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ESL Jobs FAQ

By Josef Essberger

Are there really any ESL jobs for me?

Yes, there are. Rightly or wrongly, the whole world wants to learn English. People everywhere, especially young people, are convinced that speaking good English is their passport to a successful career. What is more, they are being encouraged in this by many governments. Worldwide, there are many more ESL jobs than there are native-speaking EFL teachers to fill them (though it should not be forgotten that English is also taught by perfectly competent non-native teachers). EMT (English mother tongue) teachers are in high demand in virtually all parts of the world. However, EMT teachers may find it more difficult to break into other English-speaking countries. And in general, schools in Western Europe express a preference for teachers with an EU passport as working papers are then automatic.

So where are all these ESL jobs?

Everywhere. Though you must realize that economic conditions in individual countries do impose restrictions on supply and demand. Virtually all parts of the world—Latin America, Asia, Eastern/Central Europe, Western Europe—welcome native-speaking teachers. Africa has some demand, but less so. There is, of course, also demand in English-speaking countries such as the UK, USA and Australia.

Which countries pay best?

If making money is your chief preoccupation you'd be better off becoming a lawyer and going into politics. There are no really rich pickings in teaching, though there are other compensations. However, in comparative terms the highest paying jobs are in Western Europe; the oil-producing countries of the Arabian Gulf; and in Japan, Korea and Taiwan. Some jobs within the English-speaking countries may also be reasonably well paid.

Must I have a university degree to teach English?

A degree is often not required to teach EFL/ESL. The more important qualification is some kind of TEFL certificate. Experience can also count highly. The snag is that in many countries, especially in

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Asia and the Middle East, a working permit will not be granted without a degree. So a degree is more to satisfy the country's authorities than the language institute's real requirements. With a TEFL certificate, it is certainly possible to find work without a degree, but you should check the country's legal requirements in advance—or be prepared to work illegally, which is not unheard of.

Can my partner go with me?

You can usually take your wife or husband with you if you have been offered a legal job with visa and working permit. However, she or he may not be allowed to work and you may find it difficult to support a dependant on a teacher's income. If, however, your partner is also an EFL teacher, you could probably both find work in the same school or town.

What about taking children abroad?

With a legal job you can usually obtain a resident's visa for your children, though again you may have difficulty in supported them on a teacher's income. There would also be the question of their education, which in some cases would prove exorbitantly expensive.

Should I find a job before going abroad?

Very much up to you and the country in question. If you like adventure, and have a good TEFL certificate—and perhaps a degree for working permit purposes—you might jet off with the reasonable confidence of finding work when you land. If you are a little more staid, or nervous, or cash-strapped, you might do better to fix it all up before leaving. This is six of one and half-a-dozen of the other. Employers in some countries actually prefer to see the whites of your eyes and are not interested in talk of video-conferencing or Internet interviews. Other employers may have agents in your own country and prefer to recruit in that way.

How do I arrange a job from home?

First of all, watch the job advertisements in newspapers and online, and contact possible employers. Check out sites such as TEFL Net ESL Jobs. You can also post your resume online to let employers know that you are available for work.

How do I know that a foreign employer is reputable?

If you are employed by an international organization such as the British Council or International House you have probably already some knowledge of that organization's status and reputation, or can easily verify it. For less well known institutions, try looking on Internet forums for more information or ask the employer to put you in contact with existing or past employees.

Is there a specific time when most jobs start?

Generally speaking, teaching EFL is a year-round business with no particular calendar or holidays. Even if schools employ teachers at the start of their "academic year", teachers leave or additional

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clients arrive unexpectedly so job opportunities arise during the course of the year. It is true, however, that in Europe there is a particular demand for teachers to start in September or October.

How long a commitment will I have to make?

Most good employers will expect you to sign a contract for at least one year, especially for a job arranged in advance with airfare and accommodation. However, if you are in the country itself, you can often work on a monthly basis if it suits you better. For a few government-sponsored programs—eg, the Peace Corps or JET—a minimum two-year contract is obligatory.

Do I have to get a work permit and residence visa?

To work legally in a foreign country you need a work permit, with which you can then get a resident's visa. You should be aware that working in a foreign country without a work permit is usually a criminal offence in that country and you render yourself liable to imprisonment, fines and/or deportation. Having said that, many EFL teachers do work illegally in many parts of the world.

So how do I get this work permit?

You won't get any work permit without a job, or at least a firm job offer. Once you have that, your employer will normally sponsor you and take care of the necessary paperwork.

Who will I be teaching?

This depends to some extent on the school, but in general all kinds of people are learning English. You may be asked to teach students of all ages, of all levels, in groups or one-to-one, general English, business English, exam preparation and so on. The more flexible you are in this respect the more hours you will probably get. Schools are usually quite sensitive to their teachers' capabilities and will try to match you to the most appropriate students.

What are typical working hours?

