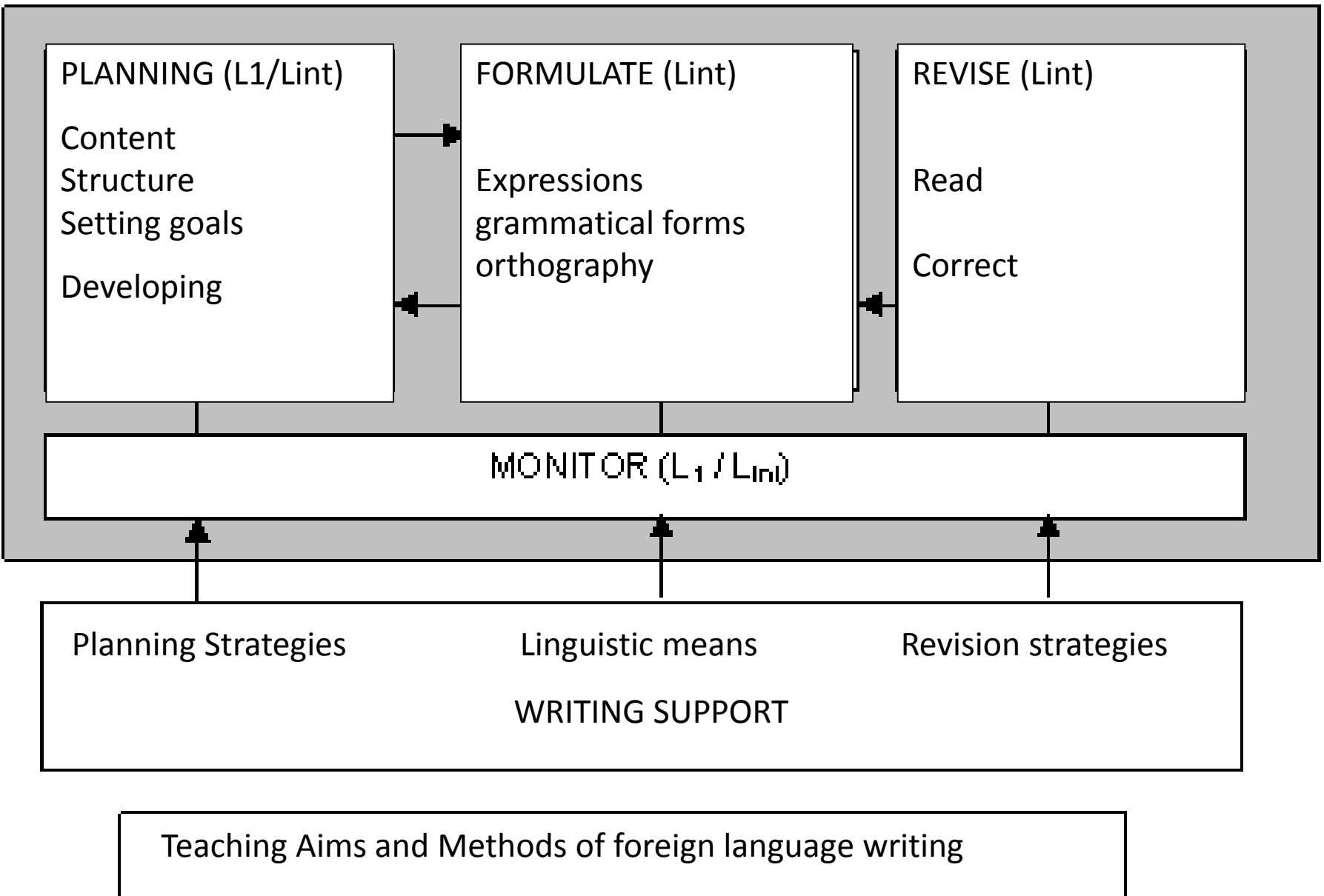
Brainstorm with your neighbour(s)...

