



Teaching English Abroad

Are you looking for an opportunity to hone your teaching skills in a unique environment? Do you want to immerse yourself in another culture at the same time you teach others about your own culture? If so, then you might like to teach English abroad. Or perhaps you aren't sure and would like to learn more. Luckily, there's information here to answer all sorts of inquiries about teaching English abroad, or, as it is formally referred to: Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). This tip-sheet aims to inform you about TEFL opportunities, including how to evaluate those opportunities when looking to secure employment reasonably and safely.

What Does Teaching English as a Foreign Language Entail?

While there are many different positions available, and thus an array of different duties, expectations, and environments, a TEFL position usually involves sending a native or fluent speaker of English to another country in order to teach English to students whose first language is not English. Typically, countries that are most seriously seeking English-language teachers do not have well-established English-language curricula in their public schools. This means that you will more likely find a position in China or South Korea than in India or Germany. The classes you teach may be filled with elementary school, high school, or even continuing education students, so the expectations on what levels you will teach can differ; but the topics typically include: grammar, composition, conversation, and culture. You will sometimes be provided with comprehensive lesson plans and teaching modules. More often than not, however, you will be given a series of suggestions and it will then be your duty to develop a full lesson plan for your students. Contracts for teachers usually last for one school year. Application season can begin as early as Autumn / Early Winter for more prestigious programs (like the Japanese Exchange & Teaching Programme) or as late as mid-Summer for schools with vacancies. However, many programs and schools accept applications year-round, hiring or accepting on a rolling basis, e.g. the Central European Teaching Program.

Now, one of the first and most frequently asked questions about TEFL is "Do I need to know the language of the host country?" Most programs will want you to speak entirely in English in the classroom, so it is not usually a necessity to speak the language of the country. However, to make the greatest impact on the students you are teaching and to have the best time while you are abroad, basic communication skills are strongly recommended. Living in a country where you know nothing of the language can be a trying experience. Not to mention, knowing the language will certainly contribute to the applicant's eligibility. Some programs, like those in Europe, e.g. the Teaching Assistant Program in France, sometimes require more than even cursory language skills, including extensive university coursework or tested proficiency. Countries in other world regions, like Asia and Africa, tend to view country-specific language skills as less important.

Tools of a Teaching English as Foreign Language Search

International and Teaching Experience

Previous international experience is rarely, if ever, a requirement for TEFL positions. But previous teaching experience is highly sought after. Teaching experience can range from typical classroom experience to ESL tutoring, leading study of a sacred text, or volunteering with adult literacy classes. Many schools seek individuals with 2 – 5 years of teaching experience, while others accept less, and a fair number require none at all. In a country like China, for instance, where there is a law that non-Chinese English language teachers must have 2 years of previous teaching experience, there are, nonetheless, many positions available which require no previous experience. These are not necessarily shady positions. It is simply that demand for teachers is so high that the law often goes unenforced. Of course, at the end of day, prior teaching experience still makes you a better candidate in any country (and leaves you with less to worry about in the classroom).

English Language Teaching (ELT) Certification

English Language Teaching (ELT) certifications are means of accreditation for those seeking to teach English abroad. These intensive courses will help potential teachers acquire an understanding of how to teach English as a foreign language, a firm knowledge of grammar, and how to navigate potential cultural barriers. Typically a quality, rigorous ELT certification course (approx. 4 weeks) costs \$1,600 – 2,000. The most widely known and respected are the Cambridge Certificate (CELTA) and the Trinity Certificate in TESOL courses. These courses sometimes involve difficult acceptance processes (almost like getting into university) and then typically run between a month (full-time) and several months (part time) in order to earn the 120-130 hours necessary to be certified. Anyone holding ELT certification stands a better chance of being hired to teach abroad. However, only some programs and schools require these certifications.

Evaluating Teaching Placement Services

Given the plethora of TEFL job listings and placement services available online, you might need to be a little wary in your searching. For example, if a job posting looks too good to be true, then you would do well to find out more. While it is incredibly important to know all the information before accepting a teaching position, including where you will be living, what kind of support you will have, and precisely what your salary is (and when each month you will be paid), most scams and bad deals happen before you ever get a job offer. Third-parties who provide assistance in contacting a school, for instance, might be receiving commissions for recruitment. In such a scenario, these middle-men are more interested in getting you linked up with a school than in giving you the best information about their employers. In addition, if these third-parties are charging for their services (which they are never supposed to do), you are almost certainly better off contacting schools on your own. Finally, the school itself may be a front. Susan Griffith mentions one situation where a fictitious school in Botswana swindled numerous potential students out their money by requesting a \$100 "visa processing fee." Protecting yourself against scams means doing a little research on schools and employers. One place to do such research is the forum on Dave's ESL Café (<http://forums.eslcafe.com/job/>). Users discuss many of the postings on the site, often inquiring into their legitimacy. Look to these conversations as you make your decisions on which positions to pursue, but be sure to run other kinds of searches as well. Many region-specific forums will post about TEFL employment opportunities asking similar questions as those on Dave's ESL Café.

