

A Short Guide to TEFL

All about Teaching English
as a Foreign Language



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Preface

The money isn't great and the conditions are sometimes lousy. In spite of these two problems, I think teaching English as a foreign language is a wonderful job. A TEFL certificate is your passport to travel and work anywhere in the world. I've met some wonderful people, had some fantastic experiences and I can look at myself in the mirror and genuinely say I have made a difference in people's lives.

Kazuhiro was one of my favourite private students. He attended classes twice a week after work and we never managed to get through the exercises I had planned for him. All he wanted to talk about was football, politics and the best places to visit in London. Every month, we'd have the lesson in one of London's many Japanese restaurants. After returning to Japan, he invited me to visit him in Tokyo. I paid for the flight but he insisted on paying for everything else and he was the perfect host, showing me the best places in Tokyo and Kyoto.

Maria was the Colombian director of a language school franchise in Ecuador. Her English wasn't bad but she felt it was. We had private lessons in her office three times a week and she gained in confidence as the lessons progressed. After successfully giving a speech in English at an international conference, I found a hard back copy of her favourite Gabriel Garcia Marquez book on my desk with a thank you letter and a gift voucher attached.

When my lovely exam preparation class received their results and found they had all passed, they invited me to a Korean restaurant in London. We ended up drinking far too much but I was very touched when they presented me with a huge card and a very expensive gift – a Lotus watch! They all went on to study at university in the UK and we still keep in touch.

When I took my Trinity TESOL course in 1996, I never imagined I would still be working in the field over fifteen years later. During that time, I have worked as a teacher, Director of Studies, course designer and as a lead teacher trainer. I have worked in London at international schools and at one of the world's top universities, in Ecuador in South America

where I taught the local head honcho of General Motors, and have spent the last few years training teachers in Granada, one of the most beautiful and enticing cities in Spain.

As I'm writing this, I'm sipping a cold beer and looking up at the amazing Moorish palace known as the Alhambra. Thoughts of catching dirty tube trains to get around London are far from my mind. But, one day, I might tire of southern Spain and yearn for a change of scene. As a TEFL teacher, I know I can find work in China, Brazil, Turkey, wherever I want. I might not have an expensive house or a fast car but I do have a degree of freedom which - at this point in my life - is exactly what I want. We are now living in a world in which the old certainties are no longer present. We have undoubtedly lost a sense of security but we have also gained a willingness to seek contentment and excitement further afield, to cross borders and have new experiences.

Being a teacher of English as a foreign language provides you with the opportunity to experience other cultures and other ways of being. I hope this short guide demonstrates why you should consider leaving the rat race and train to become a TEFL teacher. It might not be a job for life but living for a year or two in another country is a wonderful way to develop professionally and personally.

This is not a book that tells you how to teach as I firmly believe that teachers learn through observation, experimentation and reflection. Rather it's aimed at people who want to get an overview of TEFL and find out what to do before, during and after taking a TEFL training course. After reading it, I hope you will have a better idea about teaching English as a foreign language and whether it is a job you might be interested in doing.

I have been training TEFL teachers for a number of years and the idea for the book arose from conversations I had with people about TEFL and discussions with people who were considering doing the course, people who were in the middle of doing the course, and people who had completed the course - but weren't really sure what they had got themselves into and where it could lead them.

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What is TEFL anyway?

TEFL, TESOL, ESOL, ELT, CELTA, EAL, EAP, ESP etc. The list of acronyms (abbreviations consisting of the first letters of each word in the name of something, pronounced as a word, for example IKEA or UNICEF) initialisms (like acronyms but each letter is pronounced separately such as the BBC or the FBI) and abbreviations (short forms of words or phrases) is maddening. Terms vary from country to country and a term in one place may have a different meaning elsewhere.

TEFL is the term I shall use in the book and it stands for:

Teaching English as a Foreign Language.

There it is, simple isn't it? **ELT** is another term I like to use and I'll use this to refer to the English Language Teaching industry. Now, lots of people in this industry have a problem with the term TEFL because of the internationalisation of the English language – known as EIL (English as an International Language) or ELF (English as a lingua franca). Is it accurate to say that English is a 'foreign language' in many countries where it is studied and used almost as deftly as the native tongue? Let's be honest, your average 25 year-old Norwegian is as comfortable using English as many Brits, Americans or Australians. In fact, they may speak a version which is closer to the 'standard and correct' version than many native speakers (people whose mother tongue is English) who speak in a regional dialect with distinct grammatical structures, vocabulary items and pronunciation features.

Anyway, TEFL is what I shall be talking about in this book - other terms might be used but they are mostly interchangeable unless you are having an academic discussion. I'll be referring to the type of teaching that occurs in classrooms all over the world where a group of adults, children or adolescents turn up to speak with and learn from a teacher who supposedly speaks better English (wider vocabulary, awareness of formal grammar structures and accuracy and fluency when writing and speaking) than they do.

For many students, the only type of teacher they feel can do this job effectively is a native speaker teacher. This might seem reasonable but just consider this for a moment: imagine

going to, let's say, Liverpool in the UK or Alabama in the USA and listening to the local native English speakers. Do they use the same variety as presenters on the BBC or CNN?

Rightly or wrongly, many students believe that the best way to learn 'correct' English is from a native speaker. If one is not available, the next best option is a non-native speaker (a person whose second, third or eighth language is English) who has mastered English and has no problems communicating with native speakers of English (our 25 year old Norwegian for example). As a last resort, many students will begrudgingly accept classes with a teacher from their own country who is able to communicate more effectively in English than they can.

But, why do so many people want to learn English? There are several main reasons: they need it to integrate into a society where people speak English in their daily lives (**integrative motivation**) or they need it to improve their study or work prospects – (**instrumental motivation**). In many countries, English is mandatory in schools, colleges or universities (**extrinsic motivation**). There are those unusual souls who love it for its own sake (**intrinsic motivation**) and want to read Charles Dickens in the original language or understand the lyrics of Bob Dylan or their favourite rap artist but I doubt if they form the majority. However, it's also true that many people learn English in order to have a voice in the global community through social media such as Twitter or Facebook.

To sum up, TEFL is teaching English to people who don't speak it as a first language. People do this all over the world from Afghanistan to Zanzibar. There is also a huge market for teaching English to non-native learners (students or immigrants on the whole) in English speaking countries (The UK, the USA, Australia, Canada, Ireland etc.) but relatively few positions in countries where the majority of citizens are bilingual (Sweden, Norway, Gibraltar). This means that many teachers go abroad for a few years, enjoy the work and then find teaching jobs in their own countries.

A TEFL certificate is often described as being a passport to the world. With it, you can live and work (with a few exceptions) anywhere you want to.

What kind of people become TEFL teachers?

I've been in the business since 1996 and I've watched a wide range of people enter a classroom and teach. I'd like to present a few of my favourites – names have been changed to protect the innocents.

Bob was a favourite of mine. In his late forties, he had worked in publishing for years. After being made redundant, he took a TEFL course and started working in a small language school in central London. Something of a pedant, he was known for his insistence on correcting every minor grammatical error and abhorred Americanisms, which to him included such inoffensive terms as 'cool', 'how are you doing?', 'wanna' and 'gotta', and the insertion of 'like' in phrases such as *'I am really like confused by your explanation of like the present perfect man'*.

The funny thing was that a minority of his students, mainly graduates from countries as varied as Brazil and Russia, really appreciated his classes as he fitted their preconceived idea of what a teacher sounded and looked like. His classes may not have been as much fun as those of other younger and hipper teachers but they felt that his hour-long lectures on dangling participles (sounds painful, doesn't it?) would help them improve their English. However, although they learned the terminology for complex grammar structures, their speaking skills actually *deteriorated* while studying with him! They always paused for two minutes to analyse some fiendishly complex common phrase such as 'How are you today, Vladimir? When they were finally ready to respond, the person asking the question had invariably got fed up of waiting and walked off.

Sally was a ray of sunshine in a dark and dingy school in smoggy East London. Unlike the other teachers, she was rarely hung-over, had no hygiene issues and didn't view her lessons as an excuse to watch her favourite gross-out comedies over and over again. Instead, she was unusual in that she prepared her lessons the night before, learned her students' names, gave them homework - which she actually corrected - and was generally able to answer their grammatical questions without a) providing Byzantine explanations which sound impressive until you actually realise that the future present perfective passive active noun doesn't exist in any language or b) glaring out the student in the style of Lee Van

Cleef in Spaghetti westerns before spitting out the phrase 'That's how we say it in English', thus ensuring that student would be so traumatised that they would never dare to ask a question in class again. Her students adored her and the transformation in their level of English was astounding. Most impressive of all was that the most timid of students started smiling and speaking in English after a couple of weeks of her classes. The grey haired lady with the infectious smile was able to work wonders.

Andy was an actor. Times were hard and his swarthy looks were rarely required by casting agents. He did a nice line in voiceovers but needed a more regular income. He couldn't work full-time but was able to arrange his working hours around his auditions. He made an ideal cover teacher and proved a hit with private students (those who prefer to have individual classes). While his knowledge of the intricate details of English grammar may have been less than comprehensive, his strength was assisting students with their pronunciation issues. You could always recognise one of his students because they invariably used mellifluous intonation to massacre syntax (word order) and tenses.

The bottom line is that good people skills and a modicum of intellect will probably be enough to make someone a capable teacher. You need to be patient of course, especially if you are teaching low level classes. Some teachers are extroverts but they can overwhelm students with their energy. Indeed, some great teachers I've worked with have been fairly introverted and many learners respond to their ability to create a calm atmosphere in the class and *listen to* rather than *talk at* the students.

There is no archetypal TEFL teacher. The great ones have a great passion for teaching, communicating and a love of English and have developed a style which keeps them and their learners motivated.

Am I the right age and nationality to do TEFL?

I've worked with and trained recent graduates who were able to manage classes without raising their voices and middle-aged former project managers who went blank in front of a group of expectant students. Most TEFL training courses will not accept trainees younger than 18 but there is no upper age limit. However, the demands of the job probably rule out all but the sprightliest of octogenarians. Basically, anyone who is old enough to work is probably capable of being a TEFL teacher. Sally, who I mentioned earlier, was in her early 60s and used her wisdom and experience to great effect.

On the other hand, it is also true that some students may prefer teachers of a certain age. Teenagers may respond well to younger teachers at first but can change their attitude if you try to be their friend. Mature students may feel dissatisfied with teachers who are substantially younger than they are. Older businessmen, for some bizarre reason, often like to learn from young women who think a hedge fund is the money you save up to buy a new lawnmower. I think it's fair to say that first impressions do count and younger and older teachers might find themselves victims of prejudice in certain contexts. On the whole though, competent professional teachers should be able to overcome any initial student scepticism after delivery a few solid lessons.

The nationality of a TEFL teacher is more problematic and revolves around the native versus non-native teacher debate. I have trained Brits, Americans and Australians and some of them were excellent teachers while others struggled to spell their own names correctly on the whiteboard. I've also trained Spanish, Italians, Brazilians, Germans, Dutch, Danes, Hungarians, Japanese and other nationalities. And you know what? Some of them were excellent while others struggled. To become a TEFL teacher, you need to have an excellent command of spoken and written English (C1 /Advanced level and above). Beyond that, your personal qualities and teaching skills are what really matter.

Unfortunately, the industry – influenced to a large extent by students – seems to prefer native speaker teachers. This means that excellent non-native English speakers are overlooked in favour of mediocre native speaker teachers of English. I know of a number of non-native teachers who are less than 100% honest when it comes to revealing their

nationality to their employers and students. It's amazing how many of them suddenly discover English, Welsh, Scottish or Irish parentage!

My advice to novice teachers is simply to do your job to the best of your abilities. Your students will probably learn to accept and respect you if they feel they are learning from you regardless of your age and nationality. But, you might have to tell a few white lies to get employed.

Where can I work as a TEFL teacher?

