

 **ESL Job Exchange**

# Teach English Online

The Definitive Guide to Be-  
coming an Online English  
Teacher and Getting Paid In  
The Next 30 Days

---

Copyright © 2021 ESL Job Exchange

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other non-commercial uses permitted by copyright law.

ESL Job Exchange  
[www.esljobexchange.com](http://www.esljobexchange.com)

# CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION TO ONLINE TEACHING</b> .....	<b>1</b>
Why Teach English Online? .....	2
<b>QUALIFICATIONS TO GET STARTED</b> .....	<b>3</b>
Minimum Qualifications .....	3
Other Considerations .....	5
Basic Equipment to Get Started.....	6
Other Recommended Tools .....	8
<b>YOUR ONLINE TEACHING GOALS AND COMMITMENT</b> .....	<b>10</b>
Teach Online Part-Time.....	12
Examples of Part-time Schedules.....	13
Teach Online Full-Time .....	16
Examples of Full-time Schedules.....	18
<b>THE HIRING PROCESS</b> .....	<b>20</b>
Application .....	20
Interview.....	20
Demo Lesson.....	21
Onboarding .....	22
Contract .....	23
Scheduling .....	24
<b>TYPES OF ONLINE CLASSES</b> .....	<b>26</b>
Class Format.....	26
Class Frequency And Duration .....	27
Standby Teaching .....	27
<b>PUTTING THINGS INTO ACTION</b> .....	<b>27</b>
30-Day Action Plan .....	28
Final Thoughts.....	32

## INTRODUCTION TO ONLINE TEACHING

This guide was developed to help you get started on solid ground as an online teacher. Not only does the team at ESL Job Exchange have more than 5 years of experience with online teaching ourselves, we also have extensive experience being involved in the recruitment and onboarding process when hiring new online teachers for various companies.

As with any industry, not all companies are the same and whether they are directly or indirectly competing with each other for a slice of the online education market, each company has its own business model. Many companies provide online classes booked directly by students (or their parents, if the students are children). Some companies form relationships with private and public schools and provide regularly scheduled online lessons to students enrolled at these schools. Some companies are pure online classroom providers while others employ a hybrid model of online classes alongside classes at a brick and mortar language school.

Students who enroll in online classes also come in a variety of age ranges and backgrounds. Currently the majority of companies will have young learners between the ages of 4 to 18, as this is presently the largest online education demographic. But you will also find that some companies provide lessons to adults, some of whom may be professionals who need to learn English for a specific purpose, and others who may just be looking for general conversation lessons to improve their fluency.

Just as there are many types of companies and students to teach English to, people who become online teachers come from a myriad of backgrounds. A good number of people who currently teach English online were looking for a way to supplement a day-job. Many are stay-at-home parents who were looking for an opportunity to do something with their free time while working from home. You'll also find many online teachers are retirees who want to supplement their retirement income, or university students who want to earn money part-time while studying or to pay down their student loans. There are also *serial travelers* and people who are already teaching English abroad, who can take advantage of the location independence that teaching English online offers. Some of these people work part-time, though many are actually able to make this a full-time endeavor by choosing a location which offers a lower cost of living where they can live relatively comfortably on the income they make teaching online.

You can see that not everyone who teaches online has the same goals or lifestyles. Therefore, it is important that you have clear goals in mind for yourself based on your personal circumstances and lifestyle before making the decision to start a career as an online teacher.

This aim of this guide is to help you get started quickly as an online teacher, and optimize your work schedule based on the market demands as well as your personal goals with regards to teaching online.

It is important to mention that most online teaching opportunities are contract work by nature, and therefore, they are, in most cases, a form of self-employment whereby you are contracting your services to a company who will typically engage you on a pay-per-performance basis. Although you will need to apply for most online teaching opportunities and go through the company's hiring process, when a company *hires* you to teach online for them, they have usually agreed to hire you as a contractor.

With this in mind, it is important that you seek professional legal and financial advice on how to set yourself up as an independent contractor based on your personal circumstances, so that you can prepare yourself to comply with the employment and tax laws where you reside.

Finally, while online teaching opportunities exist almost everywhere, the majority of opportunities at present originate from China, where the demand for learning English is astronomical, due to the size of the country's population, its economic growth over the last two decades, and the high emphasis placed on English language education throughout China.

