

How many years do you need to learn English?

After research into English language curriculums around the world, we concluded that in terms of study duration in years, the result is as follows:

CEFR	UK curriculum	US curriculum**	Singapore curriculum	Netherlands curriculum	English institutions (ID)
Pre-A	1 year*	-	2 years*	2 years	3 months
A1	1 year	1 year	1-2 years	1 year	
A2			1 year	1 year	
B1	1 year	1 year	1-2 years	1 year	3 months
B2	1-4 year	1-2 years	1 year	-	3 months
C1	-	-	-	-	6 months

*The UK and Singaporean curriculum assume that students are already exposed to English at Pre-A level prior to Kindergarten; Pre-A during Kindergarten is considered as reinforcing the preliminary English skills learnt before school

**The US curriculum requires that Pre-A level skills are already learnt prior to Kindergarten and are not repeated again for reinforcement in Kindergarten

Green: countries with students who are already intensely exposed to English prior to starting school

The total number of years needed to learn English is summarized in the table below:

English levels	Total years of study	
	Extensive learning*	Intensive learning
Pre-A	2 years	-
A1	4-5 years	-
A2	6 years	3 months
B1	7 years	6 months
B2	8 years	9 months
C1	-	15 months

*Number of years is calculated as the average of study years of the Singaporean and Dutch curriculums

Learning hours per week in primary schools are fewer than the amount of learning hours in test prep institutions, since primary school students must split their time and attention for several other subjects as well. Therefore the conclusion is divided into extensive learning (school curriculum) and intensive learning (test preps).

Comparisons to the UK and US curriculum are not as relevant as comparisons to the Singapore and Netherlands curriculum as the CEFR is designed to grade learners of a second language. The curriculum in the UK and US are designed for native speakers of English with early exposure to the language, therefore their curriculum is more focused on literacy skills than the language itself.

The above conclusion was made with the following underlying assumptions:

- Learning capabilities and learning rates are the same across all ages and cultures
- Learning capabilities of native English speakers and non-native English speakers are the same
- Teaching methods and materials are the same across all curriculums
- Teacher quality is the same across all observed countries

For more detailed explanations of each curriculum, see Appendix below.

Appendix

The equivalents for each CEFR level in the year it is achieved in various school curriculums of other countries is described in the table below. Curriculums that are highlighted are designed for students who have been exposed to English prior to starting school, while others have not.

CEFR	UK curriculum	US curriculum	Singapore curriculum	Netherlands curriculum
Pre-A	Kindergarten	-	Kindergarten	Primary school
A1	Year 1	Kindergarten	Year 1/Year 2	Low-level secondary school (4 years)
A2			Year 3	Mid-level secondary school (5 years)
B1	Year 2	Year 1	Year 3/Year 4	High-level secondary school (6 years)
B2	Year 3/4/5/6	Year 2/3	Year 5	-
C1	-	-	-	-

UK curriculum

The level of English in the UK primary school curriculum only reaches B2 level, since the proficiency level required at C1 also includes use of the language in academic and professional contexts. The level of English in Pre-A is assumed to have been taught as the child grows up in an English-speaking environment and into kindergarten, although some components of Pre-A are still taught in Year 1. Since the curriculum is designed for students who have been exposed to English since birth, levels A1 to A2 in CEFR which sets the basic foundations of a language equals to only Year 1 of the UK curriculum. Year 2 is equivalent to B1 according to the level of writing required (personal experiences) and Year 3-6 is equivalent to B2 only because it is too low for C1 but of higher level than B1.

Year 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn to read regular and unusual grapheme-phoneme correspondences (GPCs) • listening to and discussing a wide range of poems, stories and non-fiction at a level beyond that at which they can read independently, • Naming the alphabet in order • Prefix and suffixes: plural, -er, -ed, -ing, -est
Year 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retell familiar stories • Read most words quickly and accurately • Suffixes: -ment, -ness, -ful, -less, -ly • writing narratives about personal experiences and those of others (real and fictional) • Subordination (when, if, that, because) and coordination (using, or, and, but)
Year 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • write down their ideas with a reasonable degree of accuracy and with good sentence punctuation • Understand figurative language • Ability to decode new words • Further prefix and suffixes • Plan their writing, draft, and evaluate • Use conjunctions, adverbs, prepositions in writing
Year 4	
Year 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read words effortlessly • identifying how language, structure and presentation contribute to meaning • use further prefixes and suffixes and understand the guidance for adding them
Year 6	

