The CEFR Levels, by What You Can Actually Say

A one-page summary of the six levels, by what you can do with your mouth.
Hours are rough and cumulative, and assume a language close to English.

LEVEL	WHAT YOU CAN DO	CUMULATIVE HOURS
A1 Breakthrough	Introduce yourself, order something, ask what it costs. Understand someone speaking slowly and trying to help. You can survive a transaction. You cannot hold a conversation.	**60 to 100**
A2 Waystage	Talk about your routine, your family and last weekend. Handle most shop, restaurant and travel situations. Where most self-taught learners stall, because A2 is comfortable.	**180 to 200**
B1 Threshold	Describe experiences, hopes and plans, and give your reasons. Follow native speakers who make some allowance for you. The first level with real conversation. The biggest jump of the six.	**350 to 400**
B2 Vantage	Hold a spontaneous conversation with no strain on either side. Argue a position and defend it. Follow talk in your own field. The practical target for most people, and for most universities.	**500 to 600**
C1 Effective proficiency	Speak fluently without visibly searching for words. Choose your register on purpose. Catch what was implied. Where you stop translating in your head. Usually needs immersion.	**700 to 800**
C2 Mastery	Understand virtually everything you hear. Express fine shades of meaning in complex situations. Not the same as native, and not a goal most learners need.	**Varies**

Work out your real speaking level in six minutes

Speak for two minutes, unprepared, on each of these:

1. What you did yesterday
2. A problem in your city, and what should be done about it
3. How a technology you use has changed in the last ten years

Managed the first but not the second: around A2. First two: around B1.
All three with some hesitation: around B2. All three fluently, with your opinions properly hedged and qualified: C1 territory.

Why your speaking level is lower than your reading level

Reading and listening are input skills. You can improve them alone, passively, in comfort. Speaking and writing are output skills, and they only improve through output. Most self-taught learners pour time into input and almost none into output, and the predictable result is a B2 reader who speaks at A2. That is an unbalanced profile, not a lack of talent, and the fix is more talking.

Input grows what you know. Only output grows what you can say.

What to practise at each step

A1 to A2	Volume of basic output. Say ordinary things out loud, constantly.
A2 to B1	Connecting sentences. Drill because, although, which means that.
B1 to B2	Speed and recovery. Keep talking through gaps instead of stopping.
B2 to C1	Precision and register. Say one thing formally, casually, carefully.
C1 to C2	Nuance and idiom. Catch what was implied rather than said.

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