- think of all the different kinds of writing we have to do
- what are the characteristics of each of these kinds of writings?
- what are the different things you pay attention to in order to compose a successful piece of text?

Model of writing development (Bereiter 1980)



Model of Writing Processes (Börner 1989, based on Hayes/Flower 1980)



Implications Construct

- Construct should be theory-based and/or curriculum-based
- Construct should be aligned to your learning and teaching objectives
- Construct determines
 - Task demands
 - Assessment criteria
 - Levels of expected performance

Construct => tasks and criteria

Look at the different aspects of your construct:

which aspects can you cover in writing tasks?

which aspects are best covered in assessment criteria?



GCSE Language: Writing Criteria

Communication & organisation:

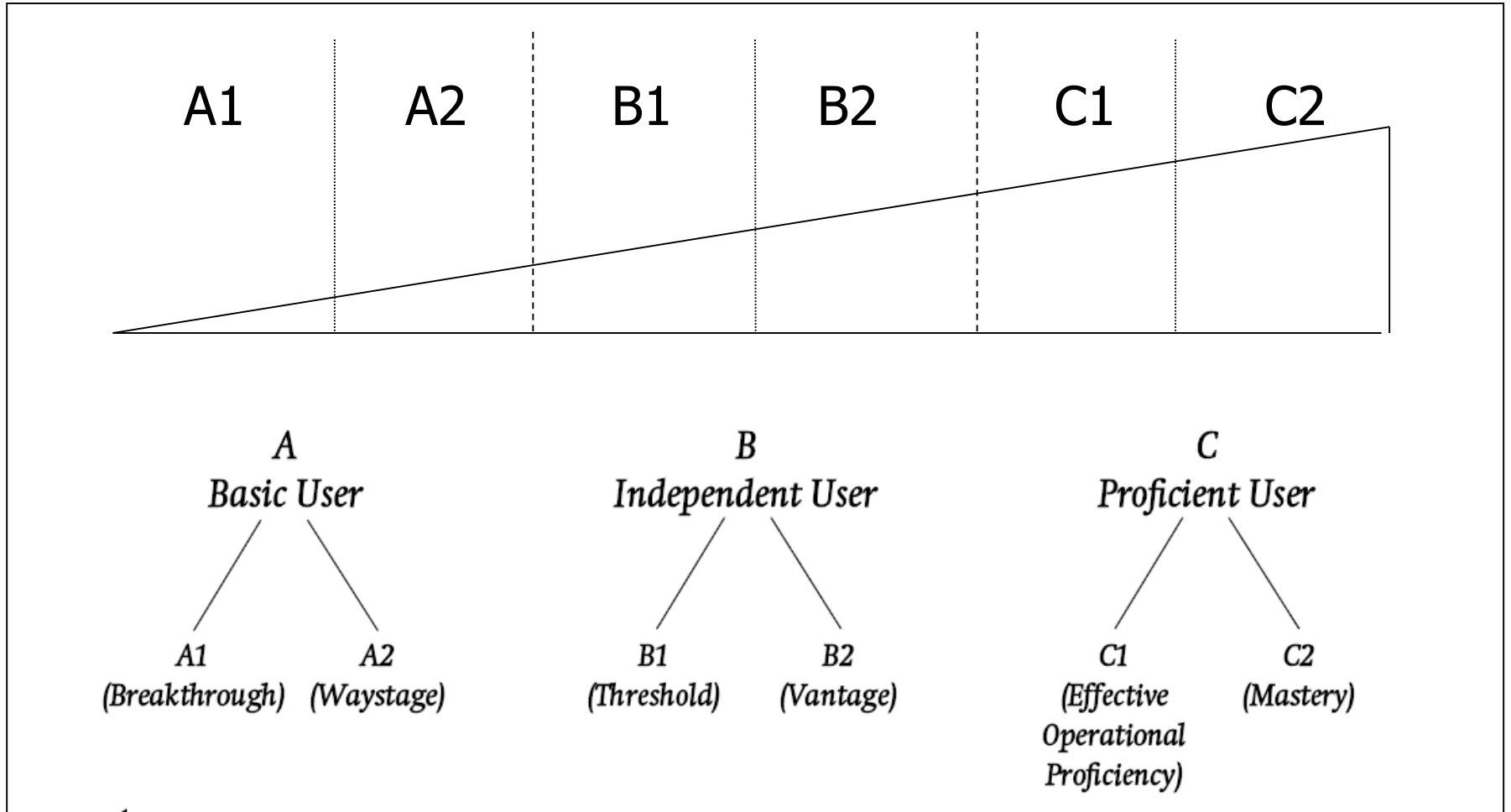
BAND	CRITERIA
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sophisticated and artful use of language.• Impressive exploitation of form and purpose.• Impressive structure which compliments ideas.
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Confident and assured use of language.• Skilful execution of form and purpose to engage the reader.• Well constructed writing.
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consistently uses language for a clear message.• Clearly executes features of form and purpose for effect.• Clear and organised writing