US curriculum

The US curriculum is highly focused on literacy skills in all aspects (reading, speaking, listening, writing), and the focus heightens starting from Year 4, from which comparisons with the CEFR levels is no longer relevant. As is the case with the UK, the US curriculum is also structured for those with preliminary exposure to English, therefore the Pre-A level is assumed to have been achieved before primary school starts. Kindergarten is considered equivalent to A1 and A2 the similar competence descriptors, such as describing familiar issues with prompt/help and reading common words with ease. Year 1 is equivalent to B1 due to similar descriptor of being able to describe people and events although the writing level of Year 1 (US curriculum) is higher than B1 (CEFR). Year 2 and 3 is also slightly of a higher level than B2, however the ability to produce a text (report or essay) with clarity and detail makes both levels considerably similar.

Kindergartners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With prompting, retell familiar stories and recognize common types of text • With prompting and support, describe the connection between two individuals, events, ideas, or pieces of information in a text.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Isolate and pronounce the initial, medial vowel, and final sounds (phonemes) in three-phoneme (consonant-vowel-consonant, or CVC) words ● Read common high-frequency words by sight (e.g., the, of, to, you, she, my, is, are, do, does) ● Describe familiar people, places, things, and events and, with prompting and support, provide additional detail ● Understand and use question words (interrogatives) (e.g., who, what, where, when, why, how). Use the most frequently occurring prepositions (e.g., to, from, in, out, on, off, for, of, by, with)
Year 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Describe characters, setting, major events in a story ● Describe the connection between two individuals, events, ideas, or pieces of information in a text ● Orally produce single-syllable words by blending sounds (phonemes), including consonant blends ● Know the spelling-sound correspondences for common consonant digraphs ● Write narratives in which they recount two or more appropriately sequenced events ● Describe people, places, things, and events with relevant details, expressing ideas and feelings clearly ● Use verbs to convey a sense of past, present, and future (e.g., Yesterday I walked home; Today I walk home; Tomorrow I will walk home). Use frequently occurring conjunctions (e.g., and, but, or, so, because)
Year 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Describe the overall structure of a story, including describing how the beginning introduces the story and the ending concludes the action ● Describe the connection between a series of historical events, scientific ideas or concepts, or steps in technical procedures in a text ● Distinguish long and short vowels when reading regularly spelled one-syllable words ● Write informative/explanatory texts in which they introduce a topic, use facts and definitions to develop points, and provide a concluding statement or section ● Tell a story or recount an experience with appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details, speaking audibly in coherent sentences ● Form and use the past tense of frequently occurring irregular verbs (e.g., sat, hid, told). Produce, expand, and rearrange complete simple and compound sentences
Year 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Recount stories, including fables, folktales, and myths from diverse cultures; determine the central message, lesson, or moral and explain how it is conveyed through key details in the text ● Determine the main idea of a text; recount the key details and explain how they support the main idea ● Identify and know the meaning of the most common prefixes and derivational suffixes ● Introduce a topic and group related information together; include illustrations when useful to aiding comprehension, Use linking words and phrases (e.g., because, therefore, since, for example) to connect opinion and reasons

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Report on a topic or text, tell a story, or recount an experience with appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details, speaking clearly at an understandable pace ● Produce, expand, and rearrange complete simple and compound sentences, Demonstrate understanding of word relationships and nuances in word meanings
Year 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text; summarize the text. ● Describe the overall structure (e.g., chronology, comparison, cause/effect, problem/solution) of events, ideas, concepts, or information in a text or part of a text ● Use combined knowledge of all letter-sound correspondences, syllabication patterns, and morphology (e.g., roots and affixes) to read accurately unfamiliar multisyllabic words in context and out of context ● Introduce a topic or text clearly, state an opinion, and create an organizational structure in which related ideas are grouped to support the writer's purpose, Link opinion and reasons using words and phrases (e.g., for instance, in order to, in addition) ● Report on a topic or text, tell a story, or recount an experience in an organized manner, using appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details to support main ideas or themes; speak clearly at an understandable pace ● Form and use the progressive (e.g., I was walking; I am walking; I will be walking) verb tenses. Use modal auxiliaries (e.g., can, may, must) to convey various conditions
Year 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including how characters in a story or drama respond to challenges or how the speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic; summarize the text ● Analyze multiple accounts of the same event or topic, noting important similarities and differences in the point of view they represent ● Link ideas within and across categories of information using words, phrases, and clauses (e.g., in contrast, especially). ● Report on a topic or text or present an opinion, sequencing ideas logically and using appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details to support main ideas or themes; speak clearly at an understandable pace ● Form and use the perfect (e.g., I had walked; I have walked; I will have walked) verb tenses. Explain the function of conjunctions, prepositions, and interjections in general and their function in particular sentences

