Curriculum Auditing and Program Development: Using the Global Scale of English to review and develop English Language programs

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Global Scale of English

Fast-track your progress

Contents

The Global Scale of English (GSE) is a proficiency scale and framework of learning objectives that expands on the research originally carried out for the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), providing a variety of tools and resources for educators working in English language education. At Rennert, we used the GSE Learning Objectives to explore the potential for impact on curriculum auditing, program alignment and student progress. Two specific use cases yielded interesting results that hold promise for any institution hoping to better understand program performance: curriculum auditing and program development.

Introduction to the Global Scale of English

The Global Scale of English (GSE) is a standardized, granular scale which measures English language proficiency. Unlike some other frameworks which describe attainment in broad bands, the Global Scale of English identifies what a learner can do at each point on a numerical scale for each of the four skills: speaking, listening, reading and writing.

The scale, which ranges from 10 to 90, is designed to motivate learners by accurately demonstrating small increments in progress. Using the Global Scale of English, teachers can match a student to the right course materials to suit their exact level and learning goals.

The Global Scale of English serves as a standard against which English language courses and assessments worldwide can be benchmarked, offering a truly global and shared understanding of proficiency levels.

The GSE Learning Objectives are mapped to the GSE proficiency scale and describe what a learner can do at different levels of proficiency on the scale.

Extending the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

The work to develop the GSE Learning Objectives builds upon the research carried out by Brian North and the Council of Europe in creating the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

Global Scale of English	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90
CEFR		<A1	A1	A2 +	B1 +	B2 +	C1	C2	
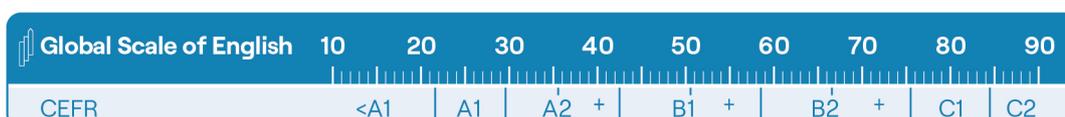
The Global Scale of English itself has been psychometrically aligned to the CEFR.

The CEFR uses a six-level classification of learner proficiency from A1 (low basic) to C2 (fully proficient). The amount of instruction needed to progress learners from one level to the next varies widely according to level, context, native language, age, ability, and other factors, so it is difficult to quantify exactly. However, it has been observed that most people studying for three or four hours per week (as is the case for many language learners) may take two or more years to move from one CEFR level to the next – and as proficiency increases, it takes even longer to move to the next CEFR level. When learners spend two or more years studying without reaching a new CEFR level, it can leave them feeling that they are making little or no progress.

In developing the GSE Learning Objectives, Pearson has extended the number and range of learning objectives – or 'Can Do' Statements – that are included in the CEFR, providing information to support a far more granular definition of language proficiency. Students are much more motivated when they can see small steps in their progress. To further address the specific needs of different learners, GSE Learning Objectives have been developed for four different learner audiences: adults studying on a general English course, adults studying academic English, adults studying English for the workplace and Young Learners (aged 6-14). For teachers, assessment specialists and content developers, the GSE provides a detailed picture of language performance at different levels of proficiency and for individual skills. By combining course materials with assessment tools that are aligned to the Global Scale of English, teachers can:

- Understand their students' levels of proficiency more precisely
- Monitor students' progress at a granular level
- Make more informed choices for each student or class.

What it means to be at a level

Learning a language is not like learning mathematics or electrical engineering, where each topic builds upon a previous one in a sequence. Language learning is not necessarily sequential, and a learner might be strong in one area, where they have had a lot of practice or a particular need or motivation, but quite weak in another.

For that reason, to say that a learner is 'at' a certain level on the Global Scale of English does not mean they have necessarily mastered every GSE Learning Objective for every skill up to that point. Neither does it mean that they have mastered none at

a higher GSE value. If a student is assessed as being at 61 on the scale, it means s/he has a 50% probability of being able to perform Learning Objectives at that level, a greater probability of being able to perform GSE Learning Objectives at a lower level, and a lower probability of being able to perform GSE Learning Objectives at a higher level. Language learning is unique to every individual.