Juan, a bright but cheeky Colombian, used to spend most lessons chatting up female students and making risqué comments. One day, another student asked me why I had become an English teacher. Before I could answer, Juan piped up and said: 'Our teacher can meet many girls from different countries. How you say? The world is your lobster!'

If his recalling of the idiom was erroneous, the general sentiment wasn't. The world is your oyster as an English teacher. For the moment, there is an international demand for English teachers: from Nepal to Peru, from Siberia to Slovakia. There is also lots of work in English-speaking countries, at private language schools and, with some high-level qualifications and experience, you may find work at a university preparing smart students for their studies.

Remember though that a wonderful holiday in the sun does not mean that working there will be a walk in the park. Living abroad is tough, you'll miss friends and family, TV, may not get the local sense of humour, desire food from home (yes, that even includes the Brits among you), and a multitude of other things you take for granted in your own country.

Before making the move, consider going to:

- a) places which you have been to and liked**
- b) places which you are culturally attracted to**
- c) places where the working conditions are acceptable for TEFL teachers**
- d) places where you speak the local language or are prepared to learn it.**

Your ideal location may not possess all three features. I live in Spain and while I don't think the working conditions are wonderful here, I can't complain about the weather, the food or the natural sights here.

Do some serious research before you accept a job abroad and NEVER EVER send somebody money overseas if a potential employer asks you to do so. You wouldn't pay after accepting a job offer so why do it to get a teaching job?

Why not head over to Dave's ESL café (one of the longest-running TEFL sites) <http://www.eslcafe.com/> and read some of the comments in the International Job Forum? *Remember that people are more likely to post negative than positive comments on forums but at least you'll get an idea of potential problems.*

You can teach TEFL all over the world but do some serious research before deciding where to go. Doing a new job is hard enough without having to deal with all the other problems (language issues, different culture, local mentality, crime rate etc.) so choose carefully.

Do I have to speak the language of my students?

Before dealing with this question: let's provide some context:

Compare the average Brit, American or Australian with the average European or African. Who is more likely to be bilingual or multilingual? Perhaps because of the international nature of English, we native English speakers tend not to take learning languages too seriously. Maybe we think that we can communicate wherever we go by speaking slowly in a loud voice and rarely make much of an effort to really learn another language.

And the rest of the world is slowly waking up to the idea that maybe native speakers are not best-equipped to teach English. Many of us have never had to learn and think and write and dream in another language. For the moment, though, most native speakers are in the fortunate position of being first in line to be offered English teaching jobs.

Some academies employ local teachers to teach English grammar by comparing and contrasting it with the structures found in their own language and employ native speakers to teach conversation classes; some schools employ native speakers as language assistants and others favour the immersive approach and prohibit teachers from using their students' language in class.

It's common for academies to employ teachers who speak the local language to teach kids. Disciplining children in English may not have the same effect as doing it in their own language. Providing complex grammar explanations won't work in English and may only work if they are explained in the students' tongue. On the other hand, having a native speaker teaching your children seems to be an indication of your social status in many countries. Teachers can actually use this to their financial advantage as some parents will actually pay more than the going rate if they believe hiring the most expensive teacher in town will impress their neighbours!

Now, I've provided a little context, I'll try to address the question. Most TEFL courses teach you how to use the **Communicative Approach** with your learners. The central principal of this approach is that learners need to develop communicative competence through performing authentic and meaningful tasks in the new language. In practice, this

has meant that most teacher training courses strongly suggest that **only** English should be used in class.

Now, adopting an 'English only' approach in the classroom works well in contexts where the local language is English - such as the UK. The students come from different countries and can only communicate with each other and the teacher by using English. They are also probably highly motivated and agree with the notion that they need to immerse themselves in the language.

Working with classes of monolingual learners in which your students share the same first language is a completely different kettle of fish. In many monolingual teaching contexts, the students and the management may not be used to or comfortable with the convention of using English as the medium through which classes are delivered. This often depends on whether you are working in the private or public sector. In the public sector, the teaching approach is usually dictated by the educational system in the country you are working in. Private language schools or academies, which often sell their service to clients by stressing that the teachers are native speakers, are more likely to favour the communicative approach in class.

As a general rule, you will probably need some basic knowledge of the local language if you teach kids and are not working with a local teacher. Adult classes are more likely to be conducted solely in English as adults are usually – but not always - more motivated and understand the pedagogical rationale behind the communicative approach.

Ultimately, it's probably a good idea to learn the basics of the local language. Not only will this help you integrate and have a more enriching cultural experience but you will find that you'll be offered more work with better pay if you are able to defend yourself in the local tongue.

So, how do I become a TEFL teacher?

20 years ago, native English speakers could pack their bags, catch a plane to a country of their choice and would have a fairly good chance of finding work as an English teacher. While there are places where you can still do this, the industry has become far more professional in recent years. This means that most people need to take a TEFL course.

The choice of courses is bewildering and many people take a course and find that these certificates are not worth the paper they are written on. Others are told that the course is validated by such and such an organisation only to find that:

a) it doesn't exist or b) the validation body is an adult education college in a provincial town such as Watford (my home town in case any Watfordians are offended).

In the UK, things are relatively straightforward. To work in a half-decent school recognised by English UK, <http://www.englishuk.com/en/english-uk> you need to have a CELTA or a Trinity TESOL. Other certificates might be accepted but most employers prefer the two recognised ones. These two are validated by Cambridge University and Trinity College London, both reputable organisations which are recognised internationally.

<http://www.cambridgeesol.org/exams/celta/index.html>

<http://www.trinitycollege.co.uk/site/?id=20>

They might be a bit more expensive but the extra cost is worth it if you intend to work in the UK. Courses can be taken in training centres all over the world. There are lots of other certificates available and these might well help you find work outside of the UK. However, they will probably not be accepted by decent schools in the UK.

Now, many teachers work and don't have a certificate. They might well be great teachers and many unqualified teachers become effective classroom practitioners. However, the main reason for taking a 4-week TEFL course is that *it's a fast-track to becoming a competent teacher*. You get to know the terminology, become comfortable with working in a classroom, develop your understanding of the English language, and get constructive

criticism from experienced trainers who want you to develop your skills. Personally, I'd feel uncomfortable employing an unqualified teacher rather than somebody who has invested a modicum of time, effort and money in taking a relatively short training course.

TEFL teachers often earn far more than local English teachers who have spent years studying the language and how to teach it. That's why I think teachers need to have a basic teaching certificate at the very least.

How much do courses cost?

Most 4-week face to face courses cost between £850 and £1500. CELTA or Trinity TESOL courses are generally more expensive. In areas where there are lots of TEFL courses, such as central London, prices are generally lower due to the competition. You will usually be required to pay a deposit to secure your place on the course and make sure this is included in the overall cost. I've heard of some training centres pushing applicants to pay the deposit and then charging them the full course fees as well!

Online courses are obviously cheaper but many schools will not employ teachers without any observed classroom experience. Blended courses (online and face to face) are worth considering. If you are from the UK, remember that many TEFL courses are generally not recognised by employers at decent schools. You might find summer work but full-time teachers generally have CELTA or Trinity TESOL.

One more thing, some TEFL courses charge **substantially more** because they guarantee a job at the end of it. Think carefully before enrolling on one of those. Despite the crisis, there are lots of TEFL jobs on offer and you don't need to limit yourself to one school just because it's included as part of the package. In fact, if you look around, you might find reasonably priced courses which also offer guaranteed work placements (make sure these are paid positions are not internships).

Full-time 130 hr courses are not cheap. Don't expect much change out of a £1000 note (assuming they exist, I certainly haven't seen one!)

Where should I do the course?

Think of it like going to university. It might be more fun to study in a new city far away from your parents. But, if you want to save money, doing it in your home town will be much cheaper. So, if there is a course on offer where you live, consider it. They might have a part-time option so you can work and study at the same time.

The main advantage of doing it in a city or country where you would like to work is that you will learn about the local teaching market. You might even be offered work during the course as the students you teach in your teaching practice classes may ask if you're interested in teaching them after the course. TEFL centres often have contacts with local schools and often act as an informal recruitment agency. The schools benefit because they don't have to look for new teachers, the trainee teachers benefit because they can find work as soon as the course ends, and the TEFL centres benefit from positive trainee feedback which can help them market the course.

Another benefit of doing the course abroad is that it's a great way of finding out if it's somewhere you'd like to relocate to. Of course, you can take a city break and get a general feel for a place but you'll get a much better understanding of the atmosphere of a city if you spend a month there.

Finally, you might be able to pick up or improve your understanding of the local language during the course. There won't be time to do any serious study though – you will need all your mental energy for the TEFL course itself! Many TEFL centres have deals with local language schools and may offer a combined package of language lessons and the TEFL course.

If money is an issue, doing it in your own city is a sensible option. If your heart is set on working abroad, do the course in a place where you'd like to live and work.

I want to do it abroad. What about somewhere to stay?

You will need accommodation if you do the course outside of your home town. Lots of people train in Eastern European cities such as Prague or Krakow because they save money on living expenses. Most centres should be able to arrange accommodation for you but it might be cheaper to arrange your own. Accommodation provided by centres may be with local families, in a local hostel or in a residence where all the trainees live together. Think carefully about your living arrangements during the course. When trainees live together, it can feel a bit like living in a reality show such as Big Brother. Younger trainees and some more mature ones too, may treat the course as an extended party. If you're somebody who needs peace and quiet to work, this may not be for you. Generally though, most trainees like living together, firm friendships are born and everybody helps each other.

If you are not sure about letting the course provider arrange accommodation for you, ask if they can put you in touch with a previous trainee. Then, you can find out what the course and the accommodation is really like. If a course provider is reluctant to put you in contact with former trainees, it's not a good sign as they might be hiding something. Ask for photos or even a video showing the accommodation offered.

Make sure your course provider confirms that the accommodation they offer is suitable for your needs. Ask for photos and make sure you get details in writing.

Which course should I take?

This is perhaps the most important question in this book and I don't want you to waste your hard-earned cash on something which will not produce the results you want.

There are literally thousands of TEFL courses. They may have slightly different acronyms and come in a variety of formats: 4-week intensive; 3 month part-time; 2-day tasters; online etc.

Let me make something very clear: to become a competent classroom teacher, you need to train on a course which has an observed teaching component. No amount of linguistic or pedagogical theory can replace the experience of delivering a class to a group of living, breathing learners. So, if you have never taught or trained people and break out in a cold sweat at the thought of teaching groups of learners, don't do a course without a teaching practice component. However, if you have teaching or training experience or want to teach individuals rather than groups, you might consider taking a shorter and cheaper online course.

The second consideration is the length of the course. Better language academies only accept people who have taken a 4 week intensive course or a part-time course that lasted for at least 120 hours. Weekend TEFL courses are a great way of trying before buying and may save you a lot of money in the long run if you decide TEFL teaching is not for you. But, short courses do not make you a competent teacher in the classroom.

Finally, do you drink Cola? I bet you do, either with or without alcohol. Well, which brand of cola do you drink? Most of you are bound to say Pepsi or Coca Cola. Next question, why do you prefer Pepsi or Coke to other cheaper brands? I suppose most of you will answer that they taste better. Final question, does that mean that all other colas are worthless? Um, not so easy to answer this one. Have you tried every other brand? Do other brands suit your budget better?

TEFL courses have a similar branding to types of cola. The most internationally recognised and prestigious courses are the CELTA (Cambridge) and Trinity TESOL (Trinity College). They are prestigious because they are validated by prestigious universities. CELTA is the

Coke and Trinity the Pepsi of the TEFL world. That doesn't mean that other brands are worthless and shouldn't be trusted but it does mean that people are more likely to employ you if you have one of these two certificates. Just as lots of people only buy Coke or Pepsi when they are feeling thirsty and wouldn't dream of trying other brands.

