



The World of EFL

EFL or ESL – English as a Foreign Language or English as a Second Language - three small letters which could give you a passport to a rich, cultural experience the formation of lifelong friendships and an almost guaranteed way of seeing the world.

Are you thinking of taking a gap year before university or are you looking for a rewarding career change? The teaching of English has become a multi-million-pound industry. English is a commodity that everyone across the globe seeks to master. It is seen as a gateway to success in international business, medicine, education, hospitality, leisure and recreation.

Holding a TEFL qualification enables you to travel across the world providing a service that will be valuable to millions in all walks of life. It's a tried and tested route taken by many, many people. However, what makes a good TEFL teacher?

It is generally accepted that the perfect teacher has a wide range of knowledge and is patient and understanding. He/She must have lots of energy and is entertaining while also being able to maintain discipline and a classroom environment conducive for study. This may seem impossible at times but as long as there is mutual respect on both sides there will be an understanding of the difficulties that may present themselves and how these problems can be overcome together. Does this way of life sound attractive to you? Where does one start and what are the requirements needed to enter the world of TESOL – the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language?



LONDON TEACHER
TRAINING COLLEGE

The [London Teacher Training College](#) offers a FREE TEFL foundation course so that you can have a taste of whether teaching would suit you. Just follow the link [HERE](#) to explore more.

Getting started

The first step on the TEFL ladder is to take a course that leads to a Certificate level 5 qualification – the Certificate in Teaching English as a Foreign Language Teaching. These have been accepted over many years as having met certain criteria. They have reached certain standards and are ‘accredited’. That means they are endorsed by a UK Government approved accreditation and the centres which run these courses have been regularly inspected and they have earned the right to issue the appropriate qualifications. Around the world there are many other courses which offer suitable EFL qualifications. You should check with your prospective future employers as to what they require from you in order to obtain a teaching position.



Apart from attending live courses, distance learning courses are now available today linked with on-line sessions. These will guide you through the theory and principles behind English language teaching. You will have to discover for yourself if you are capable of standing in front of a large group of eager faces and giving a lesson.

Once you have completed your course and have received the necessary qualification, you then need to set about finding that first allusive teaching position.

The first teaching post

If you want to stay in the UK for your first teaching appointment, it will more than likely be during the summer months with a language school, possibly in a main city or in one of the popular seaside towns which attract large numbers of foreign students during the busy summer periods. The experience will probably determine your future career in EFL.

If you decide to take a summer job, you can almost guarantee your students will be exclusively young teenage students in the UK for a bit of a holiday but also to practise their English in an English speaking environment. Some schools will want to fill as many classes as possible and the first day testing for precise linguistic levels may not be as rigorous as at other times of the year. You may have mixed ability students in the same class with different needs and expectations. This can be a problem but the school will probably have a Director of Studies or an Academic Manager for you to call on if you need help and advice. This will be a daunting time for you, lesson planning will take up much of your time as will getting to grips with the wealth of material possible in-house or on-line. It will not be enough to 'wing it' through the day. Do not make the mistake of just breezing into the classroom and teaching without some preparation beforehand. It does not work! However, if you get through your first teaching experience with your sanity intact, you will have a most rewarding career ahead of you.

Whilst you are at the school, you may be asked to get involved with the school's social programme, if there is one, or you may have to improvise one yourself. This can be great fun and very enjoyable. The excursions and cultural visits are often an integral part of the young student's first time in the UK and the more you can enrich the experience the better. If you are working with students who are under 18 you will need to be CRB or Criminal Records Bureau - checked as this is a legal requirement and a condition of all British Council schools.

If you have an extra talent; some musical ability, drama skills or a personal interest, for example; photography, yoga, a particular sport, that you can bring into your lessons, so much the better. Most language students require much more than just general English these days. What can you offer your students along with their language improvement?



At most reputable language schools there will be a policy for teacher development for its permanent and temporary staff of which you may be able to take advantage.

This development can take many forms. Some schools have a 'monitoring' or a 'buddy' system. This is where one of the more experienced members of staff guide a new teacher through the first few weeks at the school. The 'buddy' will be the first port of call if there are any difficulties. He/she may suggest weekly informal meetings where you can discuss any concerns you may have. Are there any classroom discipline issues? Do you have persistent late-comers? Are there any ways you can adapt the material in the coursebook to cater specifically to the needs of your students? How can you plan a series of lessons to link together rather a daily dose of 'one-off' lessons with no continuity?