A learner at 61 on the GSE

A learner at 61 on the GSE
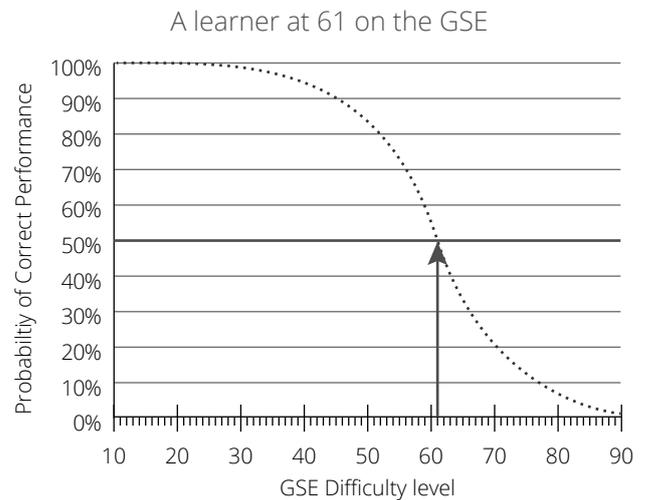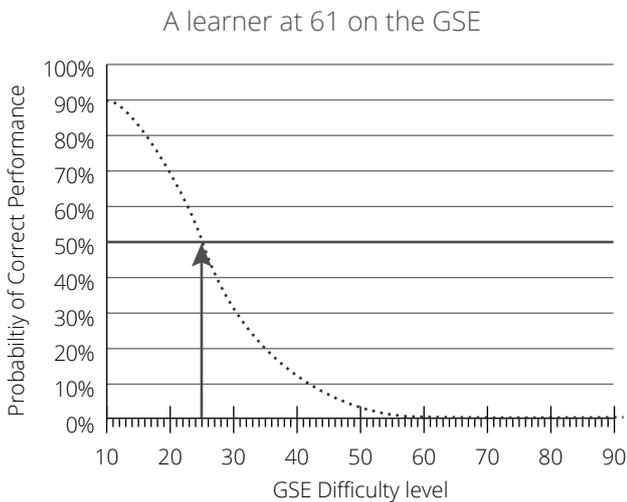
Informing teaching and assessment materials

Authors, editors and teachers are increasingly aware of the need to be learner-focused and to create syllabuses and courses that reflect learner needs and expectations. The GSE Learning Objectives constitute a detailed and graded model of student target performance across a range of skills and domains.

Rennert, New York and the Global Scale of English

Rennert International was founded in 1973 by César Rennert to create a high quality language school that offered small classes with a focus on conversational teaching methods. Today, Rennert provides educational services in English as a Second Language and other foreign languages, as well as translation services. The site also runs teacher development and professional development courses and is the Manhattan location for the World Learning/SIT TESOL Certificate. The school offers a number of language courses to students including: General English, Business English, Exam Preparation, Arts plus English, and Professional English.

Rennert is host to as many as 900 international students from around the world with a high number of students attending

from Korea, Japan, Central and South America, and Europe. In 2014, Rennert began to experiment with the Global Scale of English to address specific areas for improvement in program management: a curriculum audit to assess the overall language performance in the 13 level General English Program, and the development of new programs for business professionals.

Using the GSE for a Curriculum Audit

In 2014, the center started a project to better align the learning objectives of the General English program with the CEFR. Using the CEFR as a starting point, Rennert worked to align courses to specific levels of the CEFR. However, the CEFR did not provide enough insight into the learning outcomes for the distinct levels of the program. Using the coursebook as a starting point, and with input from staff, the school crafted additional 'Can Do' statements to provide more detail about learning in the different levels.

These new 'Can Do' statements were then aligned to courses being used in the center and published throughout the school so that teachers and learners would be aware of the course expectations and outcomes.

