

TEACHING ENGLISH ONLINE



When people think of teaching English, they immediately picture a classroom filled with students, and themselves front and centre with a whiteboard behind them. However, there are thousands of individuals actually teaching from the comfort of their own home, via Skype or a similar communication application.

Teaching English online is a wonderful way to supplement your teaching income or earn a living. You get to meet people from all over the world and help them improve their English. You will help students achieve their goals, advance their careers, get into universities and many other very satisfying endeavors.

There are three ways of teaching English online:

Independent

Having your own online English learning platform takes a lot of work and immense responsibility is needed. Initially, you'll need a website or blog and have to find various methods to promote yourself. There are many sites out there to create your own blog or website - some are free, some are not.

Pros: You can make the choices and do it your way. You also get paid more.

Cons: You'll become a business owner and will therefore, be responsible for marketing, processing payments, customer service, scheduling, lessons, lesson plans, cancellation policies. In other words, you will do everything, including teaching.

Third Party

There are a lot of third party platforms, where you can post your presence and biography. Such websites act as a middle man.

Pros: They'll connect you with students and market for you.

Cons: You won't get paid as much because the companies receive a commission either from each class or a fee when the student is assigned to you. Different platforms ask for different amounts. Really study this path before going down it. You can register for free on some, but others require you to pay to be listed on their website or directory. You can expect unreliable hours, unreliable students. You don't have much support for the education side of things.

Online School

You'll be part of a team of teachers teaching online in a 'virtual school'. This means that you can develop as an instructor, especially if you don't have much experience.

Pros: In this case, you tend to have more reliable hours and better students. You may ask what 'better students' are. They are those who take their learning seriously, and will turn up for their classes, ready and willing to learn English. Such schools also offer a good online curriculum and educational and technical support when needed.

Cons: There is less pay per class and teachers must adhere to school policies. Just because the school is online, does not mean that the teacher is free to do as they please. In fact, it is much like a brick-and-mortar school and should be seen as such.

GETTING SET UP

Practically speaking, there are a number of things a budding online English teacher needs to begin with even before their first class springs to life on their screen.

You'll need a reliable computer, Internet connection and an Ethernet cable, as wifi may be unreliable in some areas. Your Internet connection dropping every so often does not reflect professionalism and has negative consequences, as you can well imagine. Headphones are also a necessity, as they help you hear the student better, and cut out any outside background noise.

Ensure that your students also have a stable Internet connection, and ask them to use an Ethernet cable as well. Your class will be uneventful, technologically speaking and you can get on with teaching trouble-free.

The room should be quiet with a plain background or 'nice' background such as books or artwork, and there should be good lighting, natural or a light focused on your face in front of your computer. Remember that the body language is not the same online, so imagine if your student can't clearly see your facial expressions either. Your student needs to be in a well-lit area too. Body language works both ways, and is very helpful for a teacher as well.

VOIP

You'll need to decide on an online video conferencing system to use. There are a couple of choices: QQ, Skype, Google Hangouts. Always be sure you have the latest version of any application on your computer. Always use your video on during class. Use chat to help the students with vocabulary, grammar points and to clarify instructions. Always have a backup system in case your main VOIP technology doesn't work.

Dress and Etiquette

When a student has a class, they like to see that their teacher is dressed and groomed well. You need to be dressed as if you are going to work in a brick-and-mortar school. Students notice everything. Remember when you were a student? I'm sure you did too.



Eating / Drinking Beverages / Containers

Professionalism is important. Eating during class isn't very professional. You may have to work many hours back-to-back. Have a glass of water or tea standing by. However, anything that indicates alcohol is unacceptable. Don't drink water out of a wine or beer glass.

Photo and Bio

Your photo should be a good quality head-shot (you from the shoulders or chest up), with a simple background. I would recommend a professional headshot. The typical cost is around \$50USD and it is an investment for your career. You'll own the headshot and be able to use it on any site as well as LinkedIn, etc. Many sites only feature teachers with high quality head-shots. You can see a significant jump in your student bookings. Even before your potential students see you, they will see your bio and your photo. It goes without saying that your photo should be professional, and your bio, brief but attractive. Unprofessional photos and bios, do not attract serious students.