On the whole, I think most people considering doing TEFL as a full-time job should do a 4-week intensive course with observed teaching practice. Many employers offering permanent contracts will reject applicants who have done online courses with no live teaching component. If you want to do an online course, do the online CELTA, actually a blended course (online and face to face) with a live teaching component:

<http://www.cambridgeesol.org/exams/celta-online/index.html>

Other courses may be equal to or better than CELTA or Trinity TESOL courses in terms of quality. They should offer the same content and only do them if they have a minimum of 120 contact hours and this should include 6 hrs. of observed teaching practice. Other TEFL courses will get you a job in many countries but you are unlikely to find work in prestigious organisations such as the British Council or International House.

If you don't want or are not able to take CELTA or Trinity TESOL, I suggest you follow this link to start your research on the options available:

<http://www.goabroad.com/>

If you see yourself as a long-term TEFL teacher, invest in a CELTA or Trinity TESOL. If you are not sure if TEFL is for you, try a weekend course. If you only want to do TEFL as a gap-year option, generic TEFL courses might be enough. If you have teaching or training experience, you might consider doing an online course. If you are only interested in tutoring individuals (face-to-face or online), online courses might be a sensible option.

How do I get accepted on a course?

Simple. You get in touch with the Course Provider. They will tell you about the course and then they SHOULD call you in for an interview. If they immediately offer you a place on a course, be careful. A TEFL course is emotionally, physically and intellectually draining. Imagine you have 8 or 10 people in a room together for 8 to 10 hours a day, 5 days a week for 4 weeks. What happens if there is a difficult character, a bad apple in the group? What happens if somebody has really limited English and asks elementary questions every 5 minutes? All trainees on a TEFL course should be able to communicate effectively in English and have good social skills. Although the course is not primarily academic, most good course providers will insist that trainees have formal qualifications which would allow them to enter university. A good TEFL course should call you in for an interview to make sure you are a normal person. They should also test your English to make sure that you speak it better than your students? If they don't, they are just thinking about the money, money, money.

If you don't possess these qualifications, you might still be able to take a TEFL programme but you may struggle to get accepted on a CELTA or Trinity TESOL course.

Now, it's important for the centre to know that you have the qualities to complete the course but you should attend an interview to find out about them. If you don't get invited to an interview, how do you know the TEFL centre even exists? How do you know that your trainers are normal people? How do you know that they know more about teaching English language than you?

Make sure your centre seems like a professional outfit run by experienced trainers. Things have improved in recent years but the TEFL industry can be like the Wild West: full of cowboys!

What happens in the interview?

All centres adopt a slightly different approach to the initial interview. Most, however, will set a written task to check your English. This written task will probably consist of some sort of language awareness test: some grammar questions, some pronunciation questions, and some vocabulary questions. Another part of the test may be a short task about teaching. For example, how would you teach the past simple to a group of elementary learners? They may ask you for your opinion about some aspect of teaching such as your opinion about using the students' native tongue in class. You are not expected to be an expert but you should aim to demonstrate that you have an interest in the English language and some interest in teaching it. Spending a few hours online researching TEFL should provide you with enough basic understanding of the communicative approach to allow you to give the interviewers the answers they are looking for.

The rest of the interview will probably be similar to a regular job interview. A few questions about your educational background, professional experience, interests, where you would like to teach etc. If you are interviewed for a 4-week intensive course, you must prove that you will be a committed and responsible trainee teacher. Attendance is mandatory and missing classes will be frowned upon so don't tell them that you like to have heavy drinking sessions on Sunday night and struggle to get up on Monday morning.

Make a good impression by asking your interviewer for suggestions about how to improve your language awareness, which books you could buy to develop your knowledge of the methodology. Enquire if you can have a look around the centre at the resources and equipment on offer and perhaps chat with some of the current group of trainees. When I worked as a course director, I would always show the applicant the training room, introduce them to any trainees working there, and then pretend to make a phone call so the applicant could have an honest discussion with current trainees about the course. Again, if the course is good, the centre shouldn't have a problem with that.

Do some research into TEFL before the interview and brush up on your language awareness – in particular, grammar and phonology. Otherwise, prepare as you would for any job interview and sell your winning personality.

What questions should I ask at the interview?

As I mentioned, there are a lot of cowboy organisations offering TEFL courses. You don't want to be trained by somebody with only a TEFL certificate and a couple of years teaching experience. Your trainers, or at least the Course Director, should have higher level teaching qualifications such as the Diploma DELTA or an MA in Applied Linguistics or ELT. Although be a bit wary of trainers with a Masters in TEFL or TESOL or ELT. Many MA courses do not have an observed teaching component and knowing about the theory behind language learning does not make a person a skilled teaching practitioner.

Find out about the following aspects of the course:

Resources (reference books and materials for creating lessons)

Trainers' qualifications and experience

State of the classrooms

Equipment available to course trainees

The students you'll be teaching – they should be real students of English

The number of trainees on the course

Extra work outside of classroom hours

Brief overview of the curriculum

Assessment criteria

Pass rate of trainees

Current situation of previous trainees

Teaching methodology

Post-course service (references, interview tips, CV advice etc.)

Make a list of questions and don't be ashamed of referring to them in the interview.

I've been accepted on a course. Should I accept?

After the interview, you might be offered a place on the course. If you feel the interviewer is applying too much pressure on you to make your decision there and then, resist the temptation to do so. Just like with any business, the course provider would prefer to seal the deal on the spot. You may be told that the course is almost full and there is only one space left and this may or may not be true. If this happens, tell the interviewer that you'd like to have a coffee and think about it. If they respond by telling you there is no time, I bet they are lying.

My advice is to negotiate a deadline to make your decision. Any course provider that is not willing to give you a few hours, a couple of days, or until the end of the week to make up your mind is not to be trusted. Whether you are offered a place at the interview or a few days later, consider the following before accepting:

Is it a CELTA or Trinity TESOL course? If not, will my certificate be accepted where I want to teach?

Is the price of the course higher or lower than competitors? If it's higher, why might that be? If it's lower, is that an indication of quality?

What did you think about the premises?

Is the Training centre also a language school? If not, are you sure that the centre will provide real students to practise on?

What credentials do the trainers have? Professional qualifications? Teaching experience?

Did the interviewer answer your questions clearly? Did they try to evade any of your questions? If so, why might they have done that?

What did you think of the interview task? Was it too easy? Too difficult?

What did you think of the interviewer's questions? Were they related to TEFL teaching and language learning?

Did you get on with the interviewer? Do you think you could stand listening to them for 4 weeks?

Did they let you speak at the interview or did they do most of the talking? (If they dominated the interview, this is probably not a good sign as a TEFL course is a practical training course not a series of lectures)

How desperate did they seem to have you on the course?

On the whole, I would recommend trusting your instincts. If there is anything you didn't like about the centre and there are other options in the same location, look around before committing. Don't succumb to any pressure: take your time and consider carefully.

What should I do to prepare for the course?

Experience tells me that trainees who prepare for the course by brushing up on their grammar and who do some research into the methodology behind second language acquisition generally perform well. My advice is that you should aim to hit the ground running. With the internet, people can access information easier than ever before. Ask the interviewer to provide you with a pre-course reading list - they should provide one as a matter of course. The first week can be really tough because you are out of your comfort zone. Many trainees drop out in the first week and later regret it. Also, find out if the training centre is also a language school. If it is, ask to observe a couple of English lessons taught by experienced teachers. This is something you will do on the course anyway and is a great way to familiarise yourself with what happens in a language classroom. On top of that, you will be exposed to some great teaching techniques. If your training centre does not let you observe, this is perfectly understandable because students in that class may feel uncomfortable with an unfamiliar presence watching them. In this case, I suggest you find some classes to watch on YouTube.

The more studying and preparation you do before the course, the more time you'll have to focus on planning and delivering your teaching practice classes. You'll enjoy the course more and get more out of it if you start with some prior knowledge about TEFL.

Tell me the truth. What's the course really like?

It's a boot camp.

It's a piece of cake and everybody passes.

4 weeks of drinking and dragging your bones into class every day

It's the most difficult thing I've ever done in my life.

The truth is that it's a 5 or 6 week course squeezed into a month. Every trainer I know complains about the workload. Naturally, some people thrive on the pressure but a lot of trainees fail to perform as well as they could purely because they are overburdened. Time management and organizational skills are vital here. If you're a naturally disorganized person, do your best to change for the duration of the course. Invest in some sort of filing system and learn to consult the course timetable.

On top of the workload, trainees are expected to reflect upon their teaching performance. The problem is that the demands of the full-time course make this very difficult. That's why – and I can't repeat this enough – do some preparatory study before the course starts. If you do, you won't feel as if your brain is fit to burst with all the new information you're receiving and you'll have time to actually prepare decent classes, evaluate them and make changes before you do the next one.

As for the course content, you can expect input sessions, teaching practice and a series of assignments.

Input sessions are classroom-based lessons and workshops about:

The English language (grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation)

Teaching skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking)

Teaching approaches and methods

Teaching techniques such as drilling, grading language and correcting errors

Professional awareness

Lesson planning

Teaching practice consists of planning and delivering lessons, evaluating your performance and receiving feedback. Your trainers will provide assistance when needed and you will be expected to receive feedback from and give feedback to your peers. The degree of help you get from your trainers varies from trainer to trainer and trainee to trainee. If you're finding the teaching difficult, your trainer may provide lots of assistance. If you're doing well, your trainer may give you more freedom. Trainers will attempt to treat all trainees equally so try don't expect them to be able to devote themselves exclusively to helping you. You are expected to become teachers who need minimal assistance by the end of the course.

As well as the input sessions and the teaching practice, you'll be expected to complete a number of assignments. Most courses have a foreign language assignment, a materials assignment and require you to create an individual learner profile.

The foreign language assignment consists of a series of taught classes in which you will participate as a student. As you won't know the language, you'll effectively be a complete beginner and will be asked to reflect on the experience as a student and assess the teaching approach used in the lessons.

For the materials assignment, you are expected to create materials which you will use in your teaching practice lessons. They don't have to be successful but you will be asked to assess their effectiveness and consider how you would adapt them for different levels or teaching contexts.

The Individual learner profile requires you to work with an individual student and analyse their English. After analysing their strengths and weaknesses, you are asked to create a lesson based around your findings. The assignment requires you to do some relatively complex linguistic analysis utilising what you learn about language awareness in the input sessions.

Somebody always bursts into tears at some stage on a TEFL course. If you don't want it to be you, do some study before the course starts, organise yourself at the beginning and create a study plan, know when all assignments are due and, most important of all, don't

beat yourself up if you work hard and still give a poor lesson. It's an introductory course and you are not expected to be highly skilled professionals after a few weeks.

The other tip I would give is that you must listen to what your trainers tell you. You may not agree with their feedback but they are going to assess you. If they say you need to change something in your teaching, you should strongly consider taking their advice. They are supposed to be experts.

It can be an enjoyable and, for some people, a genuinely life-changing experience. Work hard, have some fun and be a good team player.

What does teaching practice consist of?

Most courses require trainees to teach for a minimum of 6 hours during the 4 week period. Each training centre will have its own system so you may start with mini-lessons of 20 minutes and finish giving a 90 min class. Sometimes you will teach with a co-trainee and plan the lesson together. You might even be required to teach the same language point and you'll have to decide where the second teacher takes over from the first. You won't only do tag-team teaching as you'll also be asked to teach alone and won't have to consult your fellow trainees.

You will probably be given teaching points for each class. A teaching point is what the students are expected to study and practice during your lesson. Examples may include a grammar point (past simple, 1st conditional), a set of vocabulary items (verbs used in cooking) or a specific task (students will read a text and answer questions or they might be asked to write a short story using a set of pictures). These teaching points are usually assigned by trainers at the beginning of the course but you might be asked to choose your own later on.

You will then be asked to create a lesson plan and choose materials to teach the teaching points. Some centres may follow a course book while others may ask you to create your own materials. The best courses probably encourage a combination of both as TEFL teachers will probably work with course books but will also complement them with their own materials and activities.