## WHY TEACH ENGLISH ONLINE?

Teaching online can be a lot of fun, especially if you enjoy helping people. But there's more to teaching online that makes it ideal as part-time and potentially full-time work:

- You can work from home (or anywhere with quiet space and reliable Internet)
- Startup costs are low
- You can start earning income within the first month
- English is a skill you already have if it's your native language
- It's very low stress and work that does not require much preparation
- Most companies provide the lesson content so you have little to prepare on your own
- You can practically set your own work hours
- Depending on where you live, you can set up your teaching hours so they don't overlap with other work you may do during your regular work hours

- Most companies manage scheduling classes for you, so there is little for you to do in terms of marketing

## QUALIFICATIONS TO GET STARTED

In 2021, most online ESL providers based in China will expect you to have the following qualifications as a minimum:

- University degree
- Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) certification

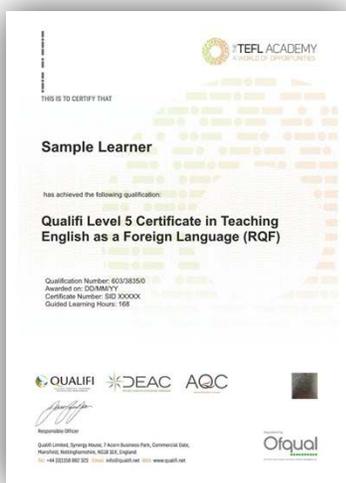
When you apply to work with online ESL companies, they will almost certainly want you to submit copies of the above qualifications with your application, in addition to a passport photo page, and a police criminal clearance certificate. Some of these requirements have been mandated by the Chinese Government, and online ESL companies will need to comply or face potential blacklisting.

## MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS

### University Degree

Having a university degree (in any field) is going to be *the* minimum requirement for almost any company you apply to. Some companies will accept people who are currently enrolled in a four-year university degree program and usually in their junior or senior year.

### 120-hour TEFL Certification



If you are planning to teach English online for a company based in China, **you will be expected to have a [120-hour TEFL certification](#)**. There are no exceptions to this. As of 2018, Chinese authorities require that online companies comply with the same minimum qualifications that brick-and-mortar schools in China have to follow when hiring an English teacher. While some companies will hire you prior to obtaining a TEFL certificate with a condition that you complete one within a certain timeframe, it is almost always better to get this qualification prior to applying, as this will not only improve your chances of being considered by companies, but also help prepare you to teach English successfully, having learned

the basic functions and challenges of teaching English language learners. [See our recommended TEFL certifications.](#)

## OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

### Experience

At present, very few companies require people with ESL teaching experience. This is not only because the demand for teachers greatly outweighs the supply, but also because of the current state of the online education industry. There is a relatively high turnover rate amongst online ESL teachers, and companies constantly need to hire new online teachers to meet their demands. Some companies do give importance to experience, and will represent this by way of the starting pay rate they offer you. The more qualified you are for the position, the more they pay. This usually, but not always, means a higher level university degree and concentration, such as a Master's Degree in Education or English. Because there is presently no industry standard for measuring experience, it is important to carefully look at your own experience and see how it might indeed connect with the type of experience companies will desire in an online teacher. For example, if you have ever tutored a student while you were yourself a student, or volunteered at a day camp, draw connections between these experiences and the type of experience that a company sees as desirable.

### Nationality

This is a sensitive topic, but one that warrants mention. Most companies that contract online teachers at this time are based in countries where there may be a legal requirement or an expectation that the online teacher is a national of a *recognized native English-speaking country*. Although there is no official list of native English speaking countries, this is often interpreted as meaning the following nationalities (ordered alphabetically):

- Australia
- Canada
- Ireland
- New Zealand
- United Kingdom
- United States of America

One could argue that there are several more nationalities that should be considered native speakers of English, and there is certainly merit to that argument. For example, many South Africans have experienced challenges getting hired as online teachers, even though English is the official language of South Africa. Indian and Filipino nationals

may regard themselves as native English speakers and may even have the right qualifications to teach English, yet are often overlooked by some companies simply because they aren't nationals of one of the aforementioned countries.

While it's unfortunate that this is the case, it is a reality, and sometimes even out of the hands of the hiring companies themselves. For one, laws vary from country to country. For another, many English language learners themselves have a perception of what a native speaker is, and expect to have language lessons from someone who comes from one of the aforementioned countries.

That's not to say you can't get hired if you're not a national of what a company would consider to be a native speaking country. Indeed, there are many online teachers who don't originate from one of the above countries, and [companies that hire non-native English speakers to teach English online](#). However, your chances of getting hired are going to be drastically lower than someone who, for example, is an American national.

## BASIC EQUIPMENT TO GET STARTED

One of the best aspects of getting started as an online teacher is the low startup cost and ease of getting started. With practically a university degree, TEFL certification and some equipment, you are essentially ready to go and can be earning money the same month. How many businesses can you say that for? Not so many. Of course, your mileage will vary based on several factors, which we will discuss later. For now, let's take a look at what exactly you need to get started.

### Desktop or Notebook Computer



You absolutely need to have a computer that can perform well enough to teach online. By computer, that means a desktop or notebook computer, not a Chromebook, netbook, tablet or smartphone. Without a desktop or notebook computer, your online teaching opportunities are going to be next to zero. You don't need the most powerful or expensive computer, but you do need one that satisfies the required specifications of most online education companies. We

recommend you [read our guide to finding the best computers for teaching online](#).