Teacher Abilities and Bio

Your biography is your main selling point so you want it to be great. You should include your professional experience, your languages, test experience, certifications, and add your interests.

Don't write a bio that is too dry, you want it to be interesting so the student wants to get to know you and take classes with you. You are the product and your bio is your advertisement. Make it count!

Your Schedule

Your schedule should not chop and change each week. You should try to find times that suit you and stick to them as much as possible. This will ultimately help you obtain regular students, who know when you are available and when you not. Consistency tends to show an organized individual, and that's what most students want.

General Advice

Remember that whatever path you decide to take, it takes time and hard work to be an online English teacher. But then, nothing good has ever come easily, has it? Don't be disappointed if in the beginning you don't have many hours. Just keep working hard and follow the advice below.

Always bear in mind that students tend to feel more anxious than in face-to-face classes. This occurs for a number of reasons:

- Fear of classes being impersonal
- Worry about possible technical difficulties
- Worry about poor sound quality leading to poor understanding
- Worry about a lack of body language which may lead to poor learning

In order to keep students positive you need to keep the following in mind:

- Try to use a lively tone of voice.
- Speak clearly and a little slower than 'normal' classes.
- Give students clear instructions on how to access and use materials.
- Make sure your students are engaged. If they fall silent, prompt them to speak, or ask if there is something they would like clarified.
- Smile, and bring laughter to your class. This immediately makes the student feel relaxed, minimizing the tension they may feel.

REMEMBER

- **ALWAYS** listen to your student
- **ALWAYS** pay attention to them. Don't make your students feel that you are not interested.
- Make sure they **LEARN** something every class. Students need to feel they are progressing.
- **ALWAYS** correct and explain errors/points that should be stressed.
- **NEVER** miss/ be late for classes. Would you like it if your students skipped or arrived later?
- **ALWAYS** be prepared.

In other words, you need to create a secure and friendly atmosphere online. Even more than in one-to-one classes. If done correctly, they will ultimately enjoy online classes much more than those they have been used to, and, for first-time online students who may not have thought they could learn via Skype / other applications, more than they actually expected to.

By following the above, you will begin your journey into online English teaching armed with the weapons needed to create a solid foundation that will be invaluable in all your teaching endeavors.

PREPARING FOR YOUR CLASS

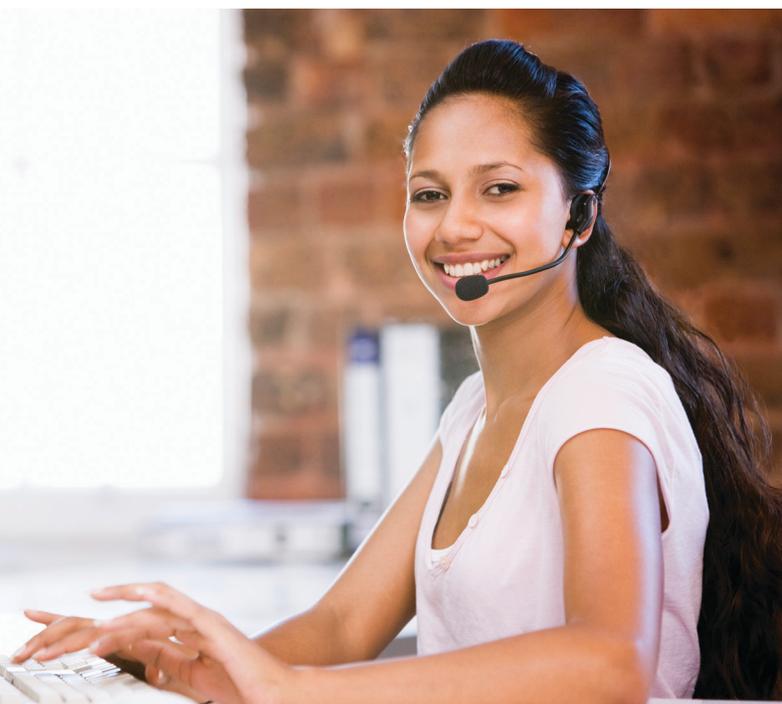
Class preparation will take you longer if you are just beginning your teaching journey. If you've been teaching and have materials of your own don't hesitate to use them. You may need to adapt the materials to an online format rather than a classroom format. You can use several methods for lessons: Microsoft Word, PDFs, or Google Documents. Google Documents is a good choice because it is saved in the cloud and not on your computer. You can imagine