The trainers will be on hand to assist you while you are designing your lesson plans. Time is of the essence in a 4 week course and most trainers will tell you directly if they think your ideas won't work. They will of course also make recommendations which you should consider incorporating into your plan. You'll be required to give a copy of your plan to the trainer who is observing you before the lesson.

The lesson itself will be observed by your peers and a trainer, who may or may not be given a specific observation task - such as to comment on your board work. The trainer

won't be an active participant in the lesson but may walk around to observe students. If you get really stuck, they will be there to help you and, if necessary, take over teaching.

After the class, there is a feedback session. Each trainer conducts these in their own way but most follow a basic pattern. You talk about how you felt the lesson went and whether you achieved your aims. Then, your peers will comment on your performance. Finally, the trainer will give you some, hopefully, constructive criticism to bear in mind while you are planning your next class. Good trainers will try to balance the positives with the negatives as keeping trainees motivated is an integral part of their job. They will also be extremely annoyed if you keep on repeating the same teaching errors despite being asked to change. You are expected to develop in confidence and improve your teaching skills during the course. Someone who does a good first lesson should not expect to cruise through the rest of the teaching practice. For your first lesson, the trainers will be assessing your ability to perform simple teaching skills such as clear writing on the board. By the end of the course, however, you will be expected to demonstrate more difficult skills such as sensitive error correction or providing clear answers to unanticipated questions from your students.

The good news is that the students you'll be teaching are generally real language learners and will know you are trainee teachers. In my experience, they are generally a motivated bunch who attend because they are getting extra English classes for free or at a reduced price. The only time I've seen students turn on a trainee teacher was when the trainee in question verbally insulted a linguistically weak but popular Korean student.

Lastly, you may have a blank, freeze or get in a muddle while teaching one of your classes. Maybe you won't be able to define a word adequately or get confused while giving a grammar explanation. This is to be expected and any good trainer will step in and take over if you start to get stressed. On a few occasions, I've asked trainees to take five minutes to collect their thoughts while I taught the class. When they returned, they were able to continue with their plan.

Planning, delivering and reflecting on your classes. Listen carefully to your trainers and peers and ask for help when you're stuck. Don't be competitive, just aim to keep developing.

Is there anything I should do or shouldn't do during the course?

You should:

Be punctual and meet deadlines. You are assessed on your professionalism and arriving late or missing deadlines will have a detrimental effect on your assessment.

Keep focused. It's very easy to go off on tangents during the input sessions and your teaching practice. Resist the temptation.

Be organised and buy a folder to store all the handouts you receive. Trainers won't be too impressed if you are constantly losing worksheets or forgetting where you put your lesson plan.

Bring a laptop and a memory stick with you. Training centres should have access to computers but you're better off having your own.

Eat well and get enough sleep. The course is mentally and physically draining so keep yourself on tip-top form.

Get used to collaboration. The communicative approach is, as the name suggests, about communication and working together. Lone wolves will have to work with other trainees and you will learn so much from your peers.

Find a way to disconnect: watch a movie, have a couple of drinks with friends etc.

You shouldn't:

Compare yourself with your peers. You are on your own journey and it's not about being the best.

Be too ambitious with your lessons. Aim to do the simple things well. If you receive positive feedback from your trainees, feel free to experiment in the second half of the course.

Spend too long planning activities. If your activities are too complex, you will struggle to explain them to the students.

Go out drinking most nights. You may feel like a beer at the end of a long day but make sure you limit yourself to a couple at the weekend.

Adopt a 'chalk and talk' approach to teaching. Your students need speaking practice. You don't so don't fall in love with the sound of your own voice.

Be professional and respectful at all times. Manage your time well and limit your partying. Think of the TEFL course like a month-long probation period in a new job.

Nobody fails a TEFL course, do they?

I've no idea why this rumour is so widespread. As a trainer who has informed trainees that they have failed the course, I can assure you that people do fail. It's true that pass rates on the CELTA and Trinity TESOL courses are very high but this is largely down to the enrolment process in most good centres. In other words, trainees unlikely to pass will probably fail the initial interview. Unaccredited courses may not have such a stringent enrolment procedure. This means that trainees may fall through the net and be accepted on courses despite being highly unsuitable for a TEFL job.

It's true that some courses do seem to pass all trainees regardless of their performance on the course and I would be wary of any centre boasting about 100% pass rates. Remember that some centres do have 100% pass rates for trainees completing the course and this might mean that trainees drop out in the first couple of weeks. When I did my training, one of my co-trainees - good at language awareness and planning lessons but who fell to pieces in front of her students - somehow managed to pass the course. I was a bit surprised when her trainer, in no uncertain terms, told her that she was not suited to teaching and should seek other employment!

People do fail or drop out of TEFL courses. Make sure this doesn't happen to you by taking the course seriously.

I've passed the course. What do I do now?

Aside from celebrating, you should think about looking for work. On a TEFL course, you build up a head of steam and I wouldn't recommend taking a long break from teaching because you need to put what you learn on the course into practice. During the course, you should receive job guidance and may even start applying for work before the end of the course. Make sure you clearly identify where you want to work and apply for positions there. Keep in contact with your training centre and ask them to look over your CV and cover letter. Why not see if they can do some research into the job you are applying for? If you plan on looking for work in the city where you took the course, offer your services as a cover teacher. If you impressed your trainers, enquire about any teaching vacancies at the centre. TEFL training centres linked to language schools often employ newly qualified teachers - this makes sense as they have actually seen you in action.

I'd also suggest organising your notes a couple of days after finishing the course. When you start teaching, you'll save lots of time by recycling lessons and activities and you'll probably be given lots of useful hand outs during the course so don't throw them away.

Oh, buy your trainers a drink and a card. If you keep us sweet, we'll be far more likely to give you a good reference !

Celebrate your achievement and then go to the next stage: finding a job and putting your new skills into practice.

Where is the best place to teach?

Only you can decide that. Write down a list of requirements, for example, buoyant job market, sun, sand and sea, cheap beer, delicious food, interesting culture, speak the language, politically stable. Then, write down a list of turn offs such as cold weather, high crime rate, no access to alcohol. Put the list aside for a few minutes, go back to it and you should be able to compile a list of countries which meet your conditions.

With your shortlist of places, go to TEFL.com <http://www.tefl.com/> and see how many jobs are advertised in these locations. Do any of them interest you? Head over to Dave's ESL café <http://www.eslcafe.com/> and look at International job forums. Read what people have written about these places. Bear in mind, that people are more likely to write negative than positive comments. Why not get in touch with some of the experts on this forum as people who contribute are generally happy to share this information? Make sure you do lots of research before deciding on a place to teach.

Another option is to work with a chain of schools. The main advantage is that they usually, but not always, offer a fairly good package (accommodation, flights, free classes, medical insurance etc.) and they usually employ internally so you can often walk straight into another teaching job with them upon completion of your contract. Make sure you read the small print carefully: many chain schools pay for your flights on the condition that you complete your contract. If you don't, they will probably take the cost of the flight out of your final pay packet.

<http://ihworld.com/jobs>

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/teacherrecruitment.htm>

<http://www.englishfirst.com/trt/job-openings.html>

If you are just interested in earning money, working in the Middle East is the place to go. The lifestyle is not for everybody though. Thousands of teachers are working in China and South Korea and there are lots of opportunities in these two countries.

As an alternative to securing a job before you leave, you could always head to your destination and look for work in situ. Many countries (especially in Latin America) rarely advertise internationally but there are lots of jobs available.

Many teachers find work in English speaking countries such as the UK, the USA or Australia. There is usually lots of work available in the summer at summer schools (students from abroad spend a couple of months studying on English immersion programmes). Many of these schools are residential and teachers are offered free accommodation – a great way to gain experience and save cash.

There is no such thing as the best place to teach. That depends upon you and what your needs are.

But don't schools only hire teachers with experience?

It's a catch-22 situation in the sense that schools hire teachers with experience but you can only get experience by being hired. Don't panic. Firstly, doing the course will give you some experience so clearly state how many hours you taught during your course on your CV. Secondly, schools prefer experienced teachers but will be willing to hire teachers straight off a TEFL course. The reason for this is that demand far outstrips supply in many places. Your first job may not be in your preferred location but you should find work if you are prepared to be flexible. Finally, some schools prefer to hire inexperienced teachers because they can pay lower rates. This is an unacceptable state of affairs but the schools would argue that staff mobility in the sector is extremely high; lots of teachers do TEFL as a gap-year option or as a means to fund their travel habit, so they pay low wages because teachers often move on to pastures new.

A good - if exhausting - way to gain experience is to find work in a summer school. You might be required to do more than teaching and have to work with rambunctious teenagers, but you will get experience and summer camps do wonders for your classroom management skills. After teaching hormonally imbalanced adolescents for a couple of months, you'll find coping with most adult students a piece of cake.

Highlight the teaching you did on the course. Remember that you have 6,8 or 10 hours more experience than somebody who has never taught before. Consider accepting summer jobs, temporary jobs or cover positions to get some more classroom hours under your belt.

I've been asked to attend a job interview. How should I prepare?

During the course, there should be a session on job guidance so go back to your notes and read them again. If possible, role play an interview with a fellow trainee or ask your trainer for advice. They might even offer to conduct a mock interview with you. Review your course notes as you'll probably be asked about your TEFL experience. Why not take some successful self-created materials along with you to the interview along with your TEFL portfolio and your trainer's feedback forms? Another thing I would recommend is to review TEFL terminology. Being fluent in the jargon of any profession can make you appear credible. Be aware that overusing or incorrect use of jargon has the opposite effect!

Key terms to use include:

Student-centred teaching

Communicative approach

Monitoring

Dynamic activities

Range of error correction techniques

Information gap activities

Student-talking time

Treat the interview as you would any job interview. Find out exactly where you have to be, aim to arrive 20 minutes early, decide how you should dress (smart casual is usually appropriate but some countries do have a dress code for teachers) and write a set of questions you would like to ask your potential employer.

What will I be asked at the interview?

Any Director of Studies worth his or her salt will ask some of the following:

About the TEFL course

About your teaching style and teaching qualities

Your experience with different levels and types of classes (young learners, business, one-to-one etc.)

Experience with and opinions of course books

Your plans for the year

Why you want to work in this academy

Your strengths and weaknesses in the classroom

How you would teach a specific language point

Activities you like to do in class and why

Your availability

A word of warning: **Many schools are run by people who don't have any teaching experience.** If you are interviewed by the owner of the school, they might be interested in you purely because you are a native speaker with a certain physical appearance which represents a standard or attractive image of a teacher. Do you really want to work for a school which functions purely as a business operation?

By asking the right questions, you'll be able to find out whether or not the job is suitable for you. An interview is a bilateral interaction in which you the interviewee is also assessing the interviewer.

What should I ask at the interview?

Once you have a TEFL certificate, you are more qualified than many teachers applying for TEFL jobs. For some reason, lots of native speakers believe they are competent English teachers purely because they speak the language fluently. In my opinion, that's a bit like somebody saying they should have a career in law enforcement because they have watched every episode of CSI!

Anyway, you should write down a list of questions to ask your interviewer because you don't want to get tricked into signing a contract and not be fully informed about your working conditions.

So, I recommend you ask about the following points:

Salary: how you'll get paid (cash in hand, straight to your account). Lots of language academies pay under the table or create a legal contract for a percentage of your hours and pay the rest in a brown envelope. It's up to you if you want to work in the black economy. What I would say is get advice from people working in the same country. How do they get paid? What are the possible consequences if you get caught? Think about why the academy prefers to pay you cash in hand? Simple greed or a normal state of affairs?

Your teaching timetable: You may get offered 25 hours a week. That sounds fine until you realise you'll be working 2hrs in the morning and then 3 hrs. at night. Maybe you get offered 40 hrs. a week. You might make some decent money but if each class lasts an hour, you'll have to plan 40 different lessons. That's a lot of planning! You might end up doing a 60 or 70 hr. week for a 40 hr. salary.