Key Resources

- Susan Griffith's Teaching English Abroad (now in its 14th edition) is a thoroughly researched, engagingly written guidebook to the field. Filled with advice, suggestions, warnings, personal testimony, and even a few current job listings, Griffiths book is almost undoubtedly the best print resource for questions about teaching English abroad. Even more helpful, it is specifically geared toward people in the US and UK.
- Dave's ESL Café (www.eslcafe.com) Dave's ESL Café has a truly comprehensive listing of positions for teaching English abroad. Susan Griffith, for instance, cites it as the online source for TEFL postings and job listings. With specific job boards for Korea and China, Dave's ESL Café also ranges over the entire international teaching market, hosting job postings and even teaching program information from Saudi Arabia and Indonesia to Russia and Taiwan. However, not everything posted is legitimate. As mentioned before, the forum on Dave's ESL café is very lively and there is plenty of discussion about most of the companies and schools looking for applicants. It is imperative that you look to these and other message boards before accepting offers or releasing personal information.
- Onestopenglish.com: While onestopenglish has a dearth of job postings (and quite a few of these aimed at native speakers of languages other than English) it contains invaluable resources for learning how to teach. From basic grammar lessons to tips on teaching students with little or no knowledge of English, these resources are ideal for students being hired without ELT certification but who aim to provide top-notch instruction.

- TEFL.com: The job postings—extensive though they may be—are mainly aimed at individuals with some form of ELT certification. However, the site has other useful elements, like a frequently updated City Cost Guide, links to TEFL resource guides on resume-building and job-seeking, and plenty of advice if you do happen to be interested in earning ELT certification.

Additional Resources

The following links lead to more general opportunities and position listings around the globe. Please note that not all the positions listed are available to anybody inquiring. Some are subject to age, language, experience, and certification restrictions. And, once again, not all job postings are legitimate, so please use extreme caution when sending our e-mails, personal information, or when making any monetary transactions.

- www.ciee.org/teach
- www.languagecorps.com
- www.educatorsoverseas.com
- www.adventureteaching.com
- <http://www.footprintsrecruiting.com/3h-6>
- www.bridgetefl.com (oriented towards TEFL certification-holders)

Specific Programs

These are teaching English abroad programs well-recognized for their integrity and prestige. Although they do not all fit neatly into the TEFL category, they are representative of the highest standards of similar programs. Not only is the aim here to make you aware of these programs but to highlight these programs as models of what to look for in others you might come across.

Central European Teaching Program

CETP exists to benefit young people in the formerly socialist countries of Central Europe by providing public schools in the region with native-speaking English teachers. Applications accepted year-round, until all teaching positions are filled.

Japanese Exchange & Teaching (JET) Programme

The JET Programme invites university graduates from overseas to participate in international exchange and foreign language education throughout Japan, serving in local government as well as public and private schools. Applications due in November each year.

The Ameson Year in China (AYC) Program

The Ameson Program recruits recent college graduates to teach at primary and secondary schools in China. This year-long program includes language-training for its teachers, as well as trips to different areas of China. Applicants who are accepted pay a fee for the program itself and for TEFL training. Applications accepted between February and May each year

Fulbright Program Teaching Assistantship (ETA)

Highly competitive teaching fellowships sponsored by the U.S. government, which are designed to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries. Applications are due in October each year. There are a wide range of countries which offer Teaching Assistantships; see the list, here: <https://us.fulbrightonline.org/about/types-of-grants/english-teaching-assistant-grants>.

A note on terminology: TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language), TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages), and ELT (English Language Teaching) are the most frequently used acronyms in Susan Griffith's *Teaching English Abroad*, the title of which inspired the acronym TEA used within this tip-sheet. TEFL refers to teaching any kind of student whose first language is not English. This encompasses both children and adults, and, more significantly, includes teaching English in both English-speaking and non-English-speaking countries. TEFL (pronounced "teffle") can be done, for instance, in the UK or in the US, so the term TEA would have been more appropriate for this tip-sheet, because it specifically entails teaching in foreign countries, which is our focus. However, since TEFL is far more widely used and typically is associated with teaching abroad, it has been used mostly throughout. Therefore the assumption held in the above pages is that these tips, resources, and guidelines are focused on TEA, even while using TEFL terminology.