how frustrating it would be to lose hundreds of proprietary lessons that you've created when your laptop crashes. Google also allows for easy sharing and commenting feature which can be integrated into your classroom.

You'll need well rounded lessons that include the four skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Grammar should be woven through the lessons, if you aren't strong in your English grammar you may want to take a class about teaching English grammar or do some reading about English grammar. You may need to study the grammar module titled: Fast Track Grammar Review for EFL Teachers. You don't have to know everything about English grammar but you should be able to simply explain basic grammatical questions like the difference between present perfect and past simple. You may not need to teach English grammar especially if you have a young learner but you need to have the knowledge in order to identify mistakes and provide appropriate feedback.

If you don't know the answer to a grammar questions let the student know that you'll get back to him or her with an answer right away. There are many online resources at your disposal. The following website should be useful:

[Azar Grammar Speaks FEGi](#)
[Azar Grammar Speaks UUEGi](#)



FEEDBACK

Feedback and error correction is arguably the most difficult thing to learn as a teacher and the most important. There are many different thoughts on correcting and giving feedback and the research tells us many different outcomes. As a teacher it is part of your job to read and know the latest research on the best practices for correcting and giving feedback. Currently these are the recommended practices:

- **Focus on the message.** If the mispronunciation does not grossly distort the message, either subtly correct them by restating it using correct syntax or simply ignore it.
- **Watch for trends.** Rather than correcting during a conversation or reading, watch for repeat offenses and address them at an appropriate time.
- **Use them as examples.** Citing common errors can help meet a lesson objective.
- **Focus on the positive.** Before pointing out corrections, be sure to celebrate the growth.
- **Suggesting Tool.** Using Google Drive's "suggesting" tool enables students to see changes and offers them the choice to accept or reject the correction. While they may generally accept a teacher's input, this tool makes them self-edit.
- **Is the student actually making an error, or is it just a mistake?** An error usually occurs consistently. You notice it again and again. If it seems like a simple mistake, maybe wait and see if they make the same mistake again.
- **Does the error cause a breakdown in communication?** In other words, does the error prevent the student from getting their ideas across, or do you still understand what they are trying to say? If it doesn't impede natural communication, I would hold onto the correction for now unless it is part of the learning target for that day.

[You can read more about feedback and error correction here.](#)

METHODOLOGY

As a teacher you will need to find a methodology that fits with your ideas of education, your research, and your students' needs. There are hundreds of different types of methodology and many have been thoroughly researched. Teaching English has gone from the rote call/response style of teaching which is still very prevalent in China to a communicative approach that completely shuns grammar. The most successful style of teaching English is probably a mixture of many different approaches. Students get frustrated when the class is too organic and conversational because it feels like chatting with a friend and we don't pay to chat with friends. Adding structure keeps the class more professional and gives a backbone to base the lessons.

With over 10 years of experience of teaching English online I've settled on two different approaches. I like the idea of principled eclecticism because it emphasizes the need for a structure and oftentimes online class can be too freeform and loose. Although, the Dogme's approach with

meaning and communication being essential I draw from these ideas as well. A student won't learn as quickly if they aren't presented with the chance to speak about topics that are meaningful and interesting topics to them.