On-site or off-site classes: A common mistake new teachers make is that they accept work and don't realise they'll be required to travel around the city going from office to office or home to home. On-site classes (those in the academy) are more convenient because you'll be able to plan and deliver your classes in the same location. Off-site classes might pay more but you'll end up losing money if you are required to spend hours each day on public transport flying from site to site. Also, remember that public transport may be inefficient and you don't want to get stressed out worrying if you are going to arrive at your

next class on time. If you are offered off-site classes, ask your interviewer to show you where the sites are.

Types of classes: One problem with most TEFL courses is that they are based on a model which works well in the UK or the US: teaching multi-lingual classes of adult learners. In other countries, you might be required to teach monolingual groups of kids or teenagers and they present a whole different set of challenges. You might not be interested in teaching young learners but you might enjoy it. However, babysitting a group of incontinent three year olds may not be your cup of tea so make sure you find out as much as you can about your classes.

Available resources and materials: One reason why teachers use course books is that they cut down planning time. Make sure you ask if your students are using a course book. If they are not, what materials are available at the school? Planning your own classes can be extremely rewarding and often results in more effective lessons but creating your own materials takes time and effort. Also, if you'll be teaching in the academy, ask to have a look at the classrooms. Do they have whiteboards? Are there enough chairs and tables? What about light and ventilation? You don't want to spend 8 hrs. a day working in a dungeon writing in chalk on an old blackboard. Finally, is there a photocopier? The worst case scenario is that you'll be asked to teach large classes with no materials. This could be very costly if you have to copy everything yourself.

CPD – Continuous professional development: Again, better schools will have a Director of Studies who will observe the teachers to make sure they are teaching to the best of their capabilities. They may offer professional development workshops or seminars. Ask to see the staffroom, chat with some of the teachers if possible. You'll get a good idea of the atmosphere at the school. Remember that you will find the first few months quite challenging. Good schools will hire inexperienced teachers and offer them lots of support.

Prepare a list of questions and watch out for any evasiveness or avoidance. Don't be pressured into accepting the first position that is offered to you.

I've got the job. How should I prepare for my first day?

Once you have been offered a job, make sure you find out details about the classes you'll be teaching: number of students, level, type of class, course books, what they like doing and what they don't like doing etc. Better schools will give you lots of information and may invite you to come in and chat with the teacher you'll be taking over from. If that's offered, do it! It will show you're willing and you'll get first-hand information about your students.

If you're not given information about your class and are left to your own devices, this is not a good sign. However, it could also mean it is a new class. If your class is a new class, the students may not know each other very well. If this is the case, why not create some ice-breaker activities. If they have been studying together for a while, they won't need to get to know each other but they will need to find out about you and you about them.

Most important, however, is that you prepare your materials the day before your first lesson. You don't want to arrive 10 minutes before your first class and find there is a line of twenty teachers waiting to use the photocopier. Make sure you confirm your timetable and check out your classroom: how is the board, is there any audio-visual equipment?

Finally, the reception staff are vital to the running of a language school. Get to know them and use your charm on them as they will often be able to help you out or cover your back if things go wrong.

Your first day at a new job is always stressful. Arrive early and be prepared.

6 hours teaching a day! How do I find time to prepare my lessons?

Like any new job, you'll find it tough at the beginning. You might need to spend an hour planning for an hour long lesson. The good news is that planning time will decrease significantly within your first few months of teaching. Experienced teachers can create lesson plans in 5 minutes.

But, you will have to roll up your sleeves and work at planning. If you are using a course book, your life will be easier. Read the teacher's notes and use them to create your own simple plan. You might have been asked to complete a lesson plan pro forma on your TEFL course so consider using that. If that helps, fine. If you struggled with the format, discard it and create your own working plan. The important thing is to find a lesson plan format that suits you.

Remember that your students should be doing the heavy lifting in a lesson and not you. Therefore, include pair work and small group activities in your lesson plan. These give you a break in the lesson and make your classes more student-centred. Most new teachers include lots of extra activities in their lesson plans because they are scared they'll run out of material. This isn't a bad strategy as you can always use the extra activities in your next lesson.

My last point about planning is that students shouldn't be learning too many new things every single lesson. Language learners improve by repeating and recycling the language they study. There is nothing wrong with review activities and they don't take long to plan. If you make them into games, students will have a good time consolidating material they have previously studied.

Your first few months will be a steep learning curve so be prepared to work hard. Once you've put the groundwork in, planning and preparing your classes will become easier and quicker.

What course books should I use?

In my experience, teachers are rarely given free rein when it comes to choosing course books. Schools often have a deal with a particular publisher or have a limited stock of books which they re-use with students. By all means, suggest a change if you really don't want to use a course book but remember that determining which one to use is generally a decision taken by those in power: the omnipotent Director of Studies (DoS).

By taking a positive attitude, you should be able to make any course book work for your class. If you don't like it but your students do, find ways to adapt the activities. If you like it but your students don't, find out what they don't like about it and adapt it accordingly. If nobody likes the course book, go to your DoS and ask if you can change it. As a last resort, get your students to sign a petition. If the course book can't be changed, view it as a challenge and work on subtly adapting and modifying the activities. Using inadequate or inappropriate resources can help teachers become more resourceful and creative.

If you are allowed to choose your own course book, look for the following:

- Engaging and current topics relevant to the age and interests of your students
- Good blend of pictures/images and content
- Clear and concise grammar reference, either in each unit or at the back of the book
- Variety of speaking, reading, writing and listening activities
- Clear and easy to follow teacher's notes
- Range of supplementary activities in teacher's book
- Multi-media supplementary activities (CDs, CD-roms, online access)

My favourite course book is New English File: teacher-friendly, easy to adapt with lots of communicative activities in the Teacher's book.

Learn how to follow course books then learn how to adapt them. If a course book isn't working for you or your students, try to get it changed.

What teaching equipment should I carry around with me?

Every teaching context is different: some schools are equipped with state of the art interactive whiteboards and Wi-Fi in every classroom whereas others are more low-tech. My view is that you can deliver great classes using whatever equipment and resources you have available. Classrooms are fundamentally about social interaction and all that is required is the willingness to communicate with the other people present.

My low-tech teaching tool-kit consists of the following:

Board markers

Scissors

Notebook

Coloured pens or pencils

Post-it notes (a fantastic resource)

A few photos of friends and family

Mini-whiteboards (pick them up for a few euros/dollars/ pounds)

Old magazines with lots of pictures in them

A phonemic chart

Scrap paper

Dice

A pack of cards

A rubber ball

When I feel like spending some time in the 21st century, I add:

My laptop (but a smartphone or tablet work equally well)

Video camera (Flip works well)

Digital Dictaphone

You can add gadgets if you feel like it but, as I mentioned earlier, the physical classroom is an environment where face to face social interaction occurs. You don't really need much more than a pen and paper to give an effective lesson. The students are the best resource!

It's my first lesson with a new class, what should I do with them?

First things first: the students are probably just as nervous as you, perhaps more so. You, the teacher, have the advantage of being able to communicate in your first language and have thought about what you are going to say or do. The students have to communicate using a language they don't communicate fluently in and have no idea about what's going to occur in the lesson.

So, it's your job to keep calm and transmit that feeling to the students in your class. Breaking the ice will help you get off to a good start.

What's the point of ice-breaking activities? Well, I guess their primary function is to get strangers to begin to form a relationship. The best way to do that is to share personal – perhaps not too personal – information. Get to know them as individuals. Find out about their learning preferences. Do a multiple intelligence questionnaire with them. Discover their interests and hobbies.

Here are a few games / activities to encourage relationship building.

Ask them to introduce their partners

Ask them to choose another student and describe them for the others to guess

Do a 'Find somebody who' type activity in which students have a series of questions such as 'Do you have a dog?' which they ask other students in a mingle activity

Students create a set of interview questions to ask you

Play the 'Post-it' game by writing the name of a famous person and sticking it on the forehead or the back of another student. Students then ask questions to find out who they are.

Put students in groups and let them discuss and then present their needs and preferences for the class.

First impressions count. The students are probably as nervous as you are about meeting one another so break the ice by getting to know about your students and letting them get to know a little about you.

How do I know if the students like me?

Teachers naturally want students to like them on a personal level. However, as any secondary or high school teacher will tell you: it's not necessarily about befriending them; it's about gaining their respect. You need to consider your students. If they are young learners and sent by their parents to attend extra-curricular English classes, are you going to be their favourite teacher? Perhaps not, but you need them to behave appropriately.

With adult learners, I think befriending them isn't a bad strategy. Their motivation is more likely to be intrinsic (they attend classes because they want to improve their English) rather than extrinsic (their parents send them). With adult students who have an intrinsic motivation, we need to create an environment in which we respect their intelligence, professional skills and life experience. All they lack is the ability to express themselves in a complex and nuanced way in English. Adults can feel extremely uncomfortable in a language class if they feel they are being infantilized.

The other key point is that they are paying for your service and will stop coming if they feel they are not improving. They might like you as a person but will drift away if they don't respect your professional ability as a teacher.

Teaching a class is like running a restaurant. No matter how friendly and charming the waiting staff, the customers won't return if the food doesn't meet their standards.

I'm being observed. Should I be worried?

This depends on why you are being observed. As a new teacher, it's perfectly normal for your boss to make sure you are doing a good job. It's all part of quality control. You might want to ask your line manager (usually your DoS) the reason for the observation. The main reasons for observing teachers include the following:

Professional development - In serious schools, the DoS wants to make sure you continue to improve as a teacher and they will give you constructive feedback to make your teaching more effective. Think of this type of observation as a chance to improve your skills - your observer may even provide you with some new techniques to experiment with.

Policy of the school - Lots of schools have an observation policy and teachers are observed on a regular basis. Some even operate a peer-observation programme to encourage teachers to learn from each other. Again, there is nothing to worry about here as watching other teachers is a great way to get some new ideas.

Response to poor student feedback - Most schools will get feedback from their students. It's an integral part of customer care. The feedback may be collected on an informal basis - the DoS or receptionists ask a sample of students what they think about their new teacher - or may be formal - students are asked to fill out a feedback questionnaire and the data is pored over and scrutinised. You may be observed because students have expressed their dissatisfaction with your lessons. This is not a particularly comfortable situation to find yourself in but don't take it personally. They may be comparing you to more experienced or qualified teachers at the school and it's hardly surprising that you are not as competent as they are yet. Your DoS knows you are a novice teacher and should provide further training if they feel you require it. Also, students often have ideas about teaching which are not shared by teachers. I had a student complain vociferously about me. It turned out that she despised me because I reminded her of her ex-boyfriend!

The truth, as the old adage goes, is that you can never please all of the people all of the time.

When I worked as a DoS, I had to deal with student complaints which included the following:

My teacher is too young. I want a teacher who is older than me.

My teacher doesn't look English.

My teacher always asks us to work in pairs but I want to speak directly to my teacher.

My teacher doesn't use the course book enough / uses the course book too much.

My teacher doesn't make us laugh as much as the previous teacher.

I think my teacher is gay. I don't like gay teachers.

My teacher expects us to give our opinions. I just want to do grammar exercises.

Find out why you are being observed before you have a panic attack. Make sure you write a clear plan with achievable aims and don't try to do anything too experimental. Better to do a tried and tested lesson and do it well than attempt to impress your observer and fall flat on your face.

I've been asked to teach an exam class. How can I prepare for that?

There are lots of English language exams: FCE, CAE, IELTS, and TOEFL etc. The good news is that students taking exam preparation classes are usually highly motivated and most actually do their homework. They don't complain about doing boring exercises from the course book if they feel they are preparing for the exam and doing mock exams in class under exam conditions is something they will expect to do. Invigilating students taking mock exams in a small classroom is not the most challenging aspect of TEFL teaching so you might be able to catch up on your marking or reading - but probably not sleeping - while doing it.

The downside of doing exam preparation classes is that they can be quite dull to teach, especially those exams without a significant speaking component. The students do ask some extremely challenging questions which you might struggle to answer satisfactorily. Make sure you stress the importance of learner autonomy early on in the course because you can then justify asking students to refer to dictionaries, grammar reference books, or discuss challenging questions in small groups.