Singapore

The main differentiator of Singapore's curriculum is that it teaches English simultaneously with a mother language. In Singapore, students are already exposed to English through daily use in Kindergarten although it is not taught formally, which is equivalent to Pre-A level where very basic English is introduced. Formal English education begins in primary school. A1 is deemed equivalent to the early years of primary school when the basic literacy skills are first taught and established, that is Year 1 and Year 2 although few aspects of Year 2 would be categorised as

A2 (e.g. paraphrasing information in speaking). Literacy skills start to become a focus starting from Year 3, therefore comparisons of A2, B1, and B2 were primarily based on the reading and writing competence level. Year 6 seems to be a higher level than B2 but not complex enough to be equivalent to C1.

Year 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Listening and viewing: Identify consonants, vowels, consonant clusters and vowel combinations; identify the key words and phrases in a text; conversation, poetry, recount, narrative ● Reading and viewing: recognize and name letters of alphabet; identify and differentiate among common sounds in words; match sounds to corresponding letter/pattern; common, one-syllable words; recognise and match contractions to words (e.g., couldn't – could not); Analyse organisational patterns in a list, comparison-contrast; identify beginning, middle, and ending of stories ● Speaking and representing: Speak clearly, according to social norms and cultural values in different situations ● Writing and representing: recognize alphabet; matching sound patterns to words (e.g., segmenting, blending); spell three- and four-letter short vowel words (e.g., consonant-vowel-consonant words, such as 'box', 'cat' and 'tick')
Year 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Listening and viewing: Identify speaker/source; make simple generalisations; conversation, poetry, recount, narrative ● Reading and viewing: recognize and name letters of alphabet; identify and differentiate among common sounds in words; match sounds to corresponding letter/pattern; common, one-syllable words; recognise and match contractions to words (e.g., couldn't – could not); Analyse organisational patterns in a list, comparison-contrast; identify beginning, middle, and ending of stories; identify and study characters and their actions ● Speaking and representing: Speak clearly, according to social norms and cultural values in different situations; paraphrase information for verification, clarification or confirmation ● Writing and representing: recognize alphabet; matching sound patterns to words (e.g., segmenting, blending); spell three- and four-letter short vowel words (e.g., consonant-vowel-consonant words, such as 'box', 'cat' and 'tick')
Year 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Listening and viewing: Identify gist/main idea; draw conclusions; distinguish fact and opinion; identify different points of view; identify problem-solution relationship; information reports ● Reading and viewing: silent letters; match sounds to corresponding letter/pattern; recognise and read compound words; recognise and match contractions to words (e.g., couldn't – could not); Analyse organisational patterns in a cause-effect, problem-solution; identify and study characters and their actions ● Speaking and representing: point out similarities and differences to explain different perspectives/ justify a position; support opinions with reason; explain cause and effect ● Writing and representing: using word meaning (e.g., of root words, and how adding prefixes and suffixes to a word affects its meaning);

