

10 Mistakes New International Teachers Make in the Job Search and in Getting Started—and How to Avoid Them

Introduction

If you're thinking about teaching internationally, you're not alone. Thousands of teachers – both in the ESL market and the K-12 market - every year decide to take the leap—and many discover that finding a great position (and thriving once you arrive) can be more challenging than expected.

After 21 years as an international teacher and leader, I've seen the same avoidable mistakes cost people time, money, and confidence. I've written this guide to show you how to sidestep the most common pitfalls so you can start your international teaching journey with clarity and confidence.

Mistake #1: Applying to Every Job Without a Clear Goal

Why it happens: New teachers feel they must grab any opportunity.

How to avoid it: Slow down a bit. Start making notes on what you're looking for. Define your ideal school type, location, and role before applying. Focused applications are much more successful.

Mistake #2: Relying Only on Job Boards

Why it happens: Job boards feel like the easiest way to find roles.

How to avoid it: Combine job boards with networking, attending virtual recruitment fairs, and connecting with recruiters directly. Also, go directly to school websites and see what jobs they are listing.

Mistake #3: Not Understanding the Contract Details

Why it happens: Excitement about moving abroad can overshadow the fine print.

How to avoid it: Carefully review contracts for salary, housing, insurance, and exit clauses. When in doubt, get professional advice.

✔ **Mistake #4: Undervaluing Your Experience**

Why it happens: Many teachers believe international schools only hire people with years abroad, so they are willing to sacrifice on some of what they thought were non-negotiables (think housing, flights, health care, etc.)

How to avoid it: Highlight transferable skills and be confident in the value you bring. Don't let the excitement of the first offer or a weak offer make you blind to red (and yellow) flags.

✔ **Mistake #5: Assuming All Schools Are Reputable**

Why it happens: Attractive websites can hide poor working conditions.

How to avoid it: Research schools thoroughly. Look for independent reviews, speak to current or former teachers, and ask direct questions during interviews. Remember that a non-answer or a redirect answer can be telling. Dig deeper.

✔ **Mistake #6: Not Preparing a Targeted Resume and Cover Letter**

Why it happens: Teachers send the same documents everywhere.

How to avoid it: Tailor your resume and cover letter to emphasize your adaptability, cultural awareness, and relevant teaching experience. As well, tailor your resume to the specific school or job you are applying for. Do your research on the role and reflect that research in what you highlight in your resume and cover letter.

✔ **Mistake #7: Overlooking Visa and Certification Requirements**

Why it happens: Different countries have different regulations.

How to avoid it: Research visa requirements early and confirm whether your qualifications are recognized in your target country.

✓ Mistake #8: Underestimating Cultural Adjustment

Why it happens: The focus is often on the move itself.

How to avoid it: Prepare for culture shock. Learn about local customs, school culture, and expectations. Read, watch videos, start language learning. All of this will help you to settle in and adjust faster and more comfortably.

✓ Mistake #9: Not Planning Finances Realistically

Why it happens: Salary figures may seem higher than in your home country.

How to avoid it: Consider the cost of living, relocation expenses, local taxes, and hidden fees. Keep in mind that some countries still require you to pay taxes back home even if you are paying taxes abroad and find out if there are workarounds for this. Plan a budget before accepting an offer.

✓ Mistake #10: Believing Success Happens Overnight

Why it happens: Social media makes international teaching look effortless.

How to avoid it: Allow time to adjust, build relationships, and find your rhythm in a new environment.

✨ Conclusion & Next Steps

Avoiding these mistakes will put you ahead of the curve and help you start your international teaching career with confidence.

If you'd like more detailed guidance, step-by-step checklists, and insider strategies, explore my in-depth e-books designed for:

- **Aspiring ESL Teachers**
- **Certified K–12 Teachers**