Challenges and Goals

The process used to create and establish the new learning objectives surfaced a number of challenges at Rennert:

• By creating learning objectives that were aligned specifically to one particular coursebook, it became difficult to move away from that coursebook without revising and changing the learning objectives. As the process for creating learning objectives was long and complicated, this was not ideal and made the decision to change the coursebook even more challenging.

• The learning objectives were created from and aligned to the coursebook which meant Rennert was reliant on the coursebook for validity that the learning objectives were at the right level of proficiency.

• Since the learning objectives were determined by the coursebook content, the learning objectives did not provide insight into gaps that might exist in the course content – gaps that could be addressed using additional Rennert custom materials.

Having been introduced to the Global Scale of English, Rennert decided to use the GSE Learning Objectives to review their programs: to improve alignment using a set of externally

validated learning objectives and to identify any gaps in the curriculum. If alignment to an independent set of learning objectives were possible, it would also allow Rennert to select new course materials and make program adjustments in the future.

Materials Required

The following information was required:

· Rennert Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) for specific levels

· Coursebook information

· Information on how SLOs were designed for Rennert

· GSE Learning Objectives for General Adult and Academic Learners (available as PDFs[1] and as part of the GSE Teacher Toolkit[2])

For the purposes of the initial trial audit, Level 3 Of the General English course was targeted because it had a poor track record for student performance: the pass rate was much lower than expected and it was hoped that the use of the GSE would help Rennert to better understand the issues. As a first step we looked at how the current SLOs for the course were developed.

Number of levels: 13
Duration (per level): 8 weeks intensive
Hours of Study (per level): 160 hours
CEFR levels (pre-audit):

Course Level	1	2	2	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
CEFR Level	A1-A2	A2	A2-B1	B1 (low)	B1 (mid)	B1+ (low)	B1+-B2	B2 (low)	B2 (mid)	B2+ (low)	B2+ (mid)	C1 (low)	C1 (mid)

The original set of Student Learning Outcomes had been created by a team of teachers at Rennert for the purposes of accreditation. The team used two points of reference to create the SLOs: the original CEFR 'Can Do' statements and the coursebook, *Interchange Level 3* (Cambridge, 1990). The coursebook content was first aligned to the CEFR 'Can Do' statements. When an appropriate 'Can Do' statement could not be found, the teachers worked together to craft a new 'Can Do' statement. Once all levels were mapped, the learning objectives for each course were published for students and teachers.

In every Rennert classroom, the SLOs are displayed in a clear plastic wall packet. The SLOs are changed to reflect the objective of each class. This provides maximum transparency into the course expectations for learners and teachers. In

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1   https://www.pearson.com/english/en/about/gse/learning-objectives.html
2   https://www.english.com/gse/teacher-toolkit/user/lo

order to pass a course, students must demonstrate 85% proficiency with the stated course objectives. Assessment of proficiency includes formative observance assessment made during in-class work, scores on tests and quizzes, and scores on homework assignments. Communicative assessment takes place during the class and a communicative performance assessment is issued at the end of each 4-week period. This information is processed before recommending that a learner move to the next level of the course.

Process

By carrying out an audit of the Rennert learning objectives through mapping them to GSE Learning Objectives, the aim was to provide an objective review of the course curriculum and surface any potential gaps, problems, and areas for improvement. Each Rennert learning objective was recorded in a spreadsheet and mapped against the GSE Learning Objectives for General Adult and Academic Learners.

The following steps were taken:

1. All the Rennert learning objectives for General English Level 3 were entered into a spreadsheet.

2. Key words from the learning objectives (*talk*, *interest*, *hobby*, *past*, etc.) were used to search for related GSE Learning Objectives in the GSE Teacher Toolkit. The GSE Teacher Toolkit was set to search for Academic Learning Objectives. This set includes all the General English learning objectives plus learning objectives that specifically target academic skills. The range was unfixed (i.e. the search was carried out on the full scale from 10-90) to increase the chances of finding a good match.