Just attending classes won't be enough and your students need to understand that. This means you have to encourage self-sufficiency which reduces your workload if you train students to search texts to find correct answers and evaluate their own and their peer's work according to the assessment criteria of the exam. I often let students check their answers to each section and then identify why their answer was correct or incorrect. Remember you don't have to answer every question immediately. Students doing exam classes have to do lots of independent study so you are aiding them by developing their independent study skills - such as consulting dictionaries or grammar reference books. You could even nominate a student to find out the answer for homework and report back to the whole class for the following lesson. If you do find yourself unable to answer a question, confess your ignorance and tell the students you'll find out the answer for the next class. As long as you actually remember to do that, I doubt the students will complain.

In terms of preparation, what you should do is find out as much as you can about the exam. There is lots of information online and you should also look through the exam preparation course book (there are lots and your life will be a lot easier if your students use

them). The Teacher's book often contains invaluable advice about the specifics of the exam and the rubrics for each component. Why not have a try at doing the exam yourself and analyse which skills are utilised in each part? For example, in the Reading tests, students are often discouraged from intensive reading (reading every detail) and instead are asked to demonstrate skimming (reading for gist) or scanning (reading to identify specific details in the text). Knowing about which sub-skills are needed for each part of the exam will enable you to give better guidance to your students.

Just one thing to add; always have a good dictionary on hand. Exams often test the students' understanding of lexical items and they will trust definitions written by Cambridge, Oxford or Webster's more than those improvised by their teacher.

Find out as much as you can about the exam. Remember to focus on developing students' study skills and challenge them to find the answers. Use the Teacher's book for correction and encourage students to use dictionaries and other reference materials.

I've been asked to do a 1-1 class. How should I prepare for it?

If I had to choose between a group class and a 1-1 class, I'd opt for the group class every time because they are generally much more fun to teach and I personally find them less demanding to teach. Now, I'm talking about adult groups here. Managing a classroom full of screaming 8 year-olds with attention deficit disorder is my idea of a living hell.

The difficulty with individual classes is that they require much more focus. Students who have paid for a private class are paying more for your undivided attention. One lesson you should absorb from your TEFL course is that too much teacher-talking time is a bad thing but you may end up doing too much talking in a private class if your student is not particularly chatty. Unlike group classes, you won't be able to set a pair work or small group task and nip out for five minutes to have a coffee or smoke a cigarette.

The other main problem with private classes is that you need to create a good rapport because spending a couple of hours with somebody you don't get on with in a closed room is excruciating for both parties. Spend the first lesson getting to know your student, find out about their job, family life, hobbies, study preferences, motivation for learning English etc. Develop a basic study plan with your student and set some achievable learning goals.

Your student may have some controversial opinions on certain topics. Remember that you are developing their English not persuading them to change their views. However, if their views really offend you, do a lesson on political correctness or teach them how to soften their opinions. I've had a few unpleasant private students over the years and my approach is to try to focus on the language that the student produces not the content. Correct any pronunciation errors and subtly introduce them to functional language or phrases they could use to sound more polite and reasonable.

There are two main ways to get private classes: through an academy or by finding them yourself. Whichever situation you find yourself in, I'd say the procedure for preparing the lessons is the same:

Get to know your student, find out about his / her educational background, profession, interests, reasons for studying English, learning preferences, specific needs.

Do a diagnostic test to find out their level, strengths and weaknesses and learning gaps

Make a few suggestions about which resources to use, which materials to work with, and what learning aims should be prioritised

Draw up a simple curriculum and discuss it with the student. Think of creating a negotiated syllabus. You are the professional and know, to some extent, what the learner needs but they might not be of the same opinion. Discussion is the key here

Mention homework and see how the student reacts. Remember that homework needs to be corrected and you don't want to give yourself extra unpaid work

Give a few lessons and get feedback. If you develop a good rapport, the student will trust you and tell you about their particular needs

My motto is to *expect the unexpected but be prepared at all times*. You'll find that private classes often have a life of their own. Students will walk into class and want to discuss last night's football match or something they have read in the paper. They'll ask you to check over an email they have just written or ask for help in planning a presentation they're about to give. You may not use the material you've prepared. No problem. Go with the flow and remember you won't have to do much planning for the next lesson.

The other aspect of private teaching I want to mention here is that students often cancel. If you're working for an academy, they will have a cancellation policy. Make sure you find out what that is. I've worked in schools where teachers didn't get paid if students didn't turn up but the school did. That's completely unfair if you have prepared and arrived on time for the class. If you have arranged your own private class, you have to agree on a cancellation policy with your student. I'd recommend a 24 hour policy in which students pay for lessons they don't attend unless they inform you at least 24 hours before. That won't work with all students in all contexts so find out about the standard procedure in your city.

Do a needs analysis to find out what your student requires from the lesson. Make sure you have lots of material for your first class as you don't know how fast the student will complete them. Remember that private students want individual attention so make sure you correct them. Have a clear cancellation policy (written in the student's language and English if possible).

My students don't like using course books. Can I teach without one?

Let's be clear here. Most of you will teach from course books. They are a necessary evil in TEFL because they give students a readymade curriculum and reduce planning time for teachers. On the other hand, do course books really meet the actual needs of the students. They can be the educational equivalent of McDonalds, easy to consume but lacking in nutrients!

In the digital age, it is much easier to gain access to learning materials in English. There are online resources which are specifically designed for language learners and there are authentic materials (media produced for native speaker audiences) which can be adapted for use in the language class.

But the greatest resources you can access for language learning purposes are your students. The simple act of asking them a question and receiving an answer gives you lots of material to work from.

Teacher: *How* are you today, Pedro?

Pedro: *I is very fine.*

Let's analyse this brief communicative act. We can learn so much about Pedro's language learning needs from his brief utterance.

We could teach him that the personal pronoun I is followed by am (auxiliary verb to be)

We could review or teach subject verb agreement: I am, You are, He is, She is, It is, We are etc.

We could focus on standard responses to questions about or wellbeing. Very well instead of very fine

Let's look at another brief dialogue, this time with a higher level student.

Teacher: *How are you today, Maria?*

Maria: *I'm a little sad today teacher. The weather is too bad. It's raining dogs and cats.*

How could we use Maria's utterance to improve her English?

We could discuss appropriate terms to address your teacher. Is it normal in English speaker countries to address somebody by their job title?

We could examine the use of the intensifier 'too' and how it doesn't actually mean the same as 'very'.

We could teach her the correct word order in the idiom 'raining cats and dogs'.

We could tell her that nobody under the age of 90 actually says 'raining cats and dogs'.

My suggestion to you here is that sometimes teaching without a course book is to be encouraged. By using the students' language, we can directly address their needs. Most teachers, however, do feel more comfortable with a syllabus so I would advise looking at the contents page in a course book and identifying the key learning aims of each unit (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, functional language, skills development work). This will give you a structure to plan your lessons around. In other words, if you have an Intermediate class, they should become familiar with the Present Perfect to talk about life experiences (I have eaten monkey's brains). Think about the form and function and develop engaging activities based on your students' interests to enable them to practise this grammar structure.

Teach the students not the course book. Students can complete most course book exercises at home but the classroom is where they can do real-life communication.

Is it a good idea to use audio or video clips in class?

Many years ago, I suggested watching a film in Friday's class. My students agreed and we sat down to watch a video cassette (that dates me) of one of my favourite movies: 'The Usual Suspects'. I had a wonderful time. At the end of the film, I asked my students if they had enjoyed it. They all glanced at each other, with shameful expressions on their faces, before one student piped up.

"It's a good film but we didn't understand it."

Another nodded vigorously and joined in.

"We can watch films at home. Lessons are for learning."

These two points hit home. If we use audio or visual material in class, we need to use them for learning purposes. We need to identify learning aims and create tasks or activities to meet them. If not, students can watch or listen to them in their own time.

These days, it's much easier to access video clips to use in class. YouTube is a wonderful resource for language learners. Most clips are short (2-3 mins) so students won't feel as if they are wasting time watching them. They can be replayed, just as we would a listening on a course book CD, and we can have different tasks for each viewing. For example, we can play the clip once to set the context and play it a second time to analyse features of language or set a set of comprehension question. We can play it a third time to check the answers to the previous task.

Therefore, the answer to the question is most definitely YES as long as you remember to:

Set the context

Give students a clear reason for watching

Watch the clip before you show it to your students. You might considering pre-teaching some language items

Here are some recommendations for using video / audio material in class:

Play it more than once (if it's short) but with a different task each time

Turn the sound off and get students to describe the images

Pause and ask students to discuss what they have just watched

Pause and get students to discuss what they think will happen next

Minimise the screen so students only hear the clip. Ask questions about where they think it's taking place, what they think the speakers are doing etc.

Turn the audio off and get students to watch the clip and create the dialogue

Dictagloss. Choose a very short clip, play it once and ask students to jot down key words.

They compare their findings, play it again and they write down more words they hear, compare in pairs, play it a third time and they should be able to reconstruct the text with the vocabulary they wrote down and their understanding of grammar structures

Watch the clip and get ss to discuss how they think the characters are feeling or thinking about

Watch a clip with lots of movement and get the ss to describe what the characters are doing

Watch a scene and get students to create a prequel and / or sequel

Video clips are effective in language learning because we still primarily communicate face to face. We convey emotion, ideas and opinions through a combination of words and gestures. Our understanding of a situation comes from being able to interpret visual and audio clues.

Finally, you don't need an interactive whiteboard to show video clips. With a small class, you can ask students to crowd around your laptops. If they have laptops or smartphones, let them watch the clips on their own mobile devices. You could always do a jigsaw viewing

in which you divide the class into two groups and they each watch a different clip. Then, you ask them to describe their clip to their partner in an information-gap activity.

Vary your classes by including video and audio materials. Listen to the feedback from your students and let them have a say in what recorded material you use and how you use it.

I set homework but my students rarely do it. What should I do?

There are many reasons why students don't do the homework you set them. These include:

It's boring

It's too difficult

They don't have time

They lack motivation

They are easily distracted

They don't like writing by hand

You have to find out why they don't do it. With adult learners, you can have a frank discussion about it. If their level is too low, have the discussion with them in their language. If you don't speak their language, see if another member of staff who does can talk with them. Alternatively, you could ask them to write down why they don't do their homework.

Once you have found out why, you can start to consider possible solutions. These include:

It's boring – find out what interests them and set homework based on their interests.

It's too difficult – find simpler exercises to give them. It's better for them to do easy tasks than nothing at all.

Not enough time – can you find a way to give them homework they can do while they are doing other things. If they have to do lots of housework, could you give them listening homework? If they spend hours on public transport, writing homework is impractical but perhaps they could do some reading. What about setting them a speaking task? They could even record it.

Lack of motivation – this is a serious problem and you might need to have a chat with the learner.

Easily distracted – well, who isn't? Give them shorter exercises that fit into their attention span. If you give them 3 short tasks, they might be able to concentrate long enough to complete at least two of them.

Writing by hand – why do we insist on handwritten homework? Worries about plagiarism I suppose. Let them type out their homework and send it to you by email. If you

ask them to give you an oral summary of what they have written, you should be able to identify if plagiarism has taken place.

Let students have some say in the homework they do.

There are a few other tricks we can utilise to increase our chances of students doing the homework we set.

Create a class contract and get students to write their own homework clause

Start each lesson with homework correction. This shows you are serious and concerned with their learning development

Set homework which will provide the foundation for the next lesson. For instance, give them a reading and tell them that they will be discussing the text in the next class.

Set mini-presentation tasks for homework. Ask students to do some research into a topic then tell the class about it the next day. If you give lots of feedback on their presentation, they'll realise you are addressing their specific needs.

Set review tasks for homework and test them in class

Finally, classrooms are places where social interaction occurs. If you create dynamic lessons with lots of authentic speaking and listening tasks where students are required to produce the language they have studied, they may be more willing to do the homework you set if it helps them to perform better in class.

