

What is TESOL?

TESOL—Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages—is the acronym that refers to the professional association, the profession, and the field itself. Because TESOL's acronym is the same as the acronym for the field as a whole, it may also help to explain what the association is not:

- ♣ TESOL is not a school and does not provide English-language classes or teacher-education programs.
- ♣ TESOL is not an accrediting or certifying body and does not evaluate teachers or teacher education programs.
- ♣ TESOL is not a placement agency and does not coordinate the filling of ESL/EFL jobs.

This flyer is for informational purposes only. TESOL does not warrant that this information is comprehensive, complete, or otherwise reliable. TESOL does not provide professional academic counseling, career counseling, legal assistance, or legal advice. TESOL hopes the information is helpful but does not intend it to substitute for professional assistance.

In addition to general academic requirements, many countries have government or visa regulations with which ESL/EFL teachers must comply. In the European Union (EU), for example, most ESL/EFL jobs require candidates to have EU passports. In the United States, ESL teaching positions in public schools (pre-K-12) are highly regulated.

To teach English in public or higher education positions, the minimum requirement is usually a master's degree in TESOL or a related field. To see what type of education and certification various jobs require, take a look at job listings.

When an organization or a certificate has the acronym TESOL in its name, it refers to the field as a whole and does not indicate that it is affiliated with the association. TESOL does not endorse or lend its name or logo to any organization. TESOL does not have institutional members; rather, it is an individual membership association.

For more information about TESOL, the association, and about TESOL, the field, please visit www.tesol.org.

What are the differences between TESL, TEFL, and TESOL?

TESL refers to teaching English as a second language: programs in English-speaking countries for students whose first language is other than English.

TEFL refers to teaching English as a foreign language: programs in countries where English is not the primary language and is not a lingua franca. TESOL, which stands for teaching English to speakers of other languages, is a general name for the field of teaching that includes both TESL and TEFL.

What type of certification do I need to teach ESL/EFL?

No single degree, certificate, or license authorizes an individual to teach ESL/EFL in all fields or in all parts of the world. Job requirements are specific to the job and the employer and may vary a great deal from one job to another. Depending on the place one is teaching, generally speaking, the minimum qualification to teach English in private language schools throughout the world is a bachelor's degree and some type of TESL or TEFL certificate.

Applicants must obtain a field-specific teaching license from the state where they wish to work. You may want to contact the department or ministry of education in the country where you plan to work for more information about that country's educational system and academic requirements for teachers.

If my degree is in a field other than TESOL, do I need another degree?

Most TESL/TEFL jobs require at least some academic background in TESOL or a related field. The potential employer decides what is related, but examples may include education, English, and linguistics. If you have a degree in an unrelated field, you might consider supplementing it with a TESL, TEFL, or TESOL certificate.

What is a TESL, TEFL, or TESOL certificate?

Certificate programs provide an introduction to ESL teaching. Generally speaking, there are two types of certificate programs: graduate certificates and independent certificates. Both usually require applicants to have a bachelor's degree, but only the individual institutions offering certificates can answer questions about their prerequisites.

Graduate certificates are taught at the university level and usually take two to four semesters to complete. The credits are often applicable to a master's degree. Independent certificates are usually much shorter-term programs (about 2 to 6 weeks) that focus on practical training and different methods for teaching language. You usually cannot apply an independent certificate toward a state teaching license or a master's degree.

If you plan to teach in the United States, U.S. employers usually do not consider independent certificates sufficient for employment.

How do I find a teacher education program in my area?

TESOL maintains a list of institutions that offer these types of programs. The Directory of Degree and Certificate Programs (DDCP) is an online resource featuring approximately 450 university-level academic and training programs in English as a second language (ESL) and related fields in the United States and Canada.

The directory of universities and colleges is organized for browsing by major (TESOL/TESL/TEFL, English, linguistics, education, other), degree doctoral, master's, post-bachelor's, bachelor's, certificate), location state or province), and program type (state/province credential or distance learning). Each program listing includes profile data on admission requirements, faculty, curriculum, tuition, and financial aid. To view the DDCP go to www.tesol.org, select Career: TESOL Degree and Certificate Programs. If you are interested in learning about other education programs outside the United States and Canada contact your local affiliate.

Can TESOL recommend a teacher education program for me?

TESOL does not evaluate teacher education programs and cannot comment on individual institutions. As an association, TESOL must be impartial and cannot direct potential students to any program or type of program. Only the individual institutions can answer questions about the types of degrees or certificates they offer.

I do not have a degree or a certificate in TEFL, but I'd like to teach ESL or EFL. What job opportunities exist?

Numerous volunteer opportunities are available worldwide. Local literacy programs often include an ESL component, and aid agencies place volunteer teachers throughout the world. If you are untrained and plan to search for a paid position, you will most likely find low pay, no benefits, and long hours. These entry level positions are usually easiest to obtain by applying on-site.

Can I teach ESL/EFL if English is not my first language?

Certainly! Some ESL/EFL employers may prefer someone who is proficient in both the students' native language and in English or someone who has had the experience of learning English as a second language. TESOL does not tolerate discrimination that affects our members, including discrimination based on language background.

Do I need to speak a language other than English to teach ESL/EFL? Do I need to speak the language of the country in which I plan to teach?

Speaking a second language is not necessarily required to enter the field of TESOL, but it is beneficial, in general, to have learned another language and to know another culture. If you are living and working in a non-English-speaking country, you may not be required to speak the host country's language, but you will likely find your stay more comfortable and rewarding if you learn the local language.

What is the typical salary range for teachers in the United States? Outside the United States?

Because so many kinds of ESL/EFL teaching jobs are available worldwide, this question is difficult to answer. In the United States, ESL/EFL jobs may be full-or part-time and may be paid an annual salary, an hourly wage, or a fee per class. For jobs outside the United States, the answer is even more complicated. Because no single body governs all the ESL jobs worldwide, there is no central source for salary and benefits information. You will have to search for information on a specific country.

What country has the most jobs available?

Because no single body governs all ESL jobs worldwide, no statistics exist for which countries have the most jobs. Please visit TESOL's Online Career Center for job listings.

Can TESOL find a job for me?

TESOL does not offer placement services for teachers or recruitment services for employers. But TESOL Career Services does have many other resources available to jobseekers, including the TESOL Career Center, an online job board; the Placement E-Bulletin, a semiweekly job posting newsletter; and the Job MarketPlace, an annual job fair held at the TESOL convention.

Does TESOL have an office where I live?

The TESOL headquarters is located in Alexandria, Virginia, USA. TESOL also has more than 100 affiliates worldwide, but these affiliates are entirely separate organizations with independent memberships and activities. Although TESOL shares a special relationship with its affiliates, membership in TESOL does not constitute membership in any of its affiliates, or vice versa.

I still have questions. What should I do?

TESOL members may contact TESOL Career Services at careers@tesol.org. Although TESOL Career Services do not include academic or career counseling, legal assistance, or legal advice, TESOL will try to help you find answers to your questions.

TESOL Career Services is a member benefit; assisting more than 14,000 members worldwide.

TESOL membership is open to anyone with an interest in the field.

For information on how to join and details about additional member benefits, please visit www.tesol.org/join.