Dogme

Read about '[Dogme - A Teacher's View](#)' here

Principled Eclecticism takes methods from several approaches including Dogme to ensure students receive instruction in **form** (e.g., sounds, suffixes, words, paragraphs) and **function** (e.g., future time, plurality, questions, requests) and are guided through the process of actively **constructing**, or building, the language (e.g., fill-in-the blanks, phrase-matching, sentence-building) allowing them to **communicate** effectively (e.g., opinion-giving, conversations, role-plays, simulated interviews) with their instructors.

Grammar and vocabulary are woven into lessons in a way that suits the individual's particular learning needs. And, only when our students are better able to communicate in their chosen areas, do we feel satisfied with the level of instruction we've provided.

Below, we've provided an example of a lesson that contains **form**, **function**, **construction**, and **communication** activities.

Choose a methodology that fits your ideas of education as well as your students' needs

Reading and Speaking Lesson	form	function	construction	communication
1. warm-up discussion				✓
2. warm-up vocabulary	✓	✓	✓	
3. reading	✓	✓		
4. comprehension		✓	✓	
5. grammar	✓	✓	✓	
6. applied grammar	✓	✓	✓	✓
7. applied vocabulary	✓	✓	✓	✓
8. wrap-up conversation				✓

The emphasis in this lesson is on exchanging information and using the vocabulary and grammar to make effective communication possible. This lesson is one of many that we offer to our students.

TAXES

It is fairly simple: you are required to file your taxes. But if you have been out of the country ("out of the country" is defined on IRS form 2555) for a full calendar year you can exclude (not pay income taxes on) the first \$101,300 of your income (for 2016 - but changes every year). BUT - you must file to get the exclusion - if you don't file you do owe taxes on the income. You need also to pay self-employment tax (social security tax) unless you are working in a country that has a pension plan for you (social security tax is not excluded by the 2555 exclusion). When abroad you will hear 98% incorrect information from people sitting on the barstool next to you and unfortunately, that is where many expatriates gather tax responsibilities information. A teacher friend lived abroad for 25 years and when his kids wanted financial help to go to university - the school wanted his tax statements and he had to reconstruct his income over all that time and file with the IRS - it was a huge headache.

<https://taxmap.irs.gov/taxmap/pubs/p54-014.htm>

SECURITY

Secure Passwords

This is a secure password: 1!Qwe\$4abT

It has no words that can be found in a dictionary, it contains numbers, letters (upper and lowercase) and special characters. It's still not **uncrackable**, but it's as good as you can get. It's also impossible to remember, right? And, you should never be using the same password twice. This causes a problem for most people, because no one wants to walk around with a list of two dozen passwords that they can't remember...

Enter **LastPass**. It's a totally secure online password vault. It creates and remembers extremely complicated passwords for all the sites you visit, and stores them. You only need to remember one password, your LastPass password, and it fills in the rest. Also, it's free.

Keeping them secure:

Don't ever share a password with someone via email. We'll never ask you for a password via email - I can't think of any exception. No other company should either.

On the Web

Be sure you're on the site you think you're on. About a year ago I got an email that appeared to be from Paypal, warning me that someone had tried to access my account, and asking me to login to secure it. The link in the email took me to a site that looked exactly like Paypal's. The url was something like: user.secure.paypal.someotherwebsite.com. So, they had put Paypal in the URL, but it actually belonged to another site. By luck, I noticed this. Just out of curiosity, I entered fake user and password info in the fields and clicked 'enter.' It redirected me to Paypal's real login page then. So, had I not noticed that this wasn't Paypal's real site, I would have handed over my password and user info without realizing it.

Using LastPass helps avoid this, because it will only autofill your user and password info on the real site. Also, if you get anything that seems strange from us, or Paypal, or any other important site, rather than clicking on the link, go directly to the website and login.

Virus Protection:

On a **Mac**: Use the free version of BitDefender

On a **PC**: McAfee, Symantec or Kaspersky

A good website to look at to learn more about security and Internet safety:

www.staysafeonline.org

REMEMBER

'A teacher presents the past,
reveals the present,
and creates the future'

— Unknown