	<p>spell silent letters and multisyllabic words; Plan how to support the key message of a text with factual/ descriptive details and/ or examples appropriate to purpose, audience, context and culture; use key words, phrases or clauses to introduce the main idea in a paragraph</p>
<p>Year 4</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Listening and viewing: Draw conclusions; identify choice of words to influence emotion; identify problem-solution relationship; information reports factual recounts ● Reading and viewing: silent letters; recognise and read compound words; recognise and read multisyllabic real words; distinguish cause and effect; identify and read common word endings, rhyming words, irregularly spelt words; compare and contrast ideas and concepts; Analyse organisational patterns in a cause-effect, problem-solution; recognise and identify plot structure; ● Speaking and representing: give details, anecdotes, concrete examples to illustrate a point; restate main points to reinforce ideas or focus on objective(s); seek agreement for discussion outcomes ● Writing and representing: using word meaning (e.g., of root words, and how adding prefixes and suffixes to a word affects its meaning); spell silent letters and multisyllabic words; Plan how to support the key message of a text with factual/ descriptive details and/ or examples appropriate to purpose, audience, context and culture; use key words, phrases or clauses to introduce the main idea in a paragraph; ensure coherence in cause-effect and compare-contrast texts
<p>Year 5</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Listening and viewing: Draw conclusions; assess speaker's enthusiasm; expositions (debates, reviews, etc.) ● Reading and viewing: silent letters; recognise and read multisyllabic real words; distinguish cause and effect; identify and read common word endings, rhyming words, irregularly spelt words; compare and contrast ideas and concepts; Analyse organisational patterns in a cause-effect, problem-solution; recognise and identify plot structure ● Speaking and representing: give details, anecdotes, concrete examples to illustrate a point; restate main points to reinforce ideas or focus on objective(s); seek agreement for discussion outcomes ● Writing and representing: using word meaning (e.g., of root words, and how adding prefixes and suffixes to a word affects its meaning); spell silent letters and multisyllabic words; distinguish American-British spelling; Plan how to support the key message of a text with factual/ descriptive details and/ or examples appropriate to purpose, audience, context and culture; Elaborate on, explain and/ or justify the main idea of a paragraph by providing relevant factual, descriptive, emotive or sensory details and/ or examples; ensure coherence in cause-effect and compare-contrast texts
<p>Year 6</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Listening and viewing: Draw conclusions; assess speaker's enthusiasm; expositions (debates, reviews, etc.) ● Reading and viewing: silent letters; recognise and read multisyllabic real words; distinguish cause and effect; identify and read common word endings, rhyming words, irregularly spelt words; compare and contrast ideas and concepts; Analyse organisational patterns in a cause-effect, problem-solution; recognise and identify plot structure ● Speaking and representing: give details, anecdotes, concrete

	<p>examples to illustrate a point; restate main points to reinforce ideas or focus on objective(s); seek agreement for discussion outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Writing and representing: using word meaning (e.g., of root words, and how adding prefixes and suffixes to a word affects its meaning); spell silent letters and multisyllabic words; distinguish American-British spelling; Plan how to support the key message of a text with factual/ descriptive details and/ or examples appropriate to purpose, audience, context and culture; Elaborate on, explain and/ or justify the main idea of a paragraph by providing relevant factual, descriptive, emotive or sensory details and/ or examples; ensure coherence in cause-effect and compare-contrast texts
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The Netherlands

The Netherlands curriculum is the most relevant curriculum to compare to due to the SEI curriculum structure since it was designed to teach English as a second language and the competence levels in the curriculum are quantified using the CEFR framework as well. However, the desired achieved levels are not stated granularly (per year of study). English is taught formally starting from secondary school, however exposure to English is already compulsory from late primary school (age 11) although some schools start exposing students to English from as early as age 5. Secondary school in the Netherlands is divided into 3 types based on the amount of vocational/scholar portions and the English curriculum is different for each type. The first school level is VMBO lasting 4 years, which expects students to reach A1 level after finishing school. The second level (HAVO) lasts 5 years and expects students to achieve A2. The third level (VWO) is expected to teach students to reach B1 level after 6 years of school.

Primary school	
Age 5-6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● No specific English lesson ● Children brought into a situation in which they come into contact with English in a playful manner and recognize certain words and phrases, such as instructions or questions, and carry out small assignments ● Songs and games are often repeated and form a recognizable part of their day for the children ● No reading skills required
Age 7-8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● No specific English lesson ● Differentiating spelling in English and Dutch ● Assignments in English, songs and naming objects
Age 9-10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Spelling of words and expressions in English ● Some subjects/courses taught in English ● extract information from short, relevant texts such as messages, songs and conversations, recognize some simple words and one or more sentences within the themes, for example which animal is described

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • texts relate to simple and familiar topics from everyday life
Age 11-12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expansion of listening and reading skills • retrieve specific predictable information from texts

