**Vocabulary, the CEFR levels, and word family size**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Level | CEFR descriptors | Suggested vocabulary size | Suggested word family size |
| C2 | Has a good command of a very broad lexical repertoire including idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms; shows awareness of connotative levels of meaning. | 7000-9000 words | Level 6 and beyond |
| C1 | Has a good command of a broad lexical repertoire allowing gaps to be readily overcome with circumlocutions; little obvious searching for expressions or avoidance strategies. Good command of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms. | 5000-6000 words  Oxford 5000 (B2-C1) See introduction to OALD 10th edition p.x. | Level 5 |
| B2 | Has a good range of vocabulary for matters connected to his/her field and most general topics. Can vary formulation to avoid frequent repetition, but lexical gaps can still cause hesitation and circumlocution. | 4000 words (2000-3000 high frequency words plus 1000-2000 relevant technical vocabulary)  Oxford 3000 (B2) | Level 4 |
| B1 | Has a sufficient vocabulary to express him/herself with some circumlocutions on most topics pertinent to his/her everyday life such as family, hobbies and interests, work, travel, and current events. Has sufficient vocabulary to conduct routine, everyday transactions involving familiar situations and topics. | 2000-3000 most frequent high frequency words | Level 3 |
| A2 | Has a sufficient vocabulary for the expression of basic communicative needs. Has a sufficient vocabulary for coping with simple survival needs. | The most frequent 1000 word families | Level 3 partial |
| A1 | Has a basic vocabulary repertoire | 120 words and phrases from the survival vocabulary\* | Flemma + -ly |

\*Nation, P., & Crabbe, D. (1991). A survival language learning syllabus for foreign travel. *System, 19*(3), 191-201.

You could classify A as Elementary, B as Intermediate, and C as Advanced.

The vocabulary sizes from B2 on and certainly for C1and C2 are largely greater than others may recommend, for example Jim Milton (see below) except for the A1 level. My allocation of vocabulary levels are based on my BNC/COCA lists. At levels A2 the word family size (Level 3 partial) is the flemma plus the four derivational affixes -ly, -er (for example  *teacher*), un-, -th (sixth).

The following table is from Milton & Alexiou (2020)

Table 4: Mean EFL vocabulary size scores and the CEFR (adapted from Milton 2009)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| CEF level | X\_Lex |
| A1 | <1500 |
| A2 | 1500 - 2500 |
| B1 | 2500 - 3250 |
| B2 | 3250 - 3750 |
| C1 | 3750 - 4500 |
| C2 | 4500 - 5000 |

Laufer (2020 p. 4) suggests B1 involves 4000 words.

Tom Cobb’s analysis says . The lists are not separate lists; the Threshold list contains the Waystage list as well as new items, so common items were separated out using Lextutor’s TEXT\_LEX\_COMPARE. Once these lists were separated, it became clear they were not 1,000 or k-lists: Waystage is 772 headwords, Threshold is 775 (both are available for viewing at the link beside this one). [blurb.pdf (lextutor.ca)](https://www.lextutor.ca/vp/comp/cefr_docs/blurb.pdf)

**References**

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