They can suggest other ways of teaching a particular grammar point and offer advice on suitable materials for further practice. They will try to ensure that you are offering a good balance of skills in your lesson plans. Of course, the student wants to practise speaking in English as much as possible but a diet of freer conversation only can get very tedious after three hours. The student, or possibly someone else, is paying a lot of money for your time and will want to see some return for that investment.

As you become more comfortable with the school and its day to day running, try to observe your colleagues. Most teachers are usually willing to allow new teachers to watch or part-teach a lesson together – ‘team-teaching’. This will enable you to get an idea of different styles and methods. Look at how your colleague manages the class. Discover which approach works for you. How does he/she engage with the students? Are the aims of the lesson clear? Do the students feel that they are learning? What evidence can you see of this? Is the teacher’s board work well-planned? Does it help or hinder the teacher? What do these implications mean for your own teaching?

After the hectic summer period you may be asked to stay on as cover for holidays or sickness. Be as flexible as possible on what you can offer the school in terms of availability and what you are prepared to teach. The school may not offer examination classes to you straightaway but you should now get to know what kind of courses students are looking for when they come to the UK. Find out a little about the various examinations that are popular in certain countries and how they operate.

When the academic year begins many ELT organizations, for example [IATEFL – the International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language](#), or English UK advertise conferences, workshops or seminars for practising EFL teachers. Attend them if possible, exchange ideas with other teachers and absorb what you can for your own personal development.

The more knowledge you require in the early stages of your EFL career, the more sought after you will be and the easier to find employment. There are many excellent on-line sites for materials, lesson plans and teaching aids in an ever growing industry. There is always something new in methodology or a new technical classroom innovation to keep up to speed with the pace of the modern world. It is one business that does not stay still for very long.

[Other options](#)

While you are finding your way around the TEFL maze you may be able to offer one- to- one or private tuition. This could be arranged through a language school or through your own personal contacts. Again, the level of ability and language requirements will vary greatly. It will be best to do a 'needs analysis' of what your client requires within the first few sessions together. This will help you to plan accordingly and follow a structure of work that will suit them.

They will probably have clear objectives and may want to see a scheme of work. You may need to think about organizing a weekly timetable for your sessions on which you can reach an agreement. Take advantage of what is around you in the UK; such as newspapers, junk mail, free services, the local community, radio and television and of course, on-line.

What does your student want? Why have they come to the UK to learn English rather than in their country? What are their aspirations? Does they want: Business communication? All-round general English skills? ESP-English for Specific Purposes? They may be living and working in the UK and have particular language needs. What are they? How will you help them to achieve these aims? Do they want English for Academic Purposes – that is seeking to pass an examination? These considerations will determine what and how you teach. The responsibility will lie with you.



Private work can be very lucrative but as you can see, also be very demanding. If you offer the appropriate service, you will have a very satisfied client and word of mouth is a powerful marketing tool for you. There might be possibilities of translation work depending on how proficient your knowledge is of another language. Local services, such as the police or medical services may require your assistance, especially during the summer months when there is a great influx of foreign students to a small seaside town. The possibility of proof-reading of

business reports or university assignments could be another profitable source of income but time-consuming.

Working abroad

Almost without question, it is the travelling abroad that attracts most people to TEFL – Teaching English as a Foreign Language. It can be a wonderful opportunity to see new places and get to know a wide variety of people from all walks of life. However, before you board the plane with that TEFL qualification in your hand and zoom off to some exotic, distant land, a word of caution. There are a number of important points to consider and the odd pitfall to avoid.

It may be true to say the whole world seems to want to learn English and EMT (English mother tongue speakers) are highly sought after. Many young people see English as a means of obtaining a successful career. However, breaking into other English-speaking countries may be more difficult for EMT speakers. Also, in general, many schools in Western Europe prefer their teachers to hold EU passports as working papers are far easier to obtain.

So, in order to fulfill your wander lust, you may have to travel further afield to obtain your first teaching post. Such destinations might be – Latin America, Asia, Eastern/Central Europe, Middle East and certain countries in Western Europe, especially for those teachers who are native speakers. There is, of course, also some demand in the UK, USA and Australia.



Your first teaching position abroad

Having decided on where to go, it is imperative that you do as much research as possible on your destination. Remember, you will be seen as a guest in that country, and you will have to adapt, possibly to a completely new culture.

Find out what codes of behavior are acceptable and unacceptable. What national and local laws will you have to comply with? What are the cultural taboos? Will there be a conflict of lifestyle or politics? Will there be a dress code you have to follow?