Accuracy:

BAND	CRITERIA
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Impressive sentence variety.• Sophisticated punctuation use.• Impressive spelling accuracy.
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Confident, crafted sentences.• Assured range of punctuation.• Confidence with spelling.
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clear variety of sentences.• Clear range of punctuation.• Consistent spelling.

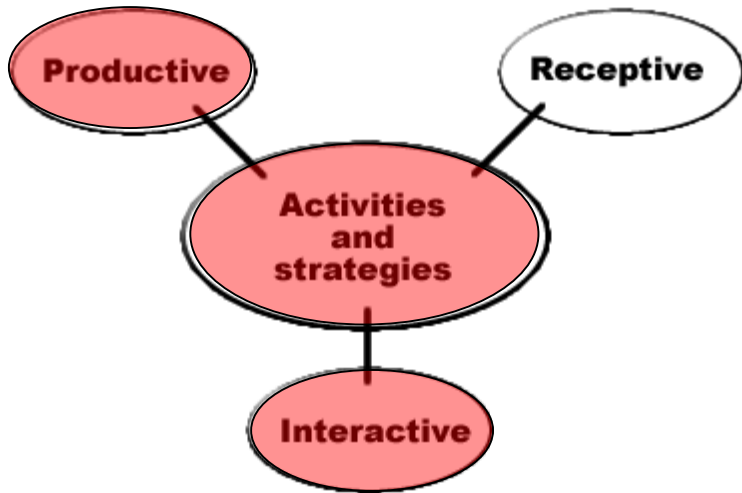