	Secondary school	
	Vocational level (VMBO)	Scholar level (HAVO/VWO)
Competence goals	<p>applications of knowledge and skills on themes that are commonplace and familiar. This includes subjects from daily life (DL) and the public sector (PU). Examples include: personal identification, home, home and surroundings, leisure and entertainment, daily routines, school, contacts with other people, asking and pointing the way, weather (DL), cinema, theater, viewing sports, traveling, shopping, eating, drinking and using public services such as a visit to the doctor (PU), where the student also learns the role of English in (international) contacts</p>	<p>applications of knowledge and skills on themes that are commonplace and familiar. This includes subjects from daily life (DL) and the public sector (PU). Examples include: personal identification, home, home and surroundings, leisure and entertainment, daily routines, school, contacts with other people, future ambitions, side jobs, current events (DL), entertainment, travel, shopping, use of public places and public services. (PU), where the student also learns the role of English in (international) contacts</p>
Age 13-17/18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening: The student can understand when others introduce themselves to each other, or determine the subject of a slow and clear spoken conversation. in short, clearly spoken texts, numbers and familiar words meant that are addressed to the listener; understand simple factual information in familiar situations; understand a brief explanation; the student can determine the subject of short viewing / listening texts; understand relevant information from short, predictable listening texts; • Reading: High-frequency words and short, simple sentences. High-frequency words, sometimes also words that are immediately understood because they are (almost) the same in the foreign language as in their 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening: The student can follow the main points of conversations about him/ her interesting subject; follow the main lines of discussions about current and trusted themes; the student can understand a description of something that is familiar or what concerns him / her personally interested; understand main points in short conversations about familiar topics; Within familiar subjects of personal interest more complex language is understood; Within the own area of interest more complex language is understood. • Reading: Can reasonably deduce from the context the meaning of unfamiliar words about subjects that are familiar and familiar. Can derive from the context the meaning of unfamiliar words on topics

	<p>own language</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Conversation: Limited to a small repertoire of words and simple expressions in order to save themselves in certain concrete situations and to be able to talk about personal details such as wellbeing, hobbies and the like. Hard-core simple phrases and small groups of words that allow very limited information about simple, everyday and familiar activities to be exchanged. The pronunciation of a limited number of words and phrases can be understood with some effort by native speakers who are used to listening to people with a different language background. ● Speaking: Use a limited number of simple memorized expressions and simple grammatical constructions. Words or groups of words are connected by basic adjectives, such as: 'and' or 'then', occasionally expanded with other simple conjunctions such as 'but' and 'because'. Can reasonably describe a word if he / she can not come to the word himself, possibly using gestures and mimics. Can reasonably use an overarching concept ('fruit' for 'orange'). ● Writing: Familiar words and short sentences such as simple (traffic) signs, instructions, names of daily objects and names of shops or frequently used basic phrases are not always correctly transcribed. Own address, nationality and other personal details are not always spelled correctly. Short words and sentences about everyday and familiar topics have been correctly transcribed. Spelling of short words that fall within the verbal vocabulary of the 	<p>related to his / her interests. Can derive the meaning of occasionally occurring unfamiliar words from the context and reduce the meaning of sentences, provided that the topic discussed is known.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Conversation: The vocabulary is usually sufficient to participate unprepared in conversations about everyday topics and about current events, possibly with descriptions. Correct use of simple constructions that belong to predictable situations. Frequent routines and patterns still contain systematic errors. Fairly accurate use of frequent routines and patterns associated with predictable situations. ● Speaking: Correct use of simple constructions that belong to predictable situations. Frequent routines and patterns still contain systematic errors. Groups of words and series of short, simple individual elements are connected, but are not always a coherent text or coherent story. Series of short, simple individual elements are linked to a coherent text or coherent story. The pronunciation is clearly understandable, even with an accent and with the occasional wrong word. ● Writing: Correct use of simple constructions that belong to predictable situations. Frequent routines and patterns still contain systematic errors. Fairly accurate use of frequent routines and patterns associated with predictable situations. Groups of words and series of short, simple individual elements are
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	<p>writer is phonically very limited. Words or groups of words are occasionally connected to basic adjectives, such as: 'and' or 'then', but not yet systematically expanded with other simple conjunctions such as: 'only' and 'because'.</p>	<p>connected, but are not always a coherent text or coherent story. A series of short, simple individual elements is linked to a coherent text or coherent story</p>
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English institutions

Through communication with a contact who used to teach English as a second language in various settings (national exam preparation, IELTS preparation, university course), data was obtained that increasing the IELTS level from low to mid range takes approximately 3 months, however leveling up from mid to higher levels takes more time. For instance, it takes 3 months to level up from 4 to 6 and it takes just as long to go from 6.5 to 7.

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