The smallest action you perform could be seen as an insult to your students. Be aware, be culturally sensitive. You will be seen as a representative of your country. Your students will see people from your country as they see you. Giving the right impression is important.

You will need to consider practical things such as travel costs, accommodation, insurance, medical costs and how to survive until you find that first job. You will probably discover that most terms of employment are arranged for a year's contract. Just think of the wonderful opportunities that are waiting for you in that first year.

Deciding on whether you find employment before you leave your country is really your choice. There are many agencies in national newspapers and on-line that can find work for you. Nowadays, on-line video conferencing or Internet interviews are becoming more popular and can speed up the process. Many employers recruit new teachers through their own agents in that country. International House in London or the British Council may also be able to assist you in finding a teaching position. It is worth contacting them on-line.

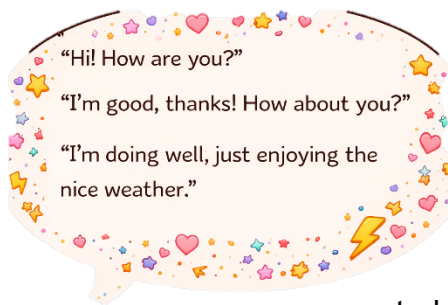
However, if wish to take the plunge and find a teaching position when you arrive in your destination, then there are a number of choices open to you. The local newspapers where you are staying may carry advertisements for English teachers or you may be able to advertise yourself. Visit local schools; they may ask you to give a demonstration lesson or give a short introductory talk about your country. Make contact with the local community and you may find private work very quickly, especially if you are an EMT speaker.

If you are going to work for a school, make sure it has a reputable name. It is important that you agree on salaries, hours and working conditions from day one. Find out as much as you can before you commit yourself to a long-term agreement. Does the school have a website?

Is the school recognized by the British Council or does it have any affiliation with International House? Are you able to contact any existing or former employees?

Whilst you are teaching at the school, you may find yourself being involved in all sorts of 'in-house' activities from giving short talks on various aspects of your culture to setting up a number of school projects, such as a school English newspaper, designing questionnaires, or organizing school debating societies. Many of today's young people around the world are very computer literate and you will be able to take advantage of these skills and of the hundreds of valuable sites on-line to extend your teaching repertoire.

Other possible school projects could be starting a film or theatre club. Once you establish that, organize a trip out together to see the film or play and then discuss it as a group. Perhaps your students would be keen on joining your book club to talk together about something they have all read. Does the book naturally lead into a film evening for an after-school social activity? Encourage your students to use the various social network sites across the globe to practise their English on-line.



Regular 'English only' conversation clubs are another popular venture you might wish to initiate. Your students would certainly enjoy it. Depending on where you are, you may become somewhat of a local celebrity. How enjoyable it might feel playing the role as teacher and student in the same classroom. Regardless of age, the students you teach will be delighted to see you take an interest in their culture. Most will gladly offer tips about local foods to eat, places to see, and things to try. You may be asked to give extra English lessons to the local schoolchildren or assist with their English homework. You will be invited to all sorts of wonderful cultural local events. Immerse yourself into the community and you will make lifelong friends and form close relationships.

Whether you are teaching in a language school or at a local junior school, you will be working with colleagues who will want to speak English with you. Regardless of their level of expertise, they will likely be keen to practice their English conversation skills with you. Not only will you have new friends, but your colleagues can help you navigate the area and its customs better than any guidebook. Consequently, once you have established yourself in a foreign country and have made contacts, the journey to other exciting locations seems much less frightening.

A lot of good EFL jobs, and general travel tips, are collected by word of mouth. By working and getting to know other EFL teachers, you can receive advice about new destinations or jobs

from people who have been there. You are part of a never-ending network which will exhaust itself only when you run out of enthusiasm.

As a final thought to bear in mind in favour of you working abroad, consider the kudos that your year long experience in a foreign country will give to your CV. Do not underestimate the value of the skills you acquire in the overseas EFL classroom; the ability to communicate across cultural barriers, leadership skills in conducting a class, and the ability to pick up a new language, even just conversationally. All these are great assets to add to your personal profile. These are skills that any future employer would admire, whether in TEFL or in another area of work.

[The EFL classroom may not be for you](#)

Perhaps TEFL is not solely your reason for wanting to work abroad. You may be interested in doing some sort of voluntary work apart from straight teaching. The VSO – the Voluntary Service Overseas, has set up a variety of schemes in such diverse areas as conservation, sport, farming, irrigation, medicine, youth work and other vital community projects. Perhaps some of these may take your interest.