Schools in most countries will expect you to work five days a week, with 20 to 25 contact hours (plus preparation time). Depending on your contract—full-time or hourly—you may have something like 6 or 8 weeks of paid holidays (if you're paid by the hour you may get no paid holidays, just a higher hourly rate). In some of the better paid Asian countries such as Korea or Japan you may be required to teach much longer hours and receive less time for holidays. You should be aware that though it may not seem much, 25 contact hours a week is actually more than enough for most human beings, and anything over that—especially on a long-term basis—can be quite strenuous.

How much will I be paid?

Not enough! :-(Don't enter TEFL for money's sake. It's difficult to quantify earnings as they vary so much from country to country and are in any event relative. In most places, with a reputable employer, you will earn enough to get by comfortably in local terms. However, very few countries or jobs will allow

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you to live well and save money. In general, you need to consider the cost of living of the country you are in. For example, a miserable pittance in Eastern Europe may in fact allow you to live better than a relatively high monthly salary in Japan.

What currency will I be paid in?

Almost always you will be paid in the local currency.

Will I earn enough to send money home?

Unlikely, unless you are particularly frugal. In the Middle East and some Asian countries, you may be able to save worthwhile amounts of money to send home. Elsewhere, you are unlikely to be able to save much, if anything, and may in any case find that exchange controls make it impossible to repatriate your savings.

What happens with taxes?

If you are legally employed you will usually be taxed at source and pay taxes and other relevant charges to the local government.

What about accommodation?

You are more likely to have accommodation arranged and perhaps paid for or subsidized if you secure a job in advance with a contract of one year or more, especially for jobs in Asia or the Middle East. You may find, however, that you are expected to share such accommodation with other teachers.

And travel? Will the school pay for it?

Again, for contracts arranged overseas in advance, travel is often paid for. It is much more difficult to get travel subsidies for jobs that you sign up for on the spot.

Will I have health insurance?

Many countries outside Europe and North America have little or no national health service and you will need to check with the school whether they provide private cover, or be prepared to pay a little extra to sign up for a local healthcare programme.

What about private lessons?

In general, employment contracts exclude the possibility of taking on private students without prior permission from your employer. However, if your regular teaching is going well, many employers will not prevent you from taking on private students (as long as you find them yourself and do not take them from the employer).

What if I really don't fit with the job or the country?

Most employers know that an unhappy teacher is a bad teacher. If you are genuinely unhappy with your position, they will often allow you to quit as soon as they can find a replacement. If, however, they have incurred costs such as travel or visa arrangements, you may be required to repay some or all of those costs. In general, you should thoroughly research the job and country you are going to in advance to avoid such a situation.

Josef Essberger formerly taught English as a foreign language in Asia and Europe. He is founder of

<http://EnglishClub.com>

, a site for ESL learners and teachers, and

<http://TEFL.net>

, a site dedicated to

ESL teachers. Looking for an ESL teaching job? Learn more at

<http://www.tefl.net/esl-jobs/>

Writing A Business Website Sales/Marketing FAQ

By Joel Walsh

Everyone on the web thinks they can write a FAQ. But then why are so many FAQs so lacking? How often have you read a FAQ and thought, "that didn't tell me anything I needed to know!"?

Two Worst FAQ Writing Faux Pas

* Many websites don't separate their FAQs for existing customers who need support from their FAQs for prospective customers who just want the information they need in order to decide whether and how to buy.

* Many websites that do provide a special pre-sales FAQ turn it into yet another advertisement—ugh! Your prospective customers need pre-sales information that truly helps them come to a decision.

Tips for Writing a Pre-Sales/Marketing FAQ:

* You should divide your FAQ into sections that will make sense to a prospective customer. Naturally, what sections you use will depend on the content of your own website and the nature of your business.

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* If you have a complex business or website with many products and services and/or options for them, you may need to have a FAQ that is very long. Traditionally, webmasters would simply create one very long page for the very long FAQ. However, very long pages are almost never good web practice from a search-engine point of view. Multiple medium-length pages will get you more search engine traffic than one long page. If you have a FAQ that would go over 1000 words, you should put each section on its own page, and have one front page with a table of contents for the entire FAQ, linking to each section and providing a list of the questions in that section.

* Usually, a FAQ will have a list of all the questions up top, with links to the questions within the page, sort of a table of contents. If you have a briefer FAQ, you don't need this.

* Keep your answers brief. If an answer requires more than two paragraphs, you should create an entire web page for it, and simply provide a link to that page in the FAQ answer.

* Your answers should cast you in the best possible light while still being believable. Do not confuse this FAQ for prospective customers with the more common support FAQ! You do not want your prospective customers to see a laundry list of everything that could conceivably go wrong with your product or service.

* In order to keep your FAQ believable and informative, do not fill it with marketese and hype. Keep the exclamation points to a minimum! Yes, you want to portray yourself in the best possible light—but the best possible believable and informative light.

In the end, remember this: your web visitors who read your FAQ are among the most qualified, interested prospects on your site. If your FAQ lacks your site may lack sales.

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