## Headset



Most companies expect online teachers they hire to have a quality headset with a boom microphone to teach with them. If you're hoping to get away with using your smart-phone headset or the computer mic, think again. Why do companies want you to use a quality headset with a boom mic? Why won't an ordinary headset do? Here's why:

- Quality headsets with a boom mic provide superior audio quality and noise cancellation
- Quality headsets make you look more professional to your students and on video

Both audio quality and professional image are important in this business, and a quality headset is relatively inexpensive compared to the income you will earn while wearing the headset and teaching online. We recommend you [read our guide to finding the best headsets for teaching online](#).

## Fast and Reliable Internet



It really goes without saying that you need a fast and reliable Internet connection to be successful as an online teacher. You probably already have this, since you're reading this guide after visiting our website, **unless** you were on your phone or in a coffee shop using free WIFI. Most companies won't accept their online teachers working from a coffee shop or any other public space which is bound to

be noisy and distracting. So, let's clarify – you need your own Internet connection at home that is fast and reliable. The companies you work with would most likely prefer that you have a dedicated workspace.

That doesn't mean you can't teach while traveling – you can. For now, let's look at how you can safeguard your income by taking a few precautionary measures with your internet connection, especially if you are planning to be a serious online teacher and make a decent income from it.

## OTHER RECOMMENDED TOOLS

### Props



Many companies, especially those that primarily work with younger children, are going to ask that you use props in your classroom. These can include stuffed animals as well as noise makers and charts that you can use to reward students when they do something good. For a list of great props to use in the classroom, [read our guide on best props for teaching English online](#).

### Green Screen and LED Desk Lamps



Some companies will encourage you to use a green screen to give you a professional and attractive background while teaching online classes. A green screen can also be useful for you as you can hide distractions in your workspace such as walls, shelves, closets or a bed from your students. With a green screen, your students instead see a *wallpaper* background image behind you. It's also useful for quickly and easily switching your background image for different companies and students. We have a [guide to using green screens in the online classroom](#) as well as a list of good options for green screens to help you get set up with your own green screen background. You can also buy a couple of USB-powered LED lights, which can be plugged into your computer, so you don't need to plug into a wall while teaching. These are also portable, so you can take them with you when you travel.

### Standing Desk



When you are teaching English online you are going to be sitting down a lot. Especially, if you are teaching full-time for 40 hours a week. Not only is this extremely bad for your health, but it can also cause you to have low energy after three or four hours straight of teaching. We have a [list of recommended standing desks](#) to help you balance your online teaching work, your posture and your overall health.

## Backup Internet



Even if you have high speed Internet at home, there will be times when your Internet or electricity will cut out. Depending on where you live or where you are, this could be a few minutes to several hours. It's a good idea to have a backup for these situations, and a workable backup is to purchase a mobile router that operates with a data SIM card. Mobile routers are relatively inexpensive and are portable, which means you can take them with you anywhere in the world and get connected quickly. You can use your existing mobile data plan, or purchase a pay-as-you-go Data SIM. You won't be using it often, as you'll get this simply for emergency situations. See our guide for the [best portable hotspots for online ESL teachers](#).

## YOUR ONLINE TEACHING GOALS AND COMMITMENT

As discussed, everyone is going to have their own specific reasons for becoming an online teacher. That's also true for you. Here are some reasons, in no particular order, why people teach online:

- Pay off debts
- Pay for university tuition and living costs
- Supplement income
- Save extra money for retirement
- Invest extra money
- Pay for travel/holidays/luxuries
- Quit a job and transition to full-time remote work
- Enjoy teaching or helping people
- Do something productive with your free time while at home
- Travel and work abroad

Now, take a moment to think about why you want to teach English online. Write down your three most important goals:

Why do I want to teach online?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

Once you have a clear idea why you want to teach online, it's time to take stock of what your opportunities are as an online English teacher, **based on your specific goals, qualifications and availability**. Assuming you already have a university degree, let's look at the following:

Do I have a 120-hour TEFL certification?

Yes	No
-----	----

When am I ready to start teaching online?

Date:

What days and times am I able to commit to work as an online teacher? We recommend you determine your availability in your own time zone while comparing it to Beijing, as the majority of online teaching opportunities will occur during Beijing daytime and evening hours. You can use this website to help you convert between time zones:

<https://www.timeanddate.com/worldclock/converter.html>

Days	Morning Hours	Afternoon Hours	Evening Hours	Total
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				
Friday				
Saturday				
Sunday				

Some online companies are going to be a better fit for you than others. Without having clarity about your goals, you may end up choosing work opportunities that conflict with your goals and end up quitting not long after you've started.

Remember – in most cases, you are going to be hired as an independent contractor and be paid for performance, meaning you will typically be paid per completed class you teach online. If you accept a contract with a company that can't provide you the hours you want based on your availability, your schedule won't get filled and you'll end up frustrated with your results.

You're most likely going to be in a different time zone to the people you will be teaching. For example, if most of your students are in China, and you're in New York, it's unlikely your students will be awake at 3pm Eastern to have an English lesson.

