

# Teach Abroad Survival

*23 Hot Tips For Teaching Success*



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*A teacher affects eternity;  
he can never tell where his influence stops.*

*Henry Adams*

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## Introduction

If you've gotten this book because you've gotten a job overseas teaching English as a Second Language and you are in need of some valuable tips then congratulations.

If you are reading this book because you are thinking about teaching ESL well congratulations to you too. Even though this ebook is geared toward those fortunate enough with that taste of adventure to actually do something about it, it also contains some great information that you can use in many areas of your life.

And if you haven't quite taken that leap yet that has you say "yes!" to teaching ESL and/or teaching ESL overseas maybe what's said here will stoke that fire underneath you to make that decision.

So what you are about to read are some tips and advice about how to help you get you situated and comfortable in your new ESL teaching position in your host country.

Of course, a lot more can be said on this topic but my ebook coach said I could only put 23 in this ebook. (I've actually snuck in a couple more tips at the end. I couldn't resist.) Some of the tips can be used by any ESL teacher whether overseas or not and some are specifically about teaching overseas.

Some of this stuff you might not have heard before, some of it is in the realm of common sense, some of it might get you to do some deep thinking. All of it has to do with my own experience and what has worked for me. I started teaching ESL in Seville Spain in 1979 and at this writing teach at a small language institute in New Orleans, Louisiana.

I never thought that this would be what I would do with my life. But destiny has a funny way of sneaking up on you. Several years ago a psychic told me I would be a teacher of teachers. I didn't put much stock in it. But, dag nabbit, here I am with an ebook and a website for ESL teachers that's growing in popularity. Guess he was right.

So enjoy. Send me your questions and comments. Let me know how this ebook has helped you.

*Richard Bienvenue*

So let us begin with our first tip...

## 1. Travel Light

If you are going overseas or traveling anywhere, one of the hardest lessons to learn is that it's **more advantageous** to travel light.

What does travel light mean? Three heavy bags and a rucksack?

Well, some people may think so. But really when it comes to travel **less is definitely more**.

How many times have you taken a trip and realized that in the middle or at the end that you didn't need to take **all** the shirts and pants and shoes and books and knick-knacks that you thought were a good idea when packing? It just weighed you down.

I remember one time when I went to Spain I thought I was traveling light by only bringing a knapsack. Well, I stuffed that thing full and when I got to my destination at a friend's home in Sevilla I realized I had brought **too much stuff**.

So what did I do? I went through it all and just took out the necessities and packed the rest of it in a box and sent it back home. I was in for a shock when I after I having lugged it all the way to the post office they were gonna charge me \$60.

"Are you sure it's gonna cost that much?" I exclaimed in my best Spanish. The woman behind the counter assured me it would. What the heck I sent it anyway.

I could've saved myself the trouble by not packing all that stuff in the first place.

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### How to pack

They say that the best thing to do when packing is to lay out everything and **cut it in half**.

Take one bag with a shoulder strap and maybe a small carry-on for the plane (I use a little rucksack for this). Take some **medium toned to dark clothing** so it doesn't show dirt and stains and a pair of dress slacks or skirt (for the ladies) and a nice medium to dark-colored shirt or blouse.

### **A good pair of shoes is of utmost importance.**

The **best** universal good looking shoes are the **Rockport Pro Walkers**. These are by far the best shoes I have ever owned. I have a pair that are over 10 years old and are still in decent condition despite the fact that I wore them almost everyday for about 8 of those years. I bought another pair last year.

If you are going to be teaching ESL for a few months or more in a foreign country you can always buy what you need there. (Unless of course you are tall or extra big, which might pose a problem.)

You probably will go back home with more than you brought so you want to leave room in your suitcase anyway. Heck, you might even have to buy a new suitcase to carry back all that stuff you bought!

[eBags.com](http://eBags.com) is the largest online store for traveling bags and luggage. Find everything you need for taking your stuff overseas.

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## **2. Keep a Journal**

I've heard it said, "**If your life is worth living it's worth recording.**" I've kept a journal for many years and I go through spurts when I write in it almost everyday to times when I may write only once or twice a month.

This practice has helped me **tremendously** with being able to sit down and work on my website ( <http://www.english-teaching-info.com> ) or write articles to be published or a proposal for a school.

It's a good way of keeping track of ideas and also just being able to spew when I am concerned or upset about something.

It's like having my own psychologist. It helps to keep me **balanced and sane**.

So living and working in a foreign country has it's own challenges and

opportunities. I think it's **real** important to have a mental and psychological outlet.