Writing Construct in the CEFR

CEFR Levels of Proficiency



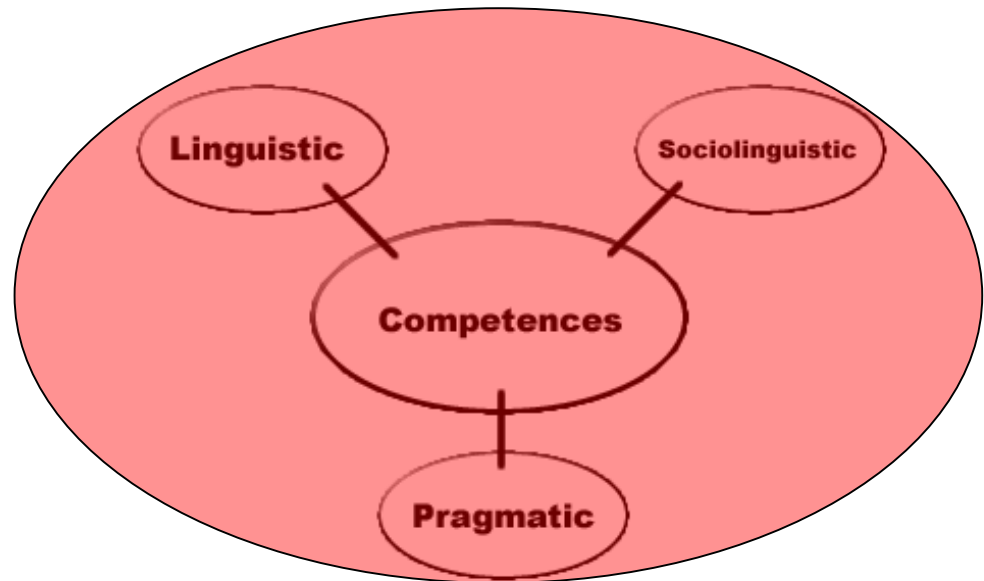
CEFR Model of Proficiency

Communicative language activities and strategies



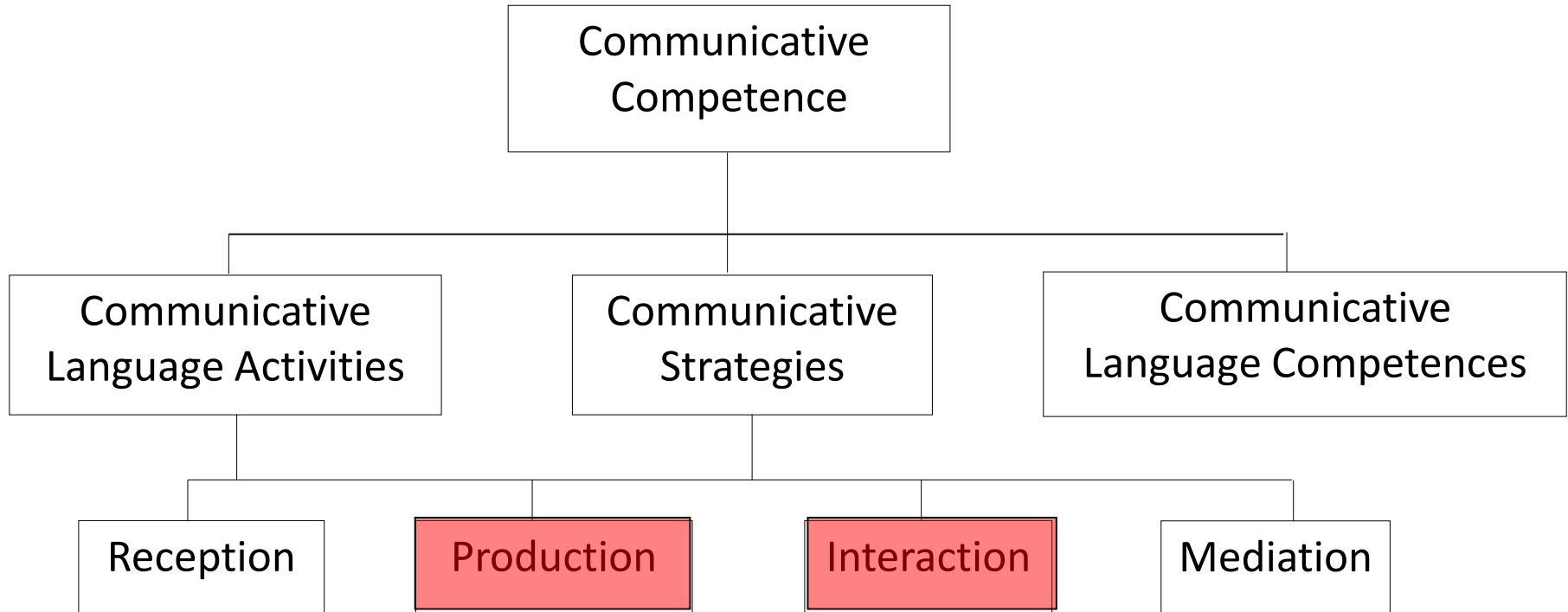
