



## 10 Things You Must Know Before Teaching English Abroad

### TEFL NUGGET # 1

You'll hear a few different acronyms being banded around to describe teaching English abroad and the qualifications you need. This can become quite confusing when trawling the 'Net. But there's no need to be confused any more. Why? Because they all mean the same thing and tend to be used interchangeably.

#### **Here's a summary:**

TEFL - (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) is generally used as an industry term. It was created originally in Europe to refer to the process of going abroad to teach English. These days some course providers use it to describe their courses, but more typically it is used to describe the industry as a whole.

TESOL - (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) is a term that is more widely recognized worldwide and can relate to teaching abroad OR in your own native speaking country. All of the major accreditation bodies use the term TESOL to describe their awards, hence why our final award is 'TESOL' not 'TEFL'.

TESL - (Teaching English as a Second Language) is another somewhat outdated term that was created to describe the process of teaching English in your own native speaking country to those whose first language is not English. For example, teaching immigrants to the UK or USA.



## TEFL NUGGET # 2

You DON'T need to speak the local language to be able to teach English abroad. In fact, most employers will be quite adamant that you stick to speaking only English. This encourages your students to make the most of their lessons and their time with you.

If you're going to a country with a language you're not familiar with, it might serve you well to learn a few basic phrases, but don't worry too much. You'll soon pick up the language you need to get by. It's amazing how quickly you learn when you have to! I myself taught in South Korea for a year. As you can imagine, before I arrived I couldn't even say 'Hello'! But within a few short weeks I was able to get my tongue around basic phrases communicate with the people in the community (even if some of it was by hand gestures!).

### TEFL NUGGET # 3

You don't need a degree to teach English in many cases. Actually, the reason you need a degree for some countries (most notably Korea and Japan) is because the government stipulates that you must have one for them to issue you with a working visa, not because the school insists upon it.

If you're an EU citizen you can teach anywhere within the European Community and so a visa isn't necessary. Most countries in Latin America don't require you to have a degree, so there are a many options there. That said, if you are a degree holder you'll certainly have the most choice available to you. In case you do need to get a working visa, get your degree certificate and transcripts ready. You might need to submit these to immigration. If you're not sure what a transcript is, it's the report that breaks down your results for each module of your degree.

### TEFL NUGGET # 4

I'm sure you'll do your research on the Internet, and so you should. But be warned; take everything you read on forums such as [www.eslcafe.com](http://www.eslcafe.com) with a pinch of salt. And certainly don't base your final decision about the reputability of a school based on something you read on a forum. You simply don't know the full story behind the grumblings of someone you have never met, and invariably they don't give the whole story. Plus, forums in general tend to be heavily biased towards negativity.



## TEFL NUGGET # 5

Always ask to speak with a past teacher of any school you're considering working for. Get their email address AND contact telephone number if possible. If you can only get their email address, ask the past teacher if you can call them personally. This is by far the best way to check out the reputability of a school.

## TEFL NUGGET # 6

Make a good first impression. Learn a little about the culture of the country in which you're going to teach before you go. Many countries, particularly in the Far East, have hundreds of cultural customs that impact daily life. For example, bowing your head as a greeting instead of shaking hands. You can't possibly learn them all, and you will be forgiven as a foreigner. But make the effort to learn a few and it will go a LONG way.

## TEFL NUGGET # 7

Grammar! Argh! Run for the hills! No seriously, don't worry about it. Our schooling systems tend not to teach us much about grammar. We intrinsically know grammar, but when it comes to describing different grammatical rules most of us don't have a clue.

When you enrol in an INTESOL TEFL course you'll go through grammar, but you won't be expected to remember everything. That's what your grammar book, AKA 'English Teacher's Bible' will be for. And don't forget, you'll be preparing a lesson plan for each class so you just need to make sure you're up to speed with the grammar for that day.

## TEFL NUGGET # 8

If you want to be in a position to get the best jobs, choose a course that is accredited. INTESOL is accredited by ALAP, a specialist ELT awarding body based in the UK. In addition, make sure your course is at least 100 hours in length.

## TEFL NUGGET # 9

It's not absolutely essential for every TEFL job, but if you can get some observed teaching practice before you let yourself loose in the classroom, do. You may feel confident already, but if not it will boost your confidence immensely. You can follow your INTESOL online TEFL course with observed teaching practice at a choice of locations, or you can even get teaching practice online with one of the world's largest online ESL tutoring companies.



## TEFL NUGGET # 10

Without question, the way to secure the best TEFL teaching job abroad is by jumping on a plane and going to the city you want to work in. You may initially think this is quite daunting, but step out of your comfort zone and do it. If an employer has the choice between a teacher s/he can meet before hiring, and one that they can only see a CV for, and speak to by phone, who do you think they'll choose? Nine times out of ten they'll choose the teacher they've met. And from your perspective you know if the school is right for you before you sign a contract and commit. It's win-win. That said, there are lots of resources where you can find a job before you travel, but as mentioned before just make sure you do your homework.

As English speakers we have a wonderful opportunity to expand our horizons by spending some meaningful time abroad.

I think one of our TEFL graduates, Adam, sums this up very well:

"With hindsight it is apparent what was missing in my life. Most people in the world today suffer a sense of personal powerlessness and pointlessness. They feel a lack of direction and a desire for 'change'. When these feelings build we start to question 'Why?', because, essentially, we feel there must be more to life – more meaning, more purpose. Traveling the world and teaching my native language gives me this meaning, rewards me with greater understanding and offers me the freedom to live wherever I choose, whenever I choose".

I hope this report has been useful, and I wish every success in your new adventure as a TEFL teacher.

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