However, many of these organizations *will* offer training in EFL for working both in primary and secondary schools as part of the deal. India, Nepal, South Africa, Mexico, Mongolia and Uganda are just some of the possible placements for voluntary work. For more information contact the VSO itself on [VSO](#)



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The next step

OK, you have now got a few years experience and perhaps have worked in a couple of exciting locations, you may now find it is time to extend your horizons and see what other opportunities might be waiting for you in the world of TEFL.

If you are considering a permanent teaching position in the UK, you will require, at some point, the next level of qualification – the DIP TESOL, or Diploma in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages. This is also a pre-requisite for any senior managerial post or teacher training, in all recognised language schools around the UK. Working for a recognized school means a professional approach to the teaching of English as a foreign language. This should ensure better working conditions and a certain code of practice to which must be adhered.



The DIP TESOL course is a demanding but stimulating one. It gives you the chance to exchange ideas with other members of the profession and gain new insight into the teaching of EFL. It is a well-respected qualification and will certainly broaden your options if you wish to make a permanent career in TEFL.

Management roles

Your first initial steps into TEFL mid-management will probably be as an ADoS – an Assistant Director of Studies in the UK during the summer months or at a school abroad. It can be a challenging position and one that will require administrative skills as well as the ability to be a good team member. It would also be of great benefit to ensure you still retain some time in the classroom as a teacher. This will continue your own personal development and help you to empathise with your colleagues when classroom issues arise. Your duties as ADoS will include some or all of the following:

- To support your Director of Studies for the well-being and day to day running of the school
- You may be responsible for course-planning and timetabling
- First-day testing and placing into class of new students
- Observing new teachers and organising teacher feedback
- Possibly chairing teachers' meetings, taking minutes acting upon any concerns that are raised
- Introducing new materials
- Ensuring that standards of teaching are maintained and compliance with British Council criteria if appropriate and meet the set requirements of an inspection. Being an Assistant Director of Studies is a position that will test your all-round abilities but one that can give you great satisfaction.

Eventually, you may decide that you wish to take on the full role of Director of Studies or Academic Manager which means you will assume greater responsibilities and probably spend less time in the classroom teaching situation. Apart from those duties similar to those of your Assistant Director of Studies, your main duty here will probably be to act as middleman between the owner or owners of the school and the teaching staff.

You will have to implement and monitor the academic programme of the school. It will be your task to ensure appropriate standards of student discipline are maintained and that clear and accurate records of class attendance and work covered are kept. Quite a responsibility!

Examinations

This is another aspect of TEFL which you are bound to come across during your career in TEFL. You may be asked to take a group of students preparing for a particular public English language examination. Perhaps, you may decide to become an examination marker or a writer of examination materials. There are a wide variety of them and have similarities and differences between them. Here is a brief outline of some of the more well-known ones.

If you are interested in this particular area, you should search on-line for the appropriate examining body for more information.

The University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate – UCLES, is probably the most internationally respected of all the examining bodies.

Cambridge Key English Test (KET)

Level: KET is the first-level Cambridge ESOL exam, at Level A2 of the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. KET shows that you can cope with everyday written and spoken communications at a basic level.

Papers: Reading / Writing, Listening, Speaking. From 2007 the examination has been in two formats - the paper and pencil test, or a computer-based version called CB-KET.

Cambridge Preliminary English Test (PET)

Level: PET is the second level Cambridge ESOL exam. It is an intermediate level exam, at Level B1 of the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

PET is a valuable qualification if you want to work or study abroad or to develop a career in international business.

Papers: Reading / Writing, Listening, Speaking. This examination is also now in two formats - the paper and pencil test, or a computer-based version called CB-PET.

Cambridge First Certificate in English (FCE)

Level: Upper-Intermediate, also known as Cambridge English First.

It is for people who need to prove they can use everyday written and spoken English at for work or study purposes.

Papers: Reading, Writing, Use of English, Listening, Speaking,

Cambridge Certificate in Advanced English (CAE)

Level: Advanced,

Pass accepted as an in-depth high-level test of English language.

Papers: Reading, Writing, of English in Use, Listening, Speaking,

Cambridge Certificate of Proficiency in English (CPE)

Level: Advanced

The most advanced of the UCLES examinations. It is for learners who have achieved an extremely high level of skill in the English language.

Papers: Reading Comprehension, Composition, Use of English, Listening, Speaking.

Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC)

This is a very popular examination around the world produced by the ETS – the Educational Testing Service.

It is highly regarded in many countries of Asia. The test questions are based on real-life work situations in an international environment such as meetings, travel, telephoning, conversations, etc.

It is especially useful for those people who want to work in large companies, particularly in Asia. It is used by organisations to determine whether an employee is suitable for a particular task.

The test is in two parts in which the candidate can take one or both:

Part 1 – Listening and Reading and scores between 10 - 990

Part 2 – Speaking and Writing and scores out of 200.

Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL)

This is another worldwide examination run by ETS. The test is in two formats: the TOEFL iBT, which is an on-line test and the Paper-based Test (PBT) for those candidates who do not have access to the Internet.

It is appropriate for the levels between Intermediate and Advanced and the scores can be used to satisfy a number of international immigration departments around the world for the issuing of residential visas.

International English Language Testing System (IELTS)

This is an examination which has certainly grown in popularity over the past few years. Many students wishing to follow a university course are required to achieve Bands 5.5 to 7 for most British university entry. It is also recognised for academic and professional purposes outside the United Kingdom.

It is available worldwide and there are forty-eight fixed examination dates each year. The examination has two versions: the Academic version and the General version. Wherever you go around the world, you are more than likely to encounter students who will be interested in improving their chances of obtaining a higher band score in the IELTS test and will be grateful for your assistance.

A few of the English language examinations have been highlighted here but, of course, there are a number of others which are taken worldwide. There are those examinations aimed at students in the world of business. It is not appropriate to cover them all here but it would certainly be worthwhile doing some research into them on the Internet. Remember, the more you can diversify and acquire new skills, the more you will have to offer a future employer.

Writing materials

While you are teaching EFL you may feel you wish to start writing educational materials of your own, perhaps as a means of supplementing your income. You may decide to write independently or with a colleague or a team of colleagues. What is your intention – to write solely in-house materials or with the intention of sending your work to a publisher?

This material could take the form of follow-up exercises, student coursebooks, supplementary practice exercises, resource materials or teachers' books. The opportunity for writing may give you a fresh focus on your teaching and a chance to recharge the batteries. Making money from this venture will vary considerably. Spend some time browsing on the thousands of TESOL sites from all around the world and you will see what there is available already and how difficult it will be to come up with something original. However, if you are working at a small language

centre where their budget is a restricted one for materials they might be very grateful for the additional resources you can provide and may pay you a modest fee. Again, it will add extra prestige to your varied CV.

Of course, you must realize that the materials you write for the school will belong to the school. Having said that, students will often enjoy using materials that have a personal touch and can give that something unique to your classes.

Writing full EFL student coursebooks is very demanding and often full of disappointments. If you *do* succeed, the financial benefits can be very rewarding. In order to do this, you will need creative ideas, substantial teaching experience, writing ability, determination to succeed and marketing ability.

It's very important that you attend conferences, such as IATEFL and English UK and network on-line. Get to know TESOL authors and representatives from publishers. Many of them have their own websites and blogs with suggestions for helping both teachers and students. Discover from them what makes a TEFL publication bestseller.

Give talks and presentations, broadcast yourself on-line. *Youtube* is a worldwide vehicle on which you might get immediate access to thousands of language students across the globe. See and be seen. Keep abreast of what are the current trends in TEFL. Look at what is already there. Could you give a new slant on an accepted practice? There is always something going on in TEFL.

It is extremely difficult to be successful in EFL writing as in most other kinds of writing. There are many superb TEFL teachers who have had that perfect book inside them for many years. Publishers will often only read the first page before rejecting your work. However, saying that, some publications do make it. It is possible. If you believe in your idea, then try. You never know!

[MA TEFL and MA TESOL](#)

Two final considerations for you to think about as you reach certain crossroads in your TEFL development might be an MA TEFL or an MA TESOL. These two options will certainly further your career and extend to you a wider range of opportunities, especially in the areas of management.

This has been a brief summary of the journey on the TESOL route. Teaching English can be a very rewarding experience both personally and sometimes financially. Once you have done an initial introductory course and have gained some experience, either in the UK or overseas, a variety of opportunities can present themselves to you. If you decide to work abroad, you will be given the chance to learn about fascinating new cultures and interesting languages. A TEFL qualification is an entry onto a privileged, well-respected network. It can provide you with a worthwhile career full of stimulating and unique challenges. It is one in which you will reflect on how fortunate you are to be involved.