Illustrative scales in chapter 4

Communicative language competences

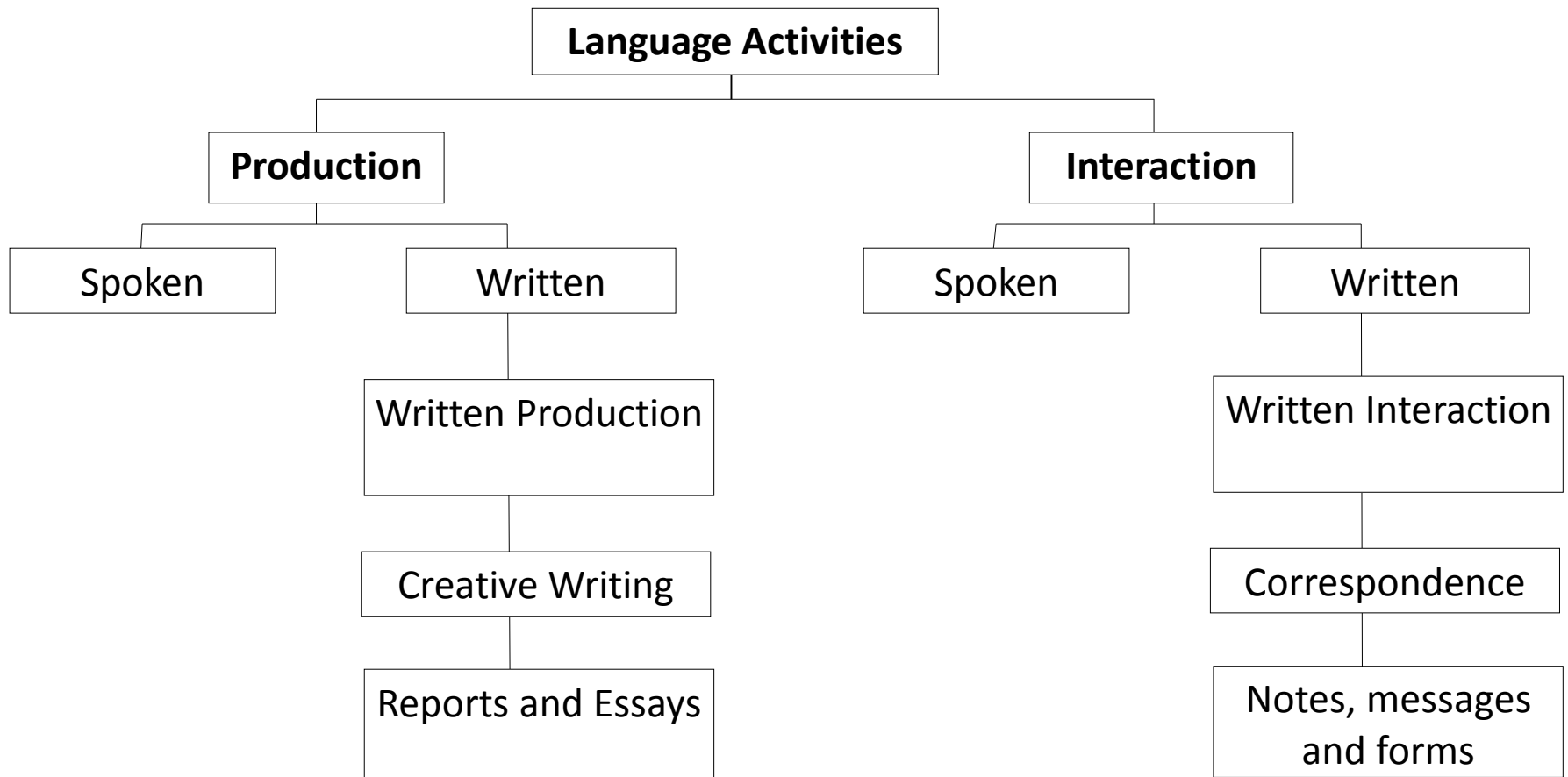


Illustrative scales in chapter 5

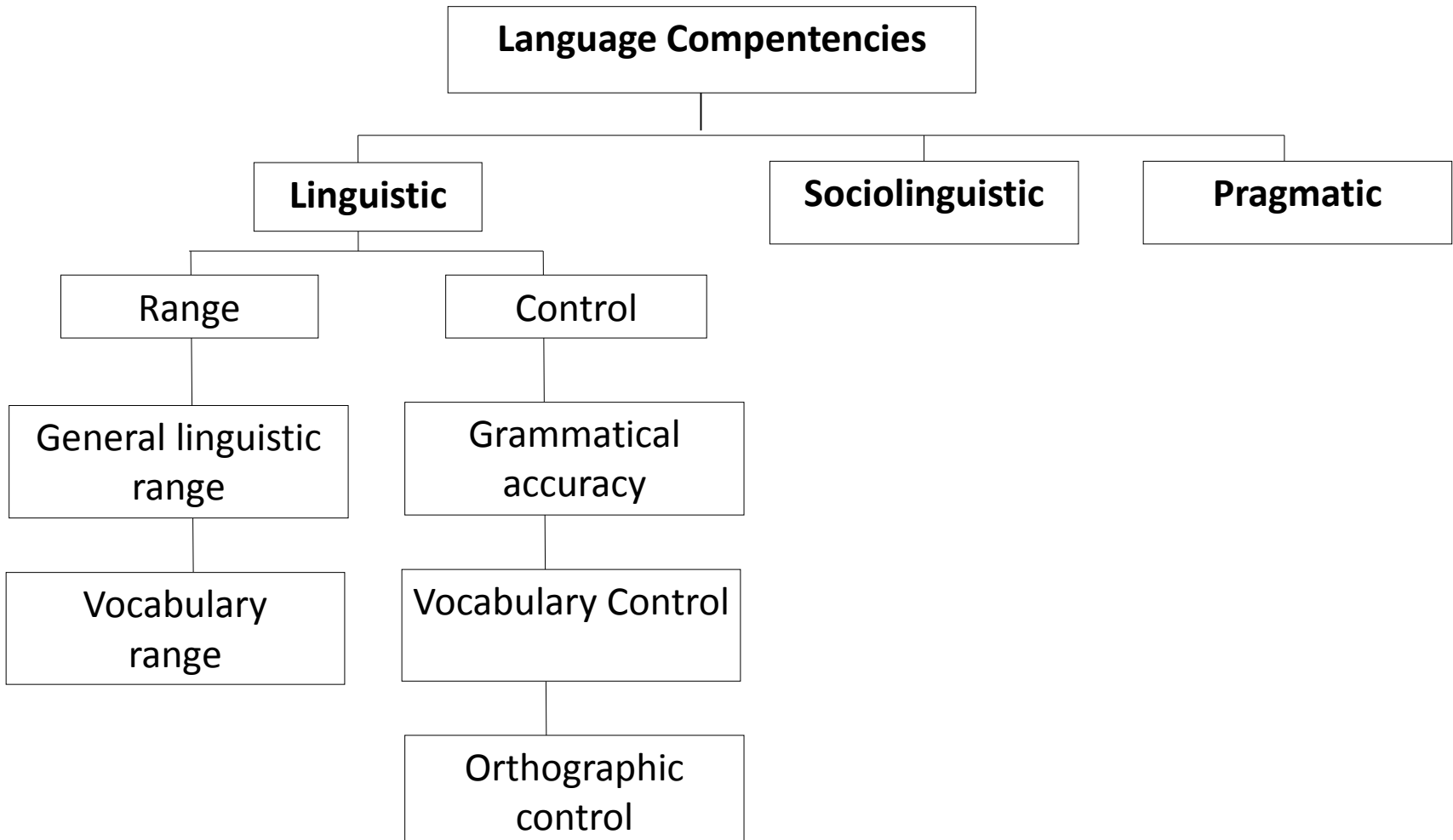
CEFR Scale Model



Hierarchy of Scales (Tasks)

