

# The Language Biography

The Language Biography facilitates the learner's involvement in planning, reflecting upon and assessing his or her learning process and progress.

The Language Biography contains goal-setting and self-assessment checklists that expand on the summary descriptors contained in the [Self-assessment Grid](#).

The Language Biography also encourages the learner to state what he/she can do in each language and to include information on linguistic, cultural and learning experiences gained in and outside formal educational contexts. It is organized to promote plurilingualism, i.e. the development of proficiency in a number of languages.

All ELP models must include all the elements illustrated in the templates and resources below, but the weighting may vary from model to model depending on local priorities. For example:

- If a priority is to highlight the synergy between the learning of different languages, more space may be accorded to metalinguistic reflection about how languages work, how they are used, and the development of learning strategies that can be used across languages, etc.
- If linguistic diversity is a priority, the model may favour more pages devoted to the linguistic environment of the learner, linguistic and intercultural experiences, and the role of mediation between languages and cultures, etc.
- An emphasis on developing learner autonomy may lead to more space being given to reflection on learning how to learn, goal-setting and self-assessment, etc.
- If intercultural learning is to be promoted, more space may be devoted to intercultural encounters, both direct and indirect (through text and other media) and reflection on behaviours, attitudes and strategies, etc.

The following sets of templates and resources are available to ELP developers. For each of the headings, developers need to decide whether to use the available templates or develop their own material. The Language Biography section of each ELP model should address each of the headings below.

## Plurilingual profile

The Language Biography usually opens with a page or two where the learner has the opportunity to reflect on and present their language and cultural background, for example the language(s) of the family, the neighbourhood, etc. You are invited to use or adapt the following template:

## Goal-setting and learning how to learn

You are invited to select and/or adapt from the following set of sample pages. There are pages prepared for both younger and older learners. The sample pages are preceded by a brief introduction.

You are advised to consider:

- whether the pages you select are intended for reflection on the learning of languages in general or on the learning of one specific language
- how your model will support on-going reflection (Are the pages intended to be reused? If so, can they be easily photocopied or can the data be stored? Will the learner be able to trace his or her development?)
- **Intercultural awareness and experience**
- You are invited to select and/or adapt from the following set of sample pages. There are pages prepared for both younger and older learners. The sample pages are preceded by a brief introduction.
- As with the Learning how to learn pages, you are advised to consider how the pages may be re-used and stored.
- When considering the pages, it is worth bearing two further points in mind. First, although the intercultural dimension of the ELP is explicitly associated with “respect for diversity of cultures and ways of life” (Council for Cultural Cooperation 2000), we need to be sensitive to cultural similarity as well as cultural difference, to sameness as well as otherness. Secondly, while ELPs designed for adolescent and adult learners often associate the intercultural dimension with residence abroad, it should be remembered that intercultural encounters may also occur in the learner’s home context.
- The Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters ([www.coe.int/lang-autobiography](http://www.coe.int/lang-autobiography)) is another Council of Europe product that may address your needs in this area.

## Self-assessment checklists

Checklists of “I can” descriptors are an obligatory requirement in all ELPs. They expand the general descriptors of the self-assessment grid into a detailed inventory of communicative activity that can be used for regular goal-setting and self-assessment. They also mediate to learners the CEFR’s action-oriented approach, which describes language learning as a variety of language use.

There is a variety of sources to select descriptors from and some guidance for adapting descriptors or formulating new ones. When you are drawing up the checklists for your model, you need to bear in mind questions, such as:

- How many descriptors per level do you need?
- How do you make it clear that no checklist is comprehensive? How do you allow learners and teachers to extend and expand the checklists?
- How will you present the descriptors? By level or by language activity?
- How will you allow for as many languages as learners might wish to assess themselves in (including languages learnt outside of school)?
- Will you allow for learners to date their self-assessment? And will they be able to show progress, for example from being able to do something with help or with hesitation to being able to do it under any circumstances?
- How will you enable learners to use the checklists for goal-setting as well as self-assessment?
- How are you going to provide guidance for the learner to transfer the results of self-assessment in the Language Biography to the Passport?

Possible solutions to these and other questions are to be found in the introduction to the set of generic descriptors for older learners.

If you are developing a model for younger learners, please consult the paper listed that considers the issues involved in producing descriptors that are both relevant and comprehensible to young learners. The paper also discusses the role of the Self-assessment Grid in ELPs for younger learners and why it is not possible to adapt it.

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/portfolio>