Find out your student's opinions about homework. Try to make your homework tasks practical and relevant to your learners' needs.

My students are always using their phones. What should I do?

Ah, mobile phones - the scourge of every TEFL teacher. Like it or not, most of our students, at least those under 40, are reliant on their mobile phones. The educational industry is looking at ways to utilise them for language learning purposes but many teachers are inherently conservative and automatically think of them as an unwelcome distraction.

Personally, I doubt if there was ever an educational golden age when students gave their teachers their complete and undivided attention in every single lesson. I went to school in a pre-mobile age (the 1980s) and I remember being utterly fascinated by the drops of condensation on the window, spending hours interpreting the scribbles of previous students on my wooden desk, gazing longingly at the pretty blonde student seated at the opposite table, thinking about what my mum was going to cook for dinner tonight, mentally visualising how I would celebrate scoring the winning goal in the World Cup final....

You get the idea – students will always find - and have always found- other things to do that aren't directly related to the learning aims identified in your lesson plan.

Most adults though recognise that making and answering calls on mobile phones in class is socially unacceptable. If this happens, send them outside and have a stern word with them after the lesson. Learning a foreign language requires a type of focused attention and a student talking in their language on their mobiles is the one thing that's guaranteed to upset your learners. They will look to you to assert your authority here. Fortunately, many schools or academies have their own policy and may enforce it by putting code of conduct posters in every classroom. If you see one, point to it and let your students know how shameful their behaviour is. Peer disapproval will support you here. With adult learners in particular, a bit of public shaming works wonders. If your school doesn't have a clear policy, why not create one with your students?

There is a case to be made for letting students use mobiles as a learning aid. Maybe they have a dictionary app which they use to check unfamiliar vocabulary. Do we really expect

them to spend two minutes flicking through a heavy paper dictionary if they can find what they need in a matter of seconds? What happens if they finish an exercise earlier than their classmates? Do we really expect them to stare into space, patiently waiting for weaker students? Maybe they are actually checking the Facebook account to read a message in English!

Set some rules about the use of mobile phones and stick to them. Get your students to agree to them and take action if the rules are not observed.

My students never speak. What should I do?

I did a straw poll with a group of my students in a school in London once to find the main reasons why they didn't speak in some classes. The results were surprising:

Some students felt shy or nervous because the teacher invariably corrected them

Some students keep quiet because they didn't know the answer or how to respond

Some students stayed silent despite knowing the answer but didn't want to draw attention to themselves

Some students didn't want other students to correct them

Some students kept the mouths closed because the teacher asked stupid or obvious questions

Overwhelmingly though, most students agreed on one thing: **the main reason why they decided not to speak was due to the behaviour of the teacher.**

Many students don't speak because the teacher speaks too much. Who needs the practice: the teacher or the student?

Many students don't speak because they can't understand the teacher. We need to grade our language, choose words and structures familiar to the students so they can grasp what we're saying.

Many students don't speak because the teachers interrupt them to finish off their sentences or to provide correction. Think about how annoyed and frustrated you feel when people cut you off when you're speaking your own language? What about when people correct you in your own language? Aaarrghh!!

One of the reasons why we encourage students to speak in pairs or in small groups is because most of us feel uncomfortable when we have to speak in public. Survey after survey reveals that what most people fear (more than spiders, snakes or being trapped in a lift with a Big Brother contestant) is public speaking.

We all like to rehearse before we speak to a large group of people. By putting students in small groups, we are taking the pressure off them and allowing them to practise their English in a supportive environment. As the group becomes more relaxed, quieter students will start to contribute more in whole class discussions.

One final thought, if you want all of your students to participate in whole class (plenary) activities, give them thinking time and encourage student to student questioning patterns. By this I mean, ask a question and choose a student to answer it; then, ask that student to ask another student and so on.

Speaking in another language is challenging and scary. Be sensitive to your students' comfort levels and let them practice in pairs and small groups. Decide if you really need to ask learners to speak in front of the whole class to assess their oral skills.

My students never shut up. What should I do?

Is it a serious problem, if your students like to chat away in English? Most teachers would agree that they prefer a lively class who enjoy conversation to a room full of Trappist monks with a vow of silence.

The problem arises when the students chat about everything except what you are trying to teach them. But, that should tell you something. Are the topics used in the class actually of interest to your students? In a student-centred lesson, we have to think about our learners' needs and preferences. As a teacher, I may have spent hours planning a lesson but may have to adapt if my students want to discuss a topical news story. If you provide some language input by correcting their utterances or improving the language they used, you are attending to their needs. Look on the bright side – you can always use the lesson you've planned for your next class thereby cutting down on planning time.

What can happen is that some classes become a conversation free-for-all. They become the equivalent of a drunken dinner party where everybody is talking but nobody's listening. If this occurs, you have to set some ground rules: Don't interrupt. Wait for people to finish talking before you respond. Put your hand up to speak. Only answer when you are directly asked a question.

These conversational riots often occur when teachers teach from the front of the class. The students are all vying for your attention and that's why they all appear to be speaking over each other. You're not a stand-up comic so your job is not to get the students laughing at your jokes. Equally, as you're not a stand-up comic, you shouldn't have to deal with the TEFL equivalent of heckling.

Put students in small groups. Divide and conquer. The key to managing conversation classes is to give the students some but not too much freedom. By putting students in conversation groups, you can monitor by passing from one group to the next. Tell them you are going to make some notes about the language they use and record errors and examples of good language which you can later share with the class. Do some direct correction if a student error results in communication or if you feel the error is basic and needs to be addressed. Participate if you feel the students have run out of ideas or need to

be nudged. Also, if you note that some students are dominating the discussion, ask a quiet student to give you their ideas. Quiet students often want to contribute but are intimidated by the more confident speakers.

Speaking is the one skill that students often can't practice outside of class. Make your tasks structured and learn how to manage dominant students by monitoring their conversations. Try to insist on English being used in class.

My students speak but rarely in English. Should I use their language in class?

Ah, the thorny issue of using the learner's L1 (first language) in class. In mainstream TEFL (which has a strong Anglo-American methodological bias), using the learner's mother tongue has generally been frowned upon on the grounds that immersing students in a new language leads to quicker and deeper acquisition. Students use the new language in authentic tasks in order to communicate. This makes sense in certain contexts. I spent years teaching in multi-lingual adult learner classes and when you've got twelve different nationalities in a class, students will naturally communicate in English as it is their lingua franca.

Working in monolingual teaching contexts is, in many ways, more difficult. Students will naturally feel more comfortable communicating with their classmates in their shared first language. Even highly motivated students who only want to use English in class find it hard to resist quickly translating a word or phrase for a classmate. If you understand your learners' L1, you can confirm if the translation was correct or not. If you don't speak their language, you might feel excluded from several conversations that occur in class.

I don't think there is or should be hard and fast rules about letting students use their first language in class. I would definitely try to limit it because the language classroom is supposed to be a place where English is practised even though you might use their language to explain difficult vocabulary or grammar structures. There is certainly a place for contrastive linguistic analysis (comparing similarities and differences between two languages) as studies show it can certainly aid retention. False friends (words which look or sound similar but have a completely different meaning in two languages) are a classic example of how contrastive analysis can be effective, for example, in Spanish 'constipado' means to have a blocked nose rather than a blocked bottom! Another reason for letting students use their first language in class is when they are preparing presentations or written texts. They may need to write the first draft in their L1 (first language).

Training your students to speak in English may take time but ultimately it is what they and you are aiming for. Don't expect them to change their study habits overnight though.

One of my students at the school I work for wants me to give him private classes. Is this a good idea?

Language schools are no different to any other business. They provide teachers with work but charge students more than they pay the teachers. Students are relatively happy if the classes are fun but they won't necessarily be satisfied with studying in a group. Of course, they pay less than they would in a private class but they also get to practise less. So, they ask how much private classes are and find them too expensive. The smart ones will know how the game works.

“Well, I pay £10 an hour for a group class but I'd have to pay £30 for an individual class. I know my teacher is paid £15 so if I offer him £20, we can both benefit.”

You can't really fault the logic. Unfortunately, your employer (the school) is the only party not to benefit from this arrangement. Many schools have a policy prohibiting teachers from giving private classes to students they met at the school. And, to misquote a famous children's book about rabbits: *“if they catch you, they will fire you. But first they have to catch you.”*

You have to make this decision for yourself. If you think the school is paying teachers too little for the work you do and earning too much for the work they do, you might decide to do some private teaching on the side. If you think you are treated fairly well by your employer, you might decline the offer of extra work.

Is general English teaching my only option with a TEFL?

Most people take a TEFL course in order to spend some time living in another country in order to broaden their cultural horizons. Fair enough. It's standard work for gap-year students and you can give something back to the local community. Some people find themselves a stranger in a strange land and need to find a source of income. I've got no problem with that. We all need to make a living and it's a great way to meet local people. Others don't intend to do TEFL for very long but many years later find themselves still doing it. They might have got good feedback from their employers and students and think that maybe this could be their vocation. This final group of TEFL teachers need to consider their options if only because professional development is generally considered a good thing. And your options include the following:

Senior teacher / Assistant Director of Studies (ADoS)

Director of Studies (DoS)

Teacher Trainer

School owner / manager

Materials writer

Marketing / sales position for language school

Marketing / sales for publishing company

Freelance tutor

Specialist teacher (Business, EAP, ESP)

University lecturer

If you have experience working in a particular field, use that to your advantage. I knew a lawyer turned TEFL teacher in Ecuador who made an absolute fortune, by local standards, teaching legal English.

TEFL is still seen by many as a job for graduates or people who want to travel around the world evading responsibility but there is an increasing demand for TEFL professionals who can perform a specific role that can't be performed by your average TEFL teacher. Unless you have some specific training, you may have to get some professional qualifications to move into these other areas.

What higher level TEFL qualifications are there?

We can divide these into vocational and academic qualifications.

The main vocational qualification (at least in the UK and Europe) is known as the Diploma or DELTA <http://www.cambridgeesol.org/exams/delta/index.html>. It's a qualification suitable for teachers with a minimum of 2 years teaching experience and it is considered equivalent to an MA on the national framework of qualifications. It's a challenging course and you will have to submit assignments and be observed teaching by experienced trainers. Once you get the Diploma, you can start applying for jobs within prestigious organisations such as the British Council, who have language schools all over the world. Your chances of finding work as a Teacher Trainer, ADoS or DoS are greatly increased by having this qualification.

I took it in 2004 and was offered an ADoS position on successful completion and became a DoS in 2007. Compared to management positions in other sectors, the money wasn't great but was nearly double that of the other teachers in the school. Working in Britain of course means that salaries were never discussed!

If you want to gain an academic qualification, you could study for a Masters in Applied Linguistics and even a doctorate. Imagine, having a PhD in TEFL! I completed my MA in Applied Linguistics and ELT in 2009. While I learned an enormous amount about the theory behind Second Language Acquisition and studied related subjects such as Psycholinguistics and Sociolinguistics, there was no observed component and I don't think doing it helped me become a better classroom practitioner. A more knowledgeable one perhaps but not necessarily better.

The advantage of doing an MA is that it can open the door to working within the university system. Universities generally pay better than private academies and you will probably work fewer contact hours under better conditions. Although, in the current crisis, maybe that's no longer true.

After a few years, consider taking the Diploma DELTA or getting an MA in ELT to further your professional development and increase your employment options.

I like the idea of becoming a Director of Studies. What does the job involve?

Every working TEFL teacher makes the same joke about the job title DoS: they are called the DoS because they never seem to do any work! I have worked under a couple of them who did doss around all day, hiding in their little office surfing the web. Others have been extremely hard-working, dedicated individuals who devoted all their energies to making the school run as well as it possibly could.

A Director of Studies is the academic manager of the school. They will generally be in charge of hiring and firing teachers, observing and training them, creating timetables and curricula, ordering course books and providing materials, negotiating with the school owner to get more resources, materials or a pay rise for teachers. Oh, they will also have to deal with complaints from students and teaching staff. They might even do some teaching and will probably have to step in and cover classes if teachers are sick.