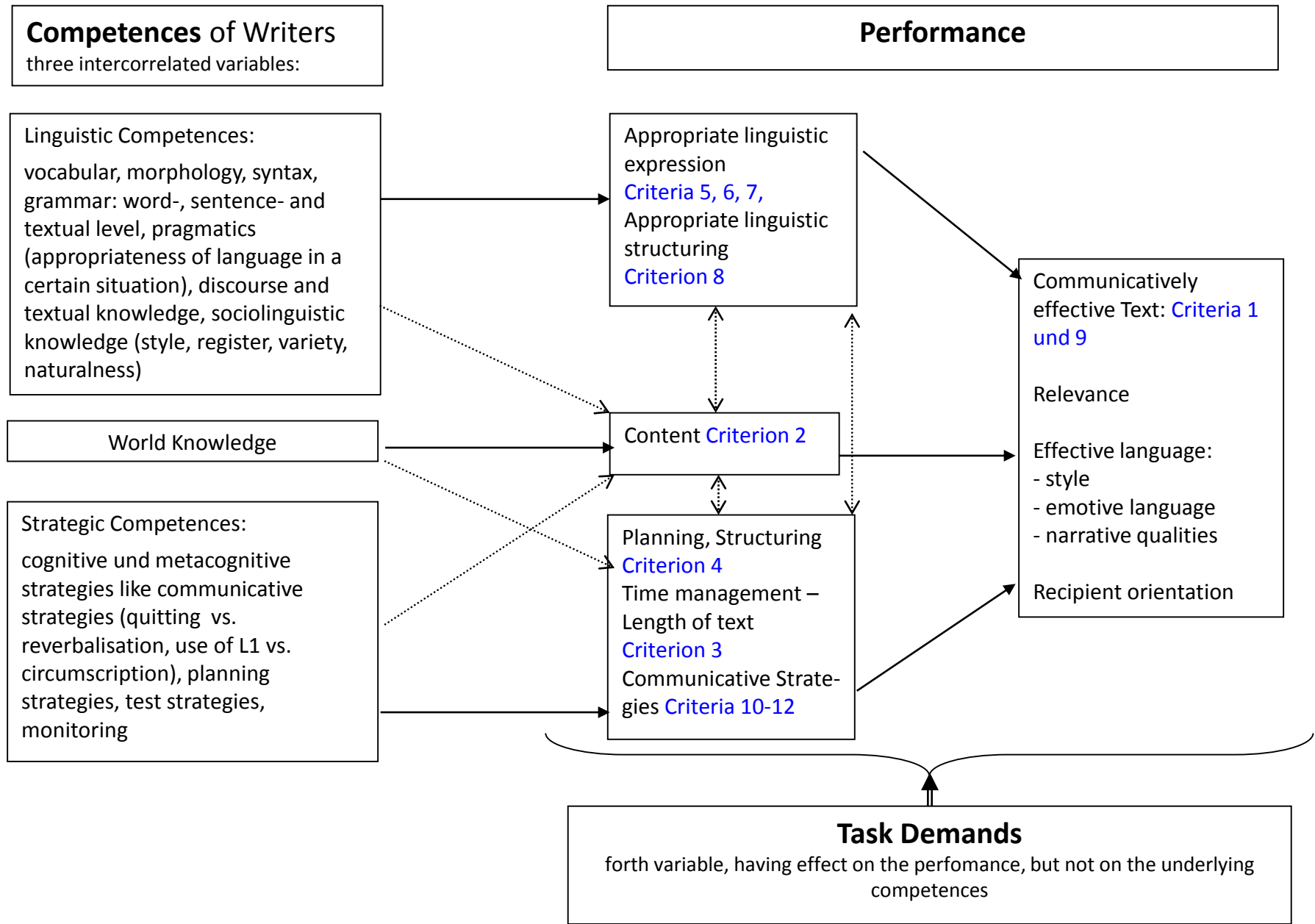


Hierarchy of Scales (Criteria)



Examples for Writing Constructs

Example for a construct (DESI Project, Harsch et al., 2007)



Example for a construct (Educational Standards Germany, Harsch & Rupp, 2011)

General Descriptors

The learners can write coherent texts on familiar topics of interest (B1).

