

## Tips From a Recruiter: Applying for International Teaching Jobs

by [Engin Ayyaz](#)

Every year, scores of ESL teachers take the plunge and travel internationally for better career prospects, because teaching in an international setting is indeed a unique experience and enriches the individual like no other. While some professionals simply do it to explore different worlds and cultures, many are also either under the burden of student loans and/or are unable to secure a position locally. Thus, many applicants hastily apply and accept (or are rejected from, for that matter) positions without paying due attention to a number of important factors. Seeking, interviewing, and accepting a teaching job in a context in which you possess limited knowledge has several dimensions and requires a careful and comprehensive look at all the issues. This article focuses on the application and interview process when applying to international teaching positions, with tips on avoiding the occupational and cultural issues that might hinder you from showing your full potential while applying for international posts.

### Job Seeking

#### Where to Look

Though it is possible to find international jobs all year round, the better programs ordinarily hire between February and May to start as early as the following September. These jobs are announced through the programs' own websites as well as [TESOL's Career Center](#) and [IATEFL's Vacancies](#) pages. There are also numerous other job vacancy sites for TEFL/TESL jobs worldwide, but job seekers should use common sense with regard to those websites and intermediary companies, because their quality and bona fides are variable.

There are also two major job fairs held annually where job seekers will have a priceless opportunity to meet and interview face-to-face with a lot of international recruiters in one place: [TESOL's Job Marketplace](#) in March and [IATEFL's Jobs Market](#) in April. Many programs post open positions on both webpages where they invite prospective candidates to apply online and schedule an interview during the conference.

#### Learning About the Program

There are thousands of programs serving the needs of millions of language learners all around the world. Here are some questions you should ask:

- Is it a *university-bound* language program (highly sought after with weekday working hours) or is it an *independent language institution* (operates after hours and on weekends)?
- Where is it located (in an *urban* area, with high rents cost of living, or in a *rural* area)?
- Does it have *private or state* status (which might indicate alternative quality levels when considered within the national context)?
- Is it accredited? Accreditation (or lack thereof) is one of the most important quality indicators for any language program; it gives some guarantee that an institution's *modus operandi* complies with international standards, including but not limited to hiring and

firing, working conditions, grievances and so forth. Look for accreditation by The Commission on English Language Program Accreditation (CEA), EAQUALS, BALEARP, and NEAS.

- Can you support the information you find with accounts from individuals (in person, if possible) who have either worked there or know the program? (Consider current or former employees, the expat community in the country, citizens of the country in question within your immediate environment.)
- What is the remuneration package? Does it include a monthly salary, health insurance, paid leave, and flight reimbursement? Paid housing with utilities, bonuses, a one-time settling in allowance, school fees for your children? How does the compensation compare with the state teacher's average salary in that country? Is the salary tax exempt? In which currency is the salary is going to be paid?

## Applying for Jobs

The focus of this section will be the application, namely the cover letter and résumé. All of the documents below are better submitted in a PDF format to prevent problems that might occur in transferring and/or opening the files.

### Cover Letter

Applicants tend to write a generic cover letter and send it to all employers. Though this might save time, the truth is not many employers read this one-size-fits-all letter. What most employers like to see in a cover letter is your making specific reference to the program's mission, curriculum, and philosophy, and proving how you would be the best fit for that particular position.

### Résumé

An employer will typically spend 10 to 15 seconds for the initial screening of a résumé; hence, it must be easily navigable. I strongly urge you to refrain from preparing unreasonably extensive résumés, and recommend limiting it to two or three pages. The sections in the résumé must be clearly indicated and include education, relevant experience, presentations and publications, and achievements, all in reverse chronological order, and references if required. Font, size, and style should be wisely and sparingly used. Unless absolutely necessary, it is always safer to avoid narrative and to use bullet points.

Unlike in the United States, in most parts of the world it is only natural that one provides personal information including picture, age, and marital status in the résumé. However, it is highly recommended that the applicant check this technical detail with local customs and company policies. It also deserves mention at this point that applicants should be prepared for questions concerning frequent job changes or long career breaks indicated in the résumé. Furthermore, candidates should bear in mind that most employers can and do *Google* names.

Finally, I strongly suggest not including any attachments such as copies of diplomas, reference letters, and so on, at initial stages of the application unless specifically instructed.

## Interviewing

Interviews are reciprocal tools for institutions and teaching professionals to find out the option that best fits their objectives and priorities. Whatever the format of the process may be, the ultimate goal of an interview is to provide a snapshot of how both parties would mutually function in the work setting.

### **Before the Interview**

Interviews might take place at the institution's site, at a job fair, or online. Regardless of the form and place of the interview, the most important aspect is preparing well by familiarizing yourself about the job and its requirements before the interview. It is imperative that the applicant has done some research and has information about the curriculum, learner profile, and cultural context prior to the interview. Having basic information about meeting and greeting in the country of the position and being culturally aware is also a nice gesture. Moreover, it is always handy to bring a hard copy of your résumé—preferably on high quality paper—as well as reference letters and other materials that you see fit. As far as the dress code is concerned, a smart casual outfit would be the safest choice.

### **During the Interview**

Tardiness can result in immediate elimination from consideration, even if the actual interview still takes place; hence, being punctual is a good head start. The first 5 or 10 minutes are the most important part of the interview, and generally indicate how the interview will proceed. Rather than leaving it at the sole discretion of the interviewer, it is a good idea to prepare a rough roadmap for the interview that will help you to try to steer proceedings to allow you to mention why you feel you would be the perfect candidate.

Nevertheless, in doing so it is of critical importance that you answer questions promptly, avoiding incoherence and verbosity. A formal yet approachable tone is definitely an asset, and so is the appropriate body language. An interviewee should definitely take the opportunity to ask questions about the country, institution, job, or similar issues, because employers always regard such questions as a sign of genuine interest. Questions can include matters pertaining to professional development opportunities, any orientation program offered, job descriptions, and so on. Last but not least, finishing off on a high note will certainly increase your chances of an offer. Always plan ahead what to say before you leave the interview room, so that you leave a good impression on the interviewer,

### **After the Interview**

Following up on the interview is a crucial element of the process, especially if you are still interested in the position after the interview. The best way to do this is by writing a short thank you e-mail stating why you are still interested in the position by making specific references to the job requirements and institution. Especially at job fairs, employers know that candidates interview with as many as 20 schools, and it is difficult for them to know if you are truly

interested. However, the e-mail should be timed appropriately so it has the best chance of being seen. If sent during the busy days during a job fair when the organization is constantly conducting interviews, it may well fall through the cracks; it is better to wait until just after the job fair is over.

### **What to Avoid**

The applicant should avoid the following:

- Scheduling the first or the last interview of the day.
- Going to the interview without knowing anything about the post.
- Speaking negatively about previous employers, even if prompted.
- Using clichés such as “My weakness is that I am a perfectionist!”
- Politics
- Stereotyping

### **Conclusion**

Finally, it should further be noted that employers spend substantial amounts of time and effort, and many resources to find the best professionals for their institutions and learners. It is an arduous task for them, too, and requires care and attention. It is also equally important that employers recognize and appreciate applicants’ positions and help create an environment in which candidates can best show their potential. All in all, trying to see the whole recruitment process from each other’s perspective would certainly help both parties understand one another and help applicants make better career decisions.

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