

FAQs - General

Do learners need any prior knowledge of English to begin?

No. Picaro begins at pre-reading level. Students can begin without any knowledge of English whatsoever.

What is Picaro's relationship with Cambridge English?

Cambridge Young Learner English (YLE) is not just a set of exams, it is a curriculum. The Cambridge curriculum is mapped to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). After successfully completing the Picaro course, children will have mastered over 1,000 words and reach the threshold of level B1: being able to communicate in everyday language.

Cambridge English exams use materials and situations from everyday life in English-speaking countries. For example, the Listening tests use native speakers from countries including the UK, Australia, the USA and Canada.

How long does it take a student to reach the correct level to take Cambridge Starters, Movers and Flyers?

Units 1 – 8 of Picaro are aligned with Cambridge Starters. By the end of Unit 8, children should be ready to take Cambridge Starters tests. At the end of Unit 12, children could take the movers test, and at the end of Unit 16, students should be prepared for the flyers exams. Cambridge recommends over 200 hours of study before taking their exams and we offer over 300 hours of preparation.

How does Picaro prepare learners for the exam?

Preparation of the Cambridge exams is integrated throughout the units through:

- ✔ Working with key vocabulary and language areas within the syllabus which is based on the Cambridge vocabulary and grammar lists in preparation for the exams.
- ✔ Task types which reflect the same kind of tasks the children are asked to complete in the Cambridge Young Learner English exams.
- ✔ A step by step guide and focused approach on exam preparation in the Teacher's Book to help the teacher combine motivating language learning with exam preparation

By completing Picaro will learners get some kind of official Cambridge recognition?

For Picaro students who takes a Cambridge Young Learners English Test gets a Cambridge award, which has a maximum of five shields for each language skill: Listening, Reading and Writing, and Speaking.

This shows clearly how your child is progressing and will motivate them to study English more.



Have you measured the success of Picaro?

We have been extensive trialling Picaro around the world. Already, in many instances we have found that Picaro has taught children new vocabulary before it is even covered in a classroom, simply because of the content they are exposed to in the online game. Extensive case studies will soon be available.

Does the game measure “learning” progress?

The game is measured via the LMS. The LMS answers accuracy and topics completed. As each topic is related to learning outcomes, this helps measure children’s learning progress. For example, a teacher or a parent can look on the LMS and check their on the children’s progress and get a summative assessment which is aimed at determining the child’s achievement level, which also helps on a formative level of assessment by identifying the learning needs of the child.

Does Picaro have any formal formative assessment?

Yes, there will be review section at the end of each of the 16 units coverings vocabulary and language structures which the children will need to do to proceed to the next level.

How can we accurately decide the best level to begin Picaro? Do you have a diagnostic test?

Yes, we have the Picaro Placement test. This exam will determine which of the 4 four Picaro levels a student should begin their online English adventure.

Which literacy skills do learners need in their first language to begin with Picaro?

Picaro begins at pre-reading level and is designed for primary-aged children starting from about 4 – 5 years to begin with, we would expect children can comprehend and speak in their L1, but may only just be starting to read and write.

The units and tasks are designed to match the children’s cognitive learning level so the progression from unit to unit takes into account the children’s learning abilities such as in reading and writing.

What is Picaro’s teaching methodology?

The overriding methodology is that of a communicative approach to learning and teaching. The course is also focused on the importance of enjoyment and giving the children opportunities to achieve success which therefore motivates them to experiment in their language learning.

The course is designed to incorporate a combination of guided discovery and social constructivism which focuses on helping and supporting the children in their language learning experience through giving them opportunities to acquire, experiment and progress.



Task based learning is evident in the philosophy of the tasks they are asked to do which focus on scaffolding their learning into manageable blocks that gradually expand to stimulate their development further.

The course methodology also strives to reach every child by integrating learning styles to stimulate different learners and provide an opportunity for the children to integrate and participate fully.

This combination of methodology stems from taking a holistic approach to teaching and learning that puts the child first and creates a memorable and carefully structured route towards improving the children's language learning experience.

Is the story of Picaro part of the methodology?

Yes, it is. The Picaro storyline is a key element of the methodology of the course because it helps the children have a clear unambiguous context to hold their learning together. Where language is used for a purpose, familiarity with a storyline and the same characters provide a feeling of safety and a stimulating context which engages the children's activity in their own learning.

How is the scope and sequence structured?

The syllabus is based on natural learning and acquisition and each new language area is integrated into a guided discovery task:

- ✔ The language or vocabulary is in a natural context
- ✔ The initial focus is on meaning
- ✔ As the units progress the focus is on creating guided discovery – in other words the children are led towards the language rather than explicitly taught it.

The tasks within the syllabus are designed around:

- ✔ Providing visual, auditory and kinaesthetic task types which focus on fun, meaningful and memorable learning.
- ✔ Focusing on social construct theory which guides the children to an understanding of the new language through layered level of progressive difficulty and understanding.
- ✔ Developing cognitive processing which allows the child to gradually acquire the rules of language use.

Language concepts and language labels begin to emerge in higher levels which correspond to Cambridge Flyer's or an intermediate level. Explanations are short and carefully structured to ensure clarity and given by one of the Picaro characters to provide a less threatening focus for the children and maintain the characteristics of the course.