Specific Descriptors

The learners can . . .

1. take notes if somebody asks for information or explains a problem (B1+),
2. convey messages, simple information and thoughts in personal letters (B1),
3. phrase simple targeted standardised letters and e-mails, for example enquiries, applications (B1),
4. write uncomplicated, detailed texts on a number of different topics on their areas of interest, for example reports, stories, descriptions (B1),
5. write short simple essays on topics of general interest (B1),
6. write short reports on familiar topics, use them to pass on information, provide reasons for action and comment (B1+).

Note. National Educational Standards. internal unpublished translation.

Example for a construct (Educational Standards Germany, Harsch & Rupp, 2011)

CEFR-Level	Task Characteristics	Specific Purpose and Text Types	Discourse Types	Output: Textual / Linguistic Expectations
A1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • very short prompts on concrete topics • concrete, very simple and familiar topics • all expected content points clearly stated 	<p>Specific Purpose:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ask for or pass on personal details <p>Text Types:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • write a list • fill in forms • write a postcard 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrative • Descriptive • Phatic • Simple expository 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • very short and simple output • groups of words • simple isolated phrases • short sentences • highly frequent, elementary vocabulary
B1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • short prompts on concrete or slightly abstract topics • topics of personal as well as general interest • expected content points listed 	<p>Specific Purpose</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pass on information • provide reasons for actions and comments <p>Text Types:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • write notes and messages • write personal letters, simple formal letters and emails • write reports/ articles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrative • Descriptive • Instructive • Expository • Simple argumentative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • short, straightforward, detailed texts (110-140 words) • logical development of ideas • coherent text • common, frequent grammatical features • task-specific vocabulary

Construct Definition

Given your background, discuss with your neighbour(s)...

- what **kind of writing** your students are expected to show (e.g. write a paragraph or a whole text)
- what **text types** your students should be able to write, and for what audience
- what **writing prompts/contexts** your students should be able to react to (e.g. what role is given to input such as texts)
- what role **linguistic knowledge** plays (e.g. range and accuracy of vocabulary and grammar, punctuation)
- what counts as **successful completion** of the task?

References

- Bereiter, C. (1980). Development in Writing. In: L. W. Gregg & E. R. Steinberg (eds): *Cognitive Processes in Writing*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 73-93.
- Börner, W. (1989). Didaktik schriftlicher Textproduktion in der Fremdsprache. In: Antons, G. & H. P. Krings (Hrsg.): *Textproduktion. Ein interdisziplinärer Forschungsüberblick*. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 348-376.
- Brown, H. D. (1994). *Teaching by Principles*. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall Regents.
- CEF general information: www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/CADRE_EN.asp
www.coe.int/T/DG4/Portfolio/?L=E&M=/documents_intro/common_framework.html
- CEF English version online: www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Framework_EN.pdf
- Tool for familiarisation with CEF: <http://www.helsinki.fi/project/ceftrain/index.php.35.html>
- Hayes, J. & Flower, L. (1980). Identifying the Organization of Writing Process. In: L. W. Gregg & E. R. Steinberg (eds): *Cognitive Processes in Writing*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 3-30.
- Council of Europe (2001). *The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching and assessment*. Strasbourg.
- Harsch, C., Neumann, A., Lehmann, R. & Schröder, K. (2007): Schreibfähigkeit. In: Beck, B. & Klieme, E. (Hrsg.): *Sprachliche Kompetenzen. Konzepte und Messungen. DESI-Studie*. Weinheim: Beltz (Pädagogik), 42-62.
- Harsch, C., & Rupp, A. (2011). Designing and scaling level-specific writing tasks in alignment with the CEFR: a test-centered approach. *Language Assessment Quarterly*, 8(1), 1-34.
- Kroll, B. (1998). Assessing Writing Abilities. In W. Grabe (Ed.), *Foundations of Second Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 219-240.
- Weigle Cushing, S. (2002). *Assessing Writing*. CUP.