In this industry, like many others, timing is important - not only your own availability, but also the availability of your students. It's also important to consider when you want to start working as an online teacher. You need to be aware of the holidays and festivals in countries where your students reside, and plan your availability and commitments with these in mind. Some online teachers get started and fill up their schedules within a month or two, while others seem to face difficulty ever putting together the schedule they want.

Therefore, examine your goals and available hours, then determine how many hours you could potentially schedule each day of the week. Take a few days to carefully think these through, so you can plan your approach and maximize your chances for success.

Note: As of 2019, the [Chinese Government](#) has mandated that online classes cannot exceed 40 minutes in duration for students up to grade 9. In addition, classes must finish by 9:00pm and not conflict with their brick-and-mortar school time.

## TEACH ONLINE PART-TIME

Teaching English online is great part-time work, because you have flexibility in how your schedule looks, and the number of hours you commit is largely up to you.

Not all companies operate the same way, and some companies will expect or require you to commit a minimum number of hours or days each week to work with them. So, it's important to carefully vet the companies you want to work with before you apply to avoid running into frustrations later on.

If you are intending to work part-time as an online teacher, we recommend you work with no more than two companies to keep your life simple. Working with two companies gives you some diversification in case one company is unable to provide you with steady work at some point, and if that happens, you can switch your hours out to the other company or to a new company. On the other hand, working with two companies is easy enough to manage on a part-time schedule. More than two, and you're beginning to complicate things.

Here are some examples of how you can set up your work schedule for part-time. See which one resonates with you, and feel free to modify them to suit you.

---

## EXAMPLES OF PART-TIME SCHEDULES

We want to show you some examples of how to set up your online teaching schedule so that you can get started quickly with a clear plan. Let's first look at the most popular time slots for teaching online, using China as the example:

Time Zone	Mornings	Afternoons	Evenings
<b>Beijing (UTC +8)</b>	8:00am – 12:00pm	1:00pm – 5:00pm	6:00pm – 9:00pm
<b>New York (UTC -4)</b>	8:00pm – 12:00am	1:00am – 5:00am	6:00am – 9:00am
<b>London (UTC +1)</b>	1:00am – 5:00am	6:00am – 10am	11:00am – 2:00pm
<b>Sydney (UTC +10)</b>	10:00am – 2:00pm	3:00pm – 7:00pm	8:00pm – 11:00pm

Make sure to allow for time changes due to daylight savings if it applies to you.

**Example 1: China Peak Hour Schedule (Evenings)**

CST	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Total
<b>8am-12pm</b>	Off	Off	Off	Off	Off	2	Off	<b>2</b>
<b>1pm – 6pm</b>	Off	<b>0</b>						
<b>6pm-9pm</b>	3	3	3	3	3	3	Off	<b>18</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>20</b>

In this example, if you are based in New York, then you would most likely have scheduled classes as follows:

Mondays – Saturdays: 6:00am – 9:00am  
 Fridays: 8:00pm – 10:00pm  
 Sundays: Off

**Example 2: China Non-Peak Hour Schedule (Mornings + Afternoons)**

CST	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Total
8am-12pm	Off	3	3	3	3	3	3	18
1pm – 6pm	Off	0						
6pm-9pm	Off	2	Off	Off	Off	Off	Off	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>20</b>

In this example, if you are based in New York, then you would most likely have scheduled classes as follows:

Mondays – Saturdays: 8:00pm – 11:00pm  
 Tuesdays: 7:00am – 9:00am  
 Sundays: Off

### Example 3: China Weekend Schedule (Mornings + Afternoons + Evenings)

CST	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Total
8am-12pm	Off	Off	Off	Off	Off	4	4	8
1pm – 6pm	Off	Off	Off	Off	Off	3	3	6
6pm-9pm	Off	Off	Off	Off	Off	3	3	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>20</b>

In this example, if you are based in New York, then you would most likely have scheduled classes as follows:

Fridays – Saturdays: 8:00pm – 12:00am

Saturdays – Sundays: 3:00am – 9:00am

#### TEACH ONLINE FULL-TIME

It is certainly possible to earn a full-time income with online teaching, but may take a little time and patience on your part. You also need to have a business mindset. Remember – you are an independent contractor. You are free to work as many or few hours with any number of companies as you can manage. You are a service provider, and they are your clients.

Of course, it's possible to work full-time with one company. But relying on one company as an independent contractor can put your income at risk if that company can no longer provide you with the hours you need to make the income you want.

Setting up your schedule to work with 2 – 3 companies is a smart approach because:

- Generally, it is easier to fill up your hours with a company when you cap the hours you offer them
- If things aren't working out with one company, you can replace it with another company, or open your hours up to other companies you already have schedules with

- Taking time off for long vacations is much easier when you work with multiple companies, because you are spreading your days off between them rather than taking several days off from just one company
- Each company has its own business model, resulting in different times when they close for long holidays. China, for example, has two long holidays in the fall and winter. If you work with a company that partners with schools to offer online classes, those classes will likely be cancelled during the holiday periods. On the other hand, companies offering private online classes direct to students could in fact be busy during these holidays since learners will be off of school or work during these periods.
- Companies also have different times of the day and week when they offer online classes. While most companies in China maintain similar peak hours of 6:00pm to 9:00pm (China Standard Time), some companies are chock full of day time classes, and others offer classes after 9:00pm
- Each company pays on its own payment cycle. This is good for you if you work with multiple companies, as you will receive your payment from each company at different times during the month, rather than waiting for one lumpsum amount to come in. It makes managing your cash flow much easier.