In busy schools, the DoS position can be quite challenging. When I did it, I found the most difficult part of the job was dealing with staff mobility: teachers leaving and finding replacements. The other challenge is finding ways to satisfy the needs of the students, the needs of the teachers, and the needs of the owner/s. It's a management position but the tendency within the industry is to offer the position to experienced and qualified teachers. However, in the same way that good football players don't necessarily make good managers, being a good teacher does not mean you'll be a good Director of Studies.

Teachers with good organisational skills should definitely consider becoming a DoS. Your more creative empathetic humanistic teacher might struggle with the managerial and administrative duties.

Being a Director of Studies is not for me. How do I become a teacher trainer?

Teacher training is the ideal job for many TEFL teachers because it means you can stay in the classroom but do something different. Good teachers who reflect upon their teaching strategies generally make good trainers. You need to have a certain amount of subject knowledge and to have demonstrated strong teaching skills so most teacher trainers have a Diploma.

Finding teacher trainer positions can be difficult as most teacher trainers stay in their jobs for quite a while. To enhance your credentials, you should take an active role in developing your skills. Applicants for teacher trainer positions who have given teaching workshops or attended conferences will have a better chance of getting on the shortlist.

If you're interested in teacher training, I'd recommend working as a teacher for a school which offers TEFL training courses. Many schools prefer internal employment so make it known that you'd be interested in training if any vacancies arise.

Teacher training is a sensible option for experienced and qualified teachers who want to stay in the classroom.

I actually enjoy teaching kids. Are there any courses I could take?

The market for teaching young learners is expanding year by year. In certain countries, such as China and Spain, parents are sending their two or three year olds to extra-curricular English classes. There is also a great demand for English child-minders. If your main motivation is to live in another culture and learn a new language, this might be a good option for you.

Most TEFL teachers will, at some point, be asked to teach kids or teenagers. While most TEFL courses do have some input sessions / workshops about teaching young learners, the focus is generally on teaching older teenagers or adults. Young learners' classes are obviously distinct and providing detailed grammar presentations won't be as effective as using songs or games. The other main difference is the type of classroom management skills needed to teach youngsters.

Cambridge does provide specific training for teachers interested in this area - <http://www.cambridgeesol.org/exams/yl-celta/index.html> and there are online supplementary courses available but I'm not sure that an online course can equip you with the skills needed to become an effective teacher of young learners.

On the other hand, those of you in touch with your inner child or those of you with children or nieces or nephews will have an idea of what works with younger learners. My advice would be to throw yourself in at the deep end and see if you can work out effective strategies for teaching kids. You might find you have a gift for it. If you struggle, you might want to focus on adult classes. Be aware though that most new teachers will have to teach a combination of different age groups.

The market for teaching young learners is huge. If you enjoy it and are good at it, you will certainly find work. On the plus side, young kids generally don't ask fiendishly complex grammar questions! Or if they do, you can usually shut them up by giving them a lollipop!

I want to be my own boss. Can I become a freelance teacher?

It's all about supply and demand. Native English speakers definitely have an advantage if they are rare commodities where they live. Rightly or wrongly, there is a perception that the best way to learn a language is to study with a native speaker teacher. You will be approached by locals in cafes or bars enquiring about your services if you go off the beaten track and look for work in places where there are few native English speakers. Indeed, many teachers fall into teaching that way and you'll build up your client base through word of mouth.

But that won't work so well if you are living in a place where there are lots of ex-pats. To become a successful freelance teacher in somewhere like Tokyo or Barcelona, you'll be competing with hundreds- if not thousands -of other TEFL teachers. That's why I would recommend finding work in an academy for your first year. When you have found your teaching feet and gained some local contacts, you might decide to work freelance. The reality is that most TEFL teachers do a mixture of academy work and privates. They find the privates by advertising their services online, posting flyers around town (cafes, bars and university notice boards are often good places to start) or you offer your services at local schools, colleges or small businesses. If you are not a natural salesperson, you might struggle a bit at the beginning.

The other thing to consider with setting yourself up as a freelance teacher is the location of your classes. You could invite people into your home which reduces costs but may not be suitable. You could go to where your students live or work or find a public place such as a café, bar or library to give your lessons. Make sure the location is quiet. Many students won't want to study in noisy bars and may feel aggrieved at having to buy a coffee on top of paying for your class. Teaching at your student's place of work is often a better option but remember that there may be constant interruptions and cancellations due to the demands of their job.

In recent years, the market for online teaching has grown considerably. If you have fast Wi-Fi connections and are comfortable with Skype, you can give classes in the comfort of your own home.

Payment is the other major consideration of freelance teachers. Now, while I wouldn't condone working illegally, the truth is that many freelance TEFL teachers work cash in hand. If you are happy doing that and you are unlikely to get found out, this might be the best way to start. However, you are unlikely to get offered work at big companies unless you go legit. Therefore, I would do lots of research into being self-employed in your particular country before going freelance.

Being a self-employed TEFL teacher has many benefits and is often the solution for experienced teachers. Academies don't generally pay experienced teachers much more than novices. The most important thing is that you develop a good name and get referrals. Satisfied students will end up doing your marketing for you.

How difficult is it to set up my own school / academy?

You would be amazed by what kind of people set up language schools. I worked for many years in London at a great school run by a Japanese lady. She founded the school over two decades ago when she realised a lot of her Japanese friends were stuck at home while their husbands worked. She rented a small classroom, found a teacher and offered English classes for Japanese housewives.

To be an owner, you don't require any special qualifications or experience. TEFL teachers with an entrepreneurial bent will at some point look into opening their own school. Local laws vary but in general it's not a particularly difficult or expensive business start-up. Finding premises can be difficult. Why not enquire into leasing classrooms from local colleges? If they have classrooms they rarely use, they might jump at the chance to rent them out? Offer free classes to your landlord/landlady in exchange for lower rental rates. Think where you want to locate the school. Conventional wisdom may lead you to think about opening a school in a neighbourhood where there is no competition but maybe finding somewhere close to your competitors might be a smart idea. If you undercut them, you might find students migrate to your school.

Apart from leasing premises, what do you need beyond a whiteboard, board markers, some chairs and a few resource books? A photocopier, Wi-Fi access and a couple of computers would definitely be sensible investments but are perhaps not indispensable. If you ask students to buy course books, you might not even need to photocopy anything. Start small if you don't have much initial funding.

Advertising can be expensive. Posters, flyers, ads in local newspapers or radio stations may help spread the word. Offering commissions to locals can be a way of getting students to enrol. Most cafes and bars are happy to let you put up a poster especially if you promote them to your students. Maybe they would be happy to offer discounts on food and drink to your students. You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours. Go to local schools and drum up some interest.

I've worked in many schools which have offered a free class to students thinking of enrolling. Many academies charge an enrolment fee. Make that low or do away with it altogether.

er. Will you offer free resources? If students sign up, you could include the course book in the fee? How will you price your classes? Have a sliding scale pricing system in which students pay a lower hourly rate if they sign up for longer. Think of gyms. Offer discounts for people signing up at the beginning of the academic year or take advantage of people's tendency to make New Year's resolution.

How many teachers are you going to employ? It's often a good idea to start off with only a couple of teachers. Hire a local to work in reception. If you don't speak the local language well, this is definitely recommended.

What will your unique selling point (USP) be? Find out what the competitors are doing and offer something different? Is there a gap in the market?

Opening your own school is a relatively cheap way of creating your own business but make sure you do lots of market research. Do you have the entrepreneurial skills to compete with your local rivals?

TEFL's no longer for me. What else can I do?

Most people work as TEFL teachers for a couple of years before finding other work. Traditionally, it has not been seen as a profession, more as something that people do before they find their vocation or during a gap year. This view is definitely changing as the sector gains professional credibility. Most universities have some sort of EFL programme and career TEFL teachers often get a Masters in Applied Linguistics and move into higher education. On the whole though, many people find there is not enough money in TEFL to make it a career; the charms of living abroad often wear out and people move back home.

But, if you've spent a couple of years doing TEFL, can the experience help you improve your chances of finding employment in other fields? Well, I think the answer is probably yes as long as you accentuate the skills you developed as a TEFL teacher. Firstly, make sure you gain some ability to communicate in the local language. The tide is turning and many international companies are choosing to employ multi-lingual non-native English speakers rather than monolingual native English speakers (Brits, Americans, Australians etc.) In other words, a Dutch person with flawless English, strong French and reasonable German may be preferred to an English person with only a smattering of French words in their foreign language vocabulary. Secondly, TEFL teachers often end up developing useful work skills such as project management and giving presentations. Include these on your CV.

Many of the skills we develop as TEFL teachers are highly sought after in the corporate world: presentation skills, copywriting skills, management skills etc.

Why are salaries so low?

Teachers prepared to work in the Middle East or some parts of Asia can make decent money. Contracts in these countries often offer a range of benefits such as free accommodation and airfare, free medical insurance, free gym membership, subsidised meals etc. More popular destinations, such as Western Europe (Spain, Italy), South East Asia (Thailand) have a surplus of language teachers and little regulation and therefore the pay is much lower. Many academies are run on the basis that the local population only want native speaker teachers and are not able to distinguish between professional teachers and travellers passing through their country. Things are slowly changing as more people speak English and students are becoming more discerning.

We do however have to remember that TEFL teachers often earn salaries which are equivalent or in excess of local teacher salaries. These local teachers have degrees in Education and many of them are fluent English speakers but are passed over in favour of native English speakers with -or sometimes without- TEFL certificates. We must appreciate our luck in being able to find work abroad relatively easily.

Salaries are not necessarily low relative to local wages. However, experience, qualifications and professional expertise are not rewarded as much as they should be.

Tell me the truth. Is TEFL really a profession?

One of my best friends teaches Science in a secondary school in the UK. He's constantly suggesting that I get into 'real' teaching. Is teaching TEFL 'real' teaching? If we define teaching as enabling somebody to gain knowledge or develop a skill, there is no doubt in my mind that TEFL teachers do real teaching. Although, there is clearly the perception that TEFL teaching is the Cinderella of education, I have worked with a number of incredibly gifted and dedicated professionals who genuinely feel their job is their vocation. On the other hand, some teachers do stay in the field for far too long and use it as a means to subsidise various addictions. As a general rule, TEFL allows a teacher a certain amount of creative freedom which they may not find in mainstream teaching. Oh, and the paperwork is rarely as overwhelming as in the public sector.

The problem with TEFL teaching is that it is largely unregulated and there is often no clear career path. Some excellent TEFL teachers leave the profession because the careers choices open to them provide them with little financial security. Indeed, many TEFL teachers return to their home country and train as teachers in the state system. While they might miss the motivated students and creative approach to lesson planning and implementation found in the TEFL world, the demands of modern life mean that they choose a decent salary and long-term contracts with promotion opportunities over the short-term option offered by most language academies.

To conclude, most TEFL professionals end up working in the publishing industry or take up university posts in their home country or abroad. It's definitely possible to make money from teaching in the long run if you take a hard headed approach to business. Many wealthy language school owners I have worked for have made money by paying teachers low salaries and offered, often illegal, contracts and failed to invest in resources and the professional development of their staff.

TEFL teachers are often professional but you have to work hard to make it into a fulfilling career. Publishing and working for universities are perhaps the most obvious career paths available.

I hope you have enjoyed this short guide to TEFL teaching. Please share on Twitter or Facebook.

I'd be extremely grateful if you would recommend www.onlinetefltraining.com to anybody you know who is considering becoming a TEFL teacher but wants to do training online.

Feel free to visit my other blog

<http://tefltrainerspain.com/>

If you are considering taking a 4-week TEFL course in Spain, I am the academic director of

**TEFL in Spain and we offer Trinity TESOL
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spain.com/](http://www.tefl-in-spain.com/)**

**If you do decide to teach English abroad, I
wish you the best of luck.**