The language explanations are integrated through a short explanation with a task for the children to complete to check their understanding such as the one on the next page.



We use the present perfect when we want to look back from the present to the past. You can use the Present Perfect to describe your experience. When we want to make a question we use 'Have you ever...' and the verb in the participle, for example, been, drunk, eaten.

- | | |
|---|------------------|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> We use the present perfect to talk about an experience. | Tick / Cross box |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> We use 'Do you ever' to make a question. | Tick / Cross box |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> The present perfect connects the present and the past. | Tick / Cross box |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> We use the verb in the past tense. | Tick / Cross box |

Task should include a step by step approach similar to that of building a house (the foundations, then the structure, then the division of rooms and finally all the items for comfort such as the furniture). The term many experts use called 'scaffolding'; in other words the building blocks which help the learner reach understanding and correspond to their cognitive point in time.

How and why were topics selected?

The topics are selected based on the children's interests and themes which are relevant to their everyday life. In addition to this, they are based on Cambridge themes so the topics provide a dual-focus – that of maintaining interest in stimulating topics appropriate for the level and age of the children and at the same time preparing them for the Cambridge exams by focusing on the same themes that are integrated into the exam formats.

How did you select the vocabulary?

The vocabulary featured in Picaro is based on the *Cambridge Young Learner* test syllabus. We chose to structure the programme around this syllabus because of Cambridge's status as the leader in English language testing. Cambridge focuses on real, everyday English and encourages learning in a supportive environment, all of which echo our academic philosophy.

When are reading and writing introduced?

It is natural to learn language by being presented with sounds and words before being asked to read and write them. Our programme simulates the way children natural learn their first language, by first exposing them to the new language before asking them to read and write in it at later stages.

Why don't you teach the alphabet at the beginning?

The alphabet is taught later on in order to allow the children to get more benefit from a logical and gradual focus on phonics. The teaching of sounds rather than letters of the alphabet is seen as a more useful tool to help the children improve and make progress in their speaking or reading skills.

How do you develop speaking? How does Picaro's games measure these skills?

The games are geared to providing receptive input through the understanding of instructions to play the game (relevant for exam purposes in the speaking part) and providing further practice of vocabulary and language areas which help the children become more confident and adventurous in their language therefore giving them a wider repertoire of communicative language strategies.

Explicit speaking tasks are gradually integrated into the units as the course progresses which mirror the tasks asked of the children in the speaking part of the Cambridge exam - opportunities for pair, group and open class talk are present in each topic and there is a section in the Teacher's Book which focuses on creative use of language or language extension where the children are challenged to 'play with the language'.

Is Picaro a supplementary course or a core general English course?

Picaro is a core general English course at heart but teachers may choose to use part of it to supplement their language lessons such as the games or a block of topics from a unit that they feel would be useful and fit in with their school curriculum syllabus.

Picaro is a blended product. What are the benefits of both a classroom curriculum and an online component individually?

The benefits of the units and topics are that they provide a clear and guided approach to developing and improving the children's language learning in a fun and motivating way. They are very visual and the characters are child orientated, each with a different personality and image. The course also provides a good grounding for Cambridge exam preparation for the three exams.

The games provide a useful tool for alternative learning that takes the children and the teacher away from the typical classroom lesson. They give the children an opportunity to a task they would want to do in their own language and environment and also allow the teacher to consolidate and extend the children's learning in a fun and child-like way.

How long is each lesson?

Most lessons have been devised to last around 60 minutes, 90 if the teacher uses the optional activities such as the creative language section, downloadable worksheets or games. This may depend on the teacher and the learning situation. There are 3 games in each topic which are integrated into the time scale but the teacher can use all of them or possibly choose one either because of time restrictions or a need to do further vocabulary or language work on one explicit area.



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How many hours per week is the course?

The units are set up as 20 lessons each, so if they children have one 1 hour lesson, it's 20 weeks. If they have 2 hrs per week, it's 10 weeks, etc. There isn't a set hours per week value as the delivery will vary so much from school to school. It has been designed it be flexible so the schools can use it within the context of their own timetable to deliver lessons of 60-80/90 minutes duration (depending on uptake of optional activities).

Can children play Picaro at home?

Yes, students will be able to play Picaro at home as well as at school..

Can children compete with each other in the game?

Currently, children cannot compete with each other in the game, in order to prevent weaker students from getting discouraged in the early stages of language learning. However, teachers are able to see the top scorers in the class via the LMS, so could produce a leaderboard in class if they felt it was a motivational activity.

Will the characters and activities evolve to match the ages of the students?

The game will evolve as the levels increase. From each Unit, the game world changes in order to keep students engaged. New worlds such as underwater world and Stone Age world are introduced. The game mechanics also increase in complexity. As the levels increase, the characters grow up in the same way that children playing the game will.

Is Picaro in British or American English?

Picaro is based on British English. If students are also sitting the Cambridge Young Learners' Exams, Cambridge accept American English or British English, as long as your students are consistent in their usage.

Creating an American English version of Picaro is on the roadmap for the future.