So – why wouldn't you want to work with multiple companies as an online teacher? If you are a stellar teacher, the companies you work for might open up opportunities for you to work with them outside of teaching, and these can be lucrative hours, especially if this work can be done on your own schedule and not during your teaching hours. Some people get hired on as full-time employees or remote workers for a company.

If such opportunities are presented to you, you need to decide how much or little you want to be involved with a company beyond working with them as an online teacher. It's a personal decision whether you prefer having the freedom to choose your work and hours versus being a company employee on a fixed schedule.

For now, let's focus on getting started quickly with a full-time teaching schedule in mind. There are several companies you could schedule hours with after getting hired to work with them. Study the examples below of full-time schedules we recommend. Of course, you can tailor these examples within the popular time slots, based on your own preferences.

---

## EXAMPLES OF FULL-TIME SCHEDULES

### Example 1: Balanced Schedule

CST	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Total
8am-12pm	3	Off	3	3	3	4	4	20
1pm – 6pm	Off	Off	Off	Off	Off	1	1	2
6pm-9pm	Off	3	3	3	3	3	3	18
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>40</b>

In this example, if you are based in New York, then you would most likely have scheduled classes as follows:

Mondays: Off  
Tuesdays – Sundays: 6:00am – 9:00am  
Tuesdays – Thursdays: 8:00pm – 11:00pm  
Fridays – Saturdays: 8:00pm – 12:00am  
Saturdays – Sundays: 6:00am – 9:00am  
Sundays: 8:00pm – 11:00pm

## Example 2: Heavy Weekend Schedule

CST	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Total
8am-12pm	2	Off	2	2	2	4	4	16
1pm – 6pm	Off	Off	Off	Off	Off	3	3	6
6pm-9pm	Off	3	3	3	3	3	3	18
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>40</b>

In this example, if you are based in New York, then you would most likely have scheduled classes as follows:

Mondays: Off  
 Tuesdays – Sundays: 6:00am – 9:00am  
 Tuesdays – Thursdays: 8:00pm – 10:00pm  
 Fridays – Saturdays: 8:00pm – 12:00am  
 Saturdays – Sundays: 1:00am – 4:00am

## THE HIRING PROCESS

While every company has its own hiring process, they generally follow a similar path:

1. Application
2. Interview
3. Demo Lesson
4. Onboarding
5. Contract Signing
6. Scheduling

The sequence of these steps may differ from one company to another, but in almost all cases, you can expect to go through each during the hiring phase.

---

### APPLICATION



Several [online teaching jobs are listed on our jobs page](#). Sign up for a candidate account, add your profile and résumé, and begin applying for jobs. You can also apply to online employers by searching for them on a search engine. However, your best bet is to search the job board as employers who list job openings are likely to be in hiring mode.

---

### INTERVIEW



Interviews are usually performed by the company's local staff, or by one or more online teachers who are performing this work for the company in addition to teaching lessons. Either way, you want to be well-prepared for the interview. Be prepared to talk about your:

- Qualifications (university degree + TEFL qualification)
- Relevant experience (previous or current teaching experience, work abroad, summer camps, etc.)
- Your philosophy to learning English online and how you would contribute to your students learning goals
- Your availability to work for the company as an online teacher

Getting hired is not difficult at this time as the barriers to entering this industry are low and the demand for online teachers is high. Plus, there is currently a high turnover rate so there is a constant need to hire new teachers. As long as you have a university degree, a 120-hour TEFL certificate and make a good impression due to being well-dressed and prepared, chances are good you will get hired.

What are companies looking for when they interview you?

- You meet the minimum qualifications
- You look professional (collared shirt or blouse, no sleeveless tops and not looking like you just got out of bed)
- You demonstrate interest for teaching English and *positive energy*
- You have a clean and uncluttered workspace (no distracting backgrounds or noises)

Many cultures are still relatively conservative, and that's largely true where the demand for ESL teachers is high. Making a good impression is important not only for you getting hired, but also for the companies you apply to. They will be putting you in front of children and adults who will be forming an impression of you, and a making a good impression is important to the company's success. They want to avoid complaints from their clients at all costs. So, companies are looking at managing their reputation just as much as they are looking for teachers. We have an article detailing [common ESL interview questions](#) to help you prepare for your interview.