For me I make it a ritual. I get up in the morning and after doing my morning meditation and reading I go to the kitchen and fix myself a nice cup of coffee and sit at the table and then just write.

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### **Off the top of your head...**

The trick is to write spontaneously **without** stopping and thinking about it. (I recommend *The Artists' Way* by Julie Cameron to get great instruction on this.)

But recently I started doing something that I am going to recommend to you.

You see I keep more than one journal. I keep my personal journal in which I record my thoughts feelings ideas brainstorms and dreams and goals. I also keep a separate journal in the classroom.

After each class (and sometimes during) I write in ideas, comments, questions, ways to improve as a teacher, what we worked on in that lesson, things I can do to help the students, etc.

This has proven to be invaluable for me and has added a **unique dimension** to my teaching.

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## **3. Get Clear on What's Expected of You As the Teacher**

It's important when you are in a new environment to find as much safety as possible so you can feel secure and not have so much stress.

You know, moving to another country or even traveling to another country involves a certain amount of stress. So you want to mitigate that by **making sure** you know just what it is that's expected of you as the teacher.

You might want to ask some questions so you can **be prepared** as much as possible before you take your first step into your new school environment:

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- How many classes will you be teaching?
- How many students in each class?
- What are the age groups?
- If you are teaching adults you might want to know what kinds of materials you are expected to use.
- Will you be teaching grammar, conversation?
- What does the school like to focus on? (For example at my school although we do grammar and such we mainly focus on conversation.)
- Will you have to do student evaluations?
- Does the school run on the semester, quarter or no system at all? (I work in the latter system which means I have to create all of my lesson plans and choose all of my own books.)
- If you are teaching kids you might want to know what socio-economic background they are from.
- What about class discipline? Is this a problem in the country you will be going into? (I understand that kids in Japan are very polite and shy and give very little trouble in class.)

You might want to find out something about the culture you are going into:

- How do they think.
- What are their values?
- What's their system of government?

What I'm saying is **don't go in cold**. Know the environment you are going into as much as possible. Of course, don't go overboard on this and get obsessed. You want a certain element of adventure and surprise too.



## 4. Put Together a Winning Lesson Plan

Some schools make it easy for you. They already have everything figured out about how and what to teach the students. The system is already set up and you just plug right into it and go.

That's why, as we previously discussed, it's **important** before you go into any teaching situation to find out what's expected of you.

But even if the school has the whole thing laid out for you it's good to not go into class empty-handed. In other words, come in with **your own ideas** about what and how to get through to your students.

I've been fortunate in that **all** of my teaching situations I have had to rely on my **own** skills and creativity to come up my own lesson plans.

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### What I do...

I usually start each of my classes with a **few minutes of conversation** just to get them **warmed up** and settled down after the break. Our classes are small so I try to get everyone to say something.

The important thing is you gotta keep the class interesting, you gotta keep it moving.

I've found that **the best thing** is to go into class with many different things to do. I may not get to all of them, usually don't.

And sometimes an **interesting topic** for conversation might come up at the beginning of class that might segue in something deeper or into other topics. And I wind up not even getting to any of the material I'd planned! (This is where it's important to be flexible which we'll discuss later.)

Now the above was for intermediate to advanced. Obviously, in beginner level you're **mainly** working on grammar and pronunciation and basic vocabulary so you may be limited in your opportunity to have any kind of deep conversation.

I teach three levels: beginner to advanced. I have what I call my bag of ESL tricks that I reach into to plan my lessons.

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They include:

- conversation,
- grammar,
- idiomatic expressions,
- reading and discussing short articles or stories,
- vocabulary building,
- dictation,
- practice TOEFL tests and discussion,
- essay writing,
- playing games (even for adults),
- watching movies,
- studying poetry.

Having a variety of and ready resources to choose from will never leave you feeling stranded and wondering “what the heck do I do now.”

Keep your eyes and ears open. The great things about teaching English is that there are infinite resources everywhere and more is added to the vast ESL “databank” each day.

Lesson plans don’t really have to be a big deal. For a more detailed discussion go to <http://www.english-teaching-info.com/english-teaching-lesson-plans.html>

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## 5. Be Flexible

Sometimes, depending on the mood of the class for that day, I'll completely throw out my lesson plan and do something different. Sometimes I can tell the class is **just not in the mood** to do what I've planned.

So in my commitment to keep the class interesting and not bore the students I shift gears and just **do something else**. It's a kind of flying-by-the-seat-of-your-pants thing just to see where you land.

Sometimes the students want to know more about me so I let them ask me questions. When that peters out I start on something else.

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