3. The closest possible match was selected, regardless of CEFR/GSE level. The GSE Learning Objectives were copied into the spreadsheet alongside the Rennert learning objectives.

4. The process was repeated for all Rennert learning objectives. In the Rennert set, reading and listening objectives were presented as "receptive objectives", rather than as individual reading and listening skills. However, a reading of the Rennert objectives indicated the reading or listening nature of the skill in most cases.

5. Grammar coverage was also mapped – although the main focus was on the functional language skills. For example, the Rennert learning objective: *Use the simple past tense to talk about themselves and exchange personal information* was mapped to a GSE Learning Objective for Speaking and a separate note made of the grammar (past tense).

6. The final list of GSE Learning Objectives was analyzed to see how many learning objectives were at each CEFR level to provide an overview of the distribution of learning objectives across levels.

7. The basic mean of all the learning objectives was calculated and a standard statistical deviation of +/- three was applied to find the upper and lower ends of the level range.

COURSE LEVEL	RENNERT SKILL	RENNERT CAN DO DESCRIPTOR	SKILL	GSE LEARNING OBJECTIVE	GSE	CEFR
3		Use the simple past tense to talk about themselves and exchange personal information	Speaking	Can exchange personal details (e.g. where they live, things they have).	28	A1 (22-29)
3	Speaking	Use *used to* for habitual actions to talk and ask about childhood	Speaking	Can ask and answer questions about habits and routines.	38	A2+ (36-42)
3	Speaking	Make evaluations and comparisons with adjectives and nouns using *not...enough*, *too*, *(not) as...as*, *too much/many...*, *fewer, less, more, (not) as much/many...as*	Speaking	Can make simple, direct comparisons between two people or things using common adjectives.	37	A2+ (36-42)
3	Speaking	Describe future plans using *be going to* and *will*	Speaking	Can describe future plans and intentions using fixed expressions.	43	B1 (43-50)
3	Reading/ Listening	Understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance, with some difficulty	Reading	Can understand the general meaning of short, simple informational material and descriptions if there is visual support.	34	A2 (30-35)
3	Reading/ Listening	Understand simple descriptions, narratives and dialogues, with support, on known topics, such as food, travel, transportation and family	Reading	Can understand the general meaning of short, simple informational material and descriptions if there is visual support.	34	A2 (30-35)

Excerpt from the audit

Results

After analyzing all the learning objectives for Level 3 of the course, we found that the distribution of learning objectives was spread between A2+ (GSE: 36 - 42) and B2 (GSE: 59 - 66), with an uneven distribution pattern that created a course that was significantly above the expected level of performance of the students (A2-B1).

This analysis went some of the way to explaining why so many students were failing the course: the content was too challenging for students to be successful. Based on this alignment to GSE Learning Objectives it was determined that the course learning objectives would need to be replaced with learning objectives that reflected an improved distribution of challenge aligned to a tighter range. The GSE Teacher Toolkit was used to identify appropriate learning objectives within an appropriate range. These were then used to inform the creation of new Rennert learning objectives. The analysis was also used to identify gaps in the curriculum – useful language functions that were not currently being covered. These additional learning objectives were given to teachers to inform the development of supplementary content.

A larger course overhaul, with new course material, was also considered, but at the time of the initial audit, this level of overhaul was not an option.

Program Development using the Global Scale of English

After completing a curriculum audit using the GSE, the potential for using the GSE Learning Objectives to create a fully aligned in-house program became evident. At the time of the audit, there was discussion around expanding an executive business course, adding more levels to the course with additional options for learners. The GSE Learning Objectives for Professional Learners provided a solid framework for developing a new program.

Challenges and goals

The initial goal was to develop a high-level course for business executives that would drive progress in a short amount of time. Rennert set themselves the task of selecting learning objectives that could build measurable progress for students who were functioning at a B1 or higher level in their English ability. In order to address this challenge, the program needed to be developed with learning objectives that were at the appropriate

level, with considerations for providing real challenge, thereby improving acquisition and driving progression of learning. The goal for the finalized program was to develop two to three levels of an upper-intermediate to advanced course specifically designed to help learners make between 3 and 5 points progress on the GSE proficiency scale.