---

## DEMO LESSON



Before getting hired, you will most likely have to perform a demo lesson to the company's hiring team. The demo lesson is essentially a role-play between you and the hiring team member, where you are the online teacher and the hiring team member is the student. The hiring team member will be observing and evaluating your demo lesson, and will usually look for the following:

- Preparedness
- Attitude and work ethic
- Age-appropriate language

- Clear and consistent instructions to students
- Level of interaction/engagement between you and the students
- Facial expressions and body language
- Professional appearance and workspace
- Fast and reliable Internet
- Visibly professional headset with mic

Most companies will provide you with materials to prepare for the demo lesson. These will include the lesson itself and possibly links to videos of model lessons and tutorials. They will expect you to review these and prepare for your demo lesson well enough that you satisfy the above criteria. If you don't fulfill all of a company's criteria, the hiring team may give you some feedback to improve and give another demo lesson before being hired and scheduled into classes.

Don't panic during your demo lesson. It's not difficult to prepare for and many companies at this time are not overly strict about their hiring criteria. As long as you show potential for being a good online teacher as well as make a positive impression, you should have little difficulty passing the demo lesson. Countless people just like you already have. That said, if you don't get hired on your first attempt, don't fret. You can usually re-apply to that company later on, and you definitely have more options for companies to work with.

---

## ONBOARDING



If you have passed the demo lesson, you will usually be invited to some onboarding sessions with the company's staff as well as experienced teachers who are hired in secondary roles to train new teachers. Topics covered typically include:

- Introduction to the company's students and learning goals
- Overview of the company's online teaching platform and courseware
- Online teaching techniques and best practices
- Company policies and procedures

Most companies will require you to complete their onboarding process before you can teach with them. However, market demands often dictate how strict this requirement may be. In cases where a company needs teachers urgently, it may have no choice but to start you teaching immediately, and thus get you to complete your onboarding *on-the-go*.

Onboarding typically occurs over a few days, and over 2 – 3 sessions. These sessions usually run about 1 – 2 hours each.

Many companies pay you to complete the onboarding sessions. These companies usually schedule onboarding after you've been hired and signed a contract with them. Other companies consider onboarding as part of your application process – you won't be hired until you've completed the onboarding, and you won't be paid for the onboarding. Some companies apply a hybrid model, where they will pay you for completing the onboarding after you've had a number of lessons, or passed a probationary period. Whichever companies you apply to work with, make sure you are clear about their hiring and onboarding policies.

---

## CONTRACT



If you're considering teaching online, you will soon realize that most companies offering online English lessons are operating in Asia. Contracts in much of Asia exist in a different manner than they do in Europe or North America. The key difference you want to recognize is that contracts in many countries like China are not always followed to the letter. As well, you may find the contracts to be tilted towards the company's favor. This is not always the case – there are several companies operating on a mutual respect basis – but these are the exception rather than the norm.

The fact is many countries where English teachers are in demand, be it online or employed abroad, a contract is often regarded more as a starting point to a relationship rather than for the substance of the contract itself.

You'll need to sign the contract to begin working with any company. That said, you are an independent contractor, and you are free to stay or leave as you wish. There are plenty of companies to work with, so if you're uncomfortable with any of the terms in the contract, look ahead to other companies which fit better with your comfort level. You can also check online reviews of companies, but take reviews – either good or bad – with a grain of salt.

Here are the important aspects to review before signing an online teaching contract:

- Pay rate: Usually expressed as either a per-hour rate or per class rate)
- Absence, leave, lateness and class cancellation policies: Some companies charge penalties and deduct the penalties from your pay if you miss or cancel a class without notifying them within a stipulated timeframe
- Payment date: Most companies pay your earnings for the month within the first two weeks of the following month, though some companies pay weekly or bi-weekly
- Payment method: PayPal is a popular method for many companies, though several companies pay your earnings directly to your bank account. This is especially the case for USA citizens, but also for UK and Canadian residents in some instances
- Termination clause: Many companies require a 30-day notice of your intention to terminate the contract, though they may terminate you sooner than 30 days by dropping classes from your schedule if they are unhappy with your performance.

Examine the contract carefully, and accept the terms only if you agree to them. Most often, you will not have much leeway in the negotiation of the company's policies. You may have some leeway in negotiating your pay rate, especially if you have a lot of experience and the right qualifications.

Contracts are typically for a six month or one year term.

---

## SCHEDULING



Once you have signed a contract with a company, you should receive access to their online teaching platform where you can open and close time slots according to your availability. Depending on when you start and the company's current inventory of classes, you should begin to see classes scheduled into your time slots. It may happen as quickly as a few days, or may take as long as a month, to see your schedule filling up. So much of your schedule will depend on timing and the company's scheduling model.

There are some differences in how companies fill your time slots, but that topic is too broad to cover in this guide. It's safe to say that, most of the time, the more popular you

are with students, the more classes you're going to see in your schedule. Other factors that can affect your schedule are:

- **Available time slots:** Some companies reward you for opening up more time slots with them.
- **Absences, leave, lateness and class cancellations:** Naturally, companies like to reward online teachers who consistently show up to classes on time.
- **Complaints:** No complaints from students or parents is good news. Frequent complaints can lead to a reduction or removal of classes from your schedule
- **Public Holidays:** There will be times during the year when your schedule can taper off due to local holidays. Some companies close while others keep classes open during holidays.