Materials

The following information was required:

• A wish list of objectives informed by previous courses and learner interest

• Course length and hours of direct classroom teaching

• The GSE Learning Objectives for Professional English (available as PDFs[3] and as part of the GSE Teacher Toolkit[4]).

Process

The process was as follows:

1. A wish list of objectives and previous course objectives was collected.

2. The list was audited against the GSE Learning Objectives to check level and identify potential gaps.

3. The GSE Learning Objectives and original course goals were used to create contextualized Rennert objectives.

4. The distribution of objectives against course expectations was reviewed and refined.

5. The original syllabus was reviewed and revised using the new Rennert learning objectives.

6. The selected course materials were reviewed and aligned to Rennert learning objectives to better understand where goals were being surfaced and where gaps needed to be addressed.

7. The original assessments were reviewed and refined using the new Rennert learning objectives.

8. The new Rennert learning objectives were mapped to the coursebook identifying units inside the book where the objectives could be taught and assessed.

9. Aligning the coursebooks to the Rennert learning objectives allowed for a gap analysis to inform the development of supplemental materials for objectives that were not well represented in the course.

10. The new set of Rennert learning objectives was published for teachers and learners.

3   https://www.pearson.com/en/about/gse/learning-objectives.html
4   https://www.english.com/gse/teacher-toolkit/user/lo

Organization of Goals

The initial process required the collation of learning objectives to use as a starting point for the creation of the new course. This included learning objectives from previous courses as well as wish list items that were not fully formed but were identified as desirable goals. The first part of this process was to look for GSE Learning Objectives that matched the level of the course. The purpose was not only to audit, but also to appropriately level, the course so a specific range for learning objectives was selected initially to ensure that the course was at the right level.

Customization of Goals

Once GSE Learning Objectives were chosen that gave an indication of the right level, the original course goals and wish list items were revised to reflect the level and to contextualize the course to the needs of Rennert. This resulted in a set of custom learning objectives that were specifically designed for the school and the outcomes of the specific program, using the GSE and CEFR as guidance to target the appropriate level of proficiency. Creating custom goals allowed for a maximum level of flexibility in selecting content and coursebooks, creating content, and understanding learner progress on the course.

Skill	Rennert Learning Objective	Skill	GSE Learning Objective	GSE/CEFR
Speaking	Use language flexibly and effectively for social and professional purposes.	Speaking	Can contribute to group discussions even when speech is fast and colloquial.	76/ C1
Speaking	Fluently, accurately and effectively participate in a full range of professional situations, such as small talk.	Speaking	Can include small talk in a negotiation in order to maintain rapport.	62/ B2
Listening	Recognize implicit meaning and differences in register and make inferences based on tone, pace, and vocabulary in a wide range of demanding, longer listening professional texts.	Listening	Can infer attitude and mood in discussion by using contextual, grammatical and lexical clues.	71/ B2+
Writing	Produce a full range of professional written texts with the appropriate layout and structure, such as meetings and agendas.	Writing	Can write detailed minutes of a meeting.	73/ B2+

During this process it became clear that any changes and adaptations to GSE Learning Objectives had to be made carefully. Changing the wording of an original learning objective could inadvertently change the level of the learning objective. With this in mind, it was important to pay attention to the original wording of GSE Learning Objectives and to

mirror or match as closely as possible when creating the new Rennert learning objective – in order to feel confident that the estimated range of the new learning objectives could be defended using the original GSE Learning Objectives.

Once the full range of learning objectives had been selected, they provided an overview of the skills that were being reviewed, the specific Rennert SLOs, and the equivalent values aligned to the GSE and CEFR.