## TYPES OF ONLINE CLASSES

### CLASS FORMAT

Each company is going to offer one or more class formats. This is going to depend on the company's business model. Many companies open student enrollment directly whereas some companies partner with public and private schools and offer group lessons. Here we'll look at the most common class formats.

#### **Private Class**

A private class – often referred to as a one-to-one class – is simply a class where there is only one student. There can be a lot of flexibility in a one-to-one class as your focus is working on improving just one student's fluency. These classes can sometimes be challenging as you have to keep one student engaged for the duration of the lesson.

#### **Small Group Class**

This is the most common format for online classes. Your classes will typically have between three to six students. Group classes can have a lot of interaction and energy due to the group dynamic. As an online teacher, you are expected to create a fun learning atmosphere where each student has an opportunity to participate. One challenge with group classes is that often your students will have different levels of fluency, confidence and interest. Another challenging aspect is when a student enters the class late and disrupts the flow of the lesson. Generally, these classes tend to be easiest to teach. The class size is small enough to engage all students during the lesson while there are enough students to create group engagement through role plays and activities.

#### **Large Group Class**

Some companies will schedule large group classes, where you may have as many as 20 – 50 students in a lesson. These are not typical among companies offering online lessons as they are not practical for meaningful learning. Some companies do offer large group classes (often for free) for students to trial a class and decide if they want to enroll in a small group class.

#### **Online Class At School**

Unlike the class formats described earlier, where students study from home on a computer or tablet, online classes at schools are conducted with students sitting in a physical classroom. You will be displayed on a large screen at the front of the class, and your students will be seated at desks. Usually, you are supported by a teaching assistant in the classroom who helps call out students to participate and organizes them into groups

during the lesson. These are often called one-to-many lessons, and are almost exclusive to companies that partner with public and private schools.

---

## CLASS FREQUENCY AND DURATION

Depending on which companies you work with, you will have various class frequencies. With some companies, you will only ever see a student or group of students once, as these companies offer open study times to students, and students can then choose a time of day they want to study. With other companies, you may see the same student or group of students several times during the week, or even over several weeks, as these companies offer a fixed study schedule to their students.

Both models have their merits and downsides. The former provides teachers with a lot of scheduling flexibility but can result in a less consistently booked schedule. The latter leans towards a more booked schedule, but comes at the expense of scheduling flexibility.

Based on your own goals as an online teacher, it's important to consider the options. You might indeed want a mix of both types in your work schedule.

Most companies set a class duration anywhere inside the range of 25 minutes to 50 minutes. This is an important consideration when choosing to work with multiple companies. You want to avoid scheduling back-to-back time slots with different companies if your classes from both companies begin and end on the hour or half hour.

It's a good idea to schedule some open time slots between, or schedule with a company that provides for breaks between classes. This way you don't run into issues with missing or being late for your classes. Ideally, you want to segment your availability with different companies on different days completely, or during different times of the day, to avoid time conflicts in your schedule. You may be tempted to book adjacent time slots, or double book your time slots. This is probably a bad idea. You may end up compromising your work quality and losing both.

---

## STANDBY TEACHING

Some companies offer their teachers to be on standby in case a teacher doesn't show up. A standby teacher may receive an incentive payment on top of the payment for covering the lesson, and some companies pay teachers just to standby, whether or not they actually cover a lesson. Standby opportunities can come in handy when you have some open slots in your schedule.

---

## PUTTING THINGS INTO ACTION

## 30-DAY ACTION PLAN

With the right attitude, good preparation and focused effort, you could start looking for online teaching opportunities today and be teaching within a week to a month. It really can happen that fast. Here is a simple action plan for you to get started.

Week	Actions
Week 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Enroll in a 120-Hour TEFL Certification Course</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Set up your <i>virtual classroom</i> at home: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Computer</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Headset with boom mic</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> High speed Internet (10mbs up / down)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> 2 – 3 desktop LED lamps</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Green screen fabric</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> ManyCam (start with free, upgrade later)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Get some kid-friendly background images</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Teaching props</li> </ul> </li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Arrange professional photos of yourself</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Record a 1-minute self-introduction video <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Prepare a simple script of what you will say</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Record yourself in your virtual classroom</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Don't include any branding</li> </ul> </li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Prepare a professional résumé with your photo</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Set up your preferred online teaching schedule</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Register at <a href="http://www.esljobexchange.com">www.esljobexchange.com</a> and other ESL job sites to begin your job search and application process</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Like our Facebook Page and join other Online ESL Job Facebook groups</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Make a list of 10 – 20 companies that fit with your preferred online teaching schedule</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Check these companies' reputations online – be objective about both good and bad reviews</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Schedule 2 – 3 hours to apply to each company on your list</li> </ul>

Week	Actions
<b>Week 2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="407 268 1372 338">❑ Schedule interviews with companies that have accepted your application</li> <li data-bbox="407 365 1372 434">❑ Apply to more companies if you don't get enough responses from your initial list</li> <li data-bbox="407 462 1372 531">❑ Prepare interview responses, questions to ask and prepare for an impromptu demo if an interviewer asks for one</li> <li data-bbox="407 558 1372 957">❑ Prepare for demo lessons scheduled after passing interviews <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="505 630 824 663">❑ Review courseware</li> <li data-bbox="505 693 768 726">❑ Practice demos</li> <li data-bbox="505 756 1372 825">❑ Watch videos of demos provided by the companies and on YouTube</li> <li data-bbox="505 854 984 888">❑ Schedule and complete demos</li> <li data-bbox="505 917 1321 951">❑ Review and sign contracts for jobs you've been offered</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Week 3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="407 982 1084 1016">❑ Schedule and complete onboarding sessions</li> <li data-bbox="407 1045 1357 1115">❑ Set up available time slots with each company according to your online teaching schedule</li> <li data-bbox="407 1144 1130 1178">❑ Set up your payment details so you can get paid</li> <li data-bbox="407 1207 1308 1276">❑ Familiarize yourself with each company's online platform and courseware</li> <li data-bbox="407 1306 1341 1375">❑ Get familiar with each company's policies, especially those that can affect your pay</li> </ul>

<b>Week</b>	<b>Actions</b>
<b>Week 4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="407 268 743 300">□ Start teaching online</li><li data-bbox="407 331 1386 363">□ Take note of any feedback you receive about your teaching quality</li><li data-bbox="407 394 1386 468">□ Do more company training as needed to build your confidence and skill as an online teacher</li><li data-bbox="407 499 1354 573">□ Enhance your virtual classroom and work space to improve your performance, comfort level (e.g., standing desk, better chair)</li><li data-bbox="407 604 1370 678">□ Track your completed lessons and income with each company on a spreadsheet</li><li data-bbox="407 709 1354 783">□ Schedule time off once a month to rest and do something else to get a change in context</li></ul>

## FINAL THOUGHTS



Use a paper-based or smartphone/tablet [calendar to keep yourself organized](#) about your schedule. This is very important as your online teaching income is determined by your time slots. You don't need to slot each booked class into your calendar. Just create a time slot for each day and times of the week that you will be opening time slots to teach online.

Maintain an Excel sheet of hours you work for each company. Most companies are good at calculating your worked hours via their online platform, but you want to have your own record not only to verify you're getting paid correctly, but also to help you forecast and average your income over the course of a year. Your income will vary from one month to the next, so we recommend averaging your income over the course of the year. This will also be helpful come tax season when you must file your tax returns.

Don't overwork yourself. Allow one day off each week to rest your eyes and your body. Teaching online is not hard work and certainly not hard physically. But constant sitting/standing while staring at a bright screen can take its toll on you. Get a pair of blue light protection glasses to wear while you teach to protect your eyes from blue light strain. And, without fail, allow yourself an extra day off each month to go and do something totally unrelated to teaching. Plan it ahead so it is not something you have to schedule last minute.

Do travel. One of the perks of being an online teacher is that you really can work from anywhere. Yes, you do need fast, reliable internet and a work environment conducive to online learning. Your virtual classroom can be portable with a portable green screen, two USB chargeable LED lights and ManyCam. And of course, choose a place to stay which will have a fast internet connection.

Get to know some other online teachers in your area and around the world. You'll be amazed how helpful other online teachers can be, and you don't want to be all work and no play. People working as online teachers can relate to each other and share ideas. Go out and grab lunch together. And when you travel to a place where you know some-

one teaching online, don't be surprised to find yourself invited to stay with them. Now you've got a place to stay (and maybe even work online) while you travel!

- Keep a regular eye on the online companies in the market. New opportunities arise regularly. [Register a candidate account](#) at [www.esljobexchange.com](http://www.esljobexchange.com) to apply to new jobs, check other job boards, and join online teaching job social media groups.

Teaching online is a great way to earn decent money relatively fast with minimal qualifications or barriers. It may not be the best paying work, but it can have a seriously positive impact on your savings, investment and debt repayment goals, or completely finance items in your bucket list. It's also a ton of fun, especially if you enjoy helping people.

Is it perfect and problem-free? No. There's no such thing. Avoid the whiners online and you'll find that a positive attitude will go a long way. Will you make *six figures* teaching online with online companies? Not likely. But look at it this way. You're now working from home, independently. You're spending less on clothes, travel and eating out. You've got good chunks of free time to work on other goals, if you want to. And with the right financial guidance and depending on where you live, you could reduce your taxes, since you are an independent contractor and thus, self-employed. As with anything, look carefully into your bottom line and make sure it really does work out for you before getting started. Chances are, there are fewer downsides to teaching online than there are upsides.

Good luck with your online teaching goals. What are you waiting for? Get started today.

Register for Free at:

[www.esljobexchange.com](http://www.esljobexchange.com)



Copyright © 2021 ESL Job Exchange

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law.

[www.esljobexchange.com](http://www.esljobexchange.com)