Distribution and Range

Having established which learning objectives would be surfaced in the course, it was then possible to move to the next stage in the process in which the challenge of the course could be reviewed, along with the distribution of learning objectives across the various skills. In an initial review (without any adjustment), the list of SLOs contained a higher number of speaking learning objectives and an almost equal distribution of reading, listening and writing learning objectives. For this particular program in which speaking was the primary focus, the distribution reflected the goals of the course well, and was well aligned with the placement assessment for the course, which was also heavily weighted to speaking. After review and discussion with the teachers, a final distribution was created where 50% of the learning objectives reflected speaking and the other half of the learning objectives was distributed across the remaining skills.

Initial Mapping (Advanced)

Adv	S	R	L	W	TOTAL	%
B2	1	0	0	0	1	4%
B2+	7	3	3	3	16	57%
C1	7	2	0	2	11	39%
TOTAL	15	5	3	5	28	100%

After first edits (Advanced)

Adv	S	R	L	W	TOTAL	%
B2	1	0	0	0	1	3%
B2+	7	3	3	3	16	53%
C1	7	2	2	2	13	43%
TOTAL	15	5	5	5	30	100%

Once the learning objectives were distributed across the skills it was easier to more closely examine the range of difficulty of the intended course. As the course was designed for upper-intermediate learners, it was necessary to review the entrance and exit proficiency expectations and whether or not these were realistic. After discussion, a range was established for incoming learners along with expectations of potential progress during the course. In this particular program, students start anywhere from very high B2 (GSE: 65+) to C1 (GSE: 76+). Considering the intensive nature of the course (with over 200 hours of intensive input) some high achieving students could potentially see learning progress of between 4-6 points on the GSE.

The following targets were established:

- Students who start at B2/lower end of B2+ (GSE: 65-70) could finish at high B2+ - C1/GSE: 70-77
- Students who start at the higher end of B2+ (GSE: 71-75) could finish at C1/GSE: 76-80
- Students who start at the lower end of C1 (GSE: 76-80) could finish at a high C1/GSE: 80-84

Final version (Advanced)

Adv	S	R	L	W	TOTAL	%
B2	1	0	0	1	2	7%
B2+	8	3	3	2	16	53%
C1	6	2	2	2	12	40%
TOTAL	15	5	5	5	30	100%
%	50%	17%	17%	17%	100%	

Furthermore, the process revealed that for students who enrolled at a high C1 (GSE: 81+), the course could perhaps be too low to achieve measurable progress. This indicated the opportunity for an additional advanced level of the course that could challenge C1 level students.

Curriculum and Assessment Review

After finalizing the SLOs and the distribution of outcomes across levels, it was possible to revise any previous program materials created for the course. The SLOs allowed for the creation of a course planner and lesson guidance that provided a more significant amount of detail around the objectives that would be achieved, which course content would address specific learning objectives, and where teachers would need

to consider additional materials and supplements in order to achieve against expected course objectives.

Additionally, the process of assessment was also reviewed to help teachers understand where specific learning objectives would be achieved and so help them plan observation of performance.

Conclusions

The process of aligning programs to GSE Learning Objectives has had a number of benefits for Rennert in terms of clarifying course objectives, impacting overall efficacy of teaching, and improving learner achievement. Using the Global Scale of English from the beginning of the course design process provided a great opportunity to reflect on how to best achieve the desired progress outcomes. As the program was planned around specific progress targets, it was possible to make adjustments to course length and the number of contact hours in order to improve the ability to achieve the target goal of advancing student proficiency between 3 and 6 GSE points. Furthermore, it became clear that having the learning objectives mapped to a coursebook could improve the overall flexibility of content delivery by teachers. With an overview of how the course objectives were mapped to the coursebook, teachers were able to make decisions on which content to cover based on observation of learners and their specific needs. And one final observation for any institution considering using the GSE for a curriculum audit or development of a new program of study: the experience at Rennert emphasized the need for thoughtful customization of Global Scale of English Learning Objectives to institution-specific objectives. The GSE Learning Objectives provide a framework of reference for educators to inform teaching and assessment, but specific learner needs should lie at the heart of any decisions taken in these areas.

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Pearson