

K12 ACADEMICS — TEACHING ABROAD SERIES

TEFL & TESOL Certification

A guide for aspiring teachers & educators — what TEFL, TESOL, and CELTA mean, the 120-hour standard, accreditation, cost, and how to choose the right course.



Find Your Community
2026 EDITION

The world's largest education resource.

Online since 2004, K12 Academics has helped millions of families, students and educators **find the right school, college, camp, business and program in their community** — for every kind of learner.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT CERTIFICATE TO TEACH ABROAD

A TEFL, TESOL, or CELTA certificate is the **entry ticket** to teaching English abroad. The industry standard is a **120-hour accredited course**, but the acronyms, formats, and prices vary widely. This program-neutral guide explains **what the certificates mean, the 120-hour standard, accreditation, cost, and how to choose the right course**, and points you to the K12 Academics directory to find providers and programs.

General guidance, not professional or accreditation advice. Certificate names, standards, prices, and employer requirements change and vary by provider and destination. The details here are recent examples and **must be confirmed with each course provider and with the schools or programs you plan to apply to.** K12 Academics does not run or endorse any specific course — use the K12 Academics directory to find and compare your options.

Understand the Acronyms

WHAT TO KNOW

The key terms: **TEFL** (teaching abroad, non-English countries), **TESOL** (broader, abroad and English-speaking countries), **TESL** (within English-speaking countries), **CELTA** (a specific, respected 120-hour certificate, adult-focused), and **DELTA** (advanced, for experienced teachers). TEFL and TESOL are often used interchangeably.

BY THE NUMBERS

TEFL / TESOL

teaching abroad

TESL

English-speaking countries

CELTA / DELTA

specific / advanced

HOW TO HELP

Start with the vocabulary — **TEFL and TESOL** are what most teachers earn to work abroad, while **CELTA** is a specific, respected TEFL-type certificate and **DELTA** is for experienced teachers.

GOOD TO KNOW

TEFL and TESOL are **largely interchangeable** — both certify you to teach English to non-native speakers, whether the label says "Foreign" or "Other".

Know the 120-Hour Standard

WHAT TO KNOW

The **industry standard is a 120-hour accredited course** — most employers require at least this. Longer courses (a Level 5 180-hour certificate or a 300-hour diploma) can strengthen your CV, but **more hours don't automatically mean higher pay** for a new teacher. A 120-to-200-hour course covers what most people need.

BY THE NUMBERS

Minimum

120 hours (accredited)

Longer courses

boost the CV (optional)

More hours

≠ automatically more pay

HOW TO HELP

Aim for at least a **120-hour accredited course** — the industry minimum; a longer Level 5 course helps your CV, but isn't essential to land most first jobs.

GOOD TO KNOW

A course **anywhere from 120 to 200 hours**, properly accredited, is all most teachers need to start.

Prioritise Accreditation

WHAT TO KNOW

There's **no single international TEFL standard**, so **accreditation by a recognised, independent body** matters more than anything. A cheap, unaccredited certificate can be worthless to employers. Verify the accreditation, check the provider's reputation and reviews, and confirm the certificate is internationally recognised before you pay.

BY THE NUMBERS

No single standard

so accreditation matters

Verify

recognised independent body

Check

reputation & reviews

HOW TO HELP

Make **accreditation** your first filter — with no single global standard, a recognised, independent accreditation (plus a strong reputation) is what makes a certificate worth having.

WATCH OUT

An **unaccredited certificate can be worthless** to employers — always confirm the accrediting body before paying.

Choose Your Format

WHAT TO KNOW

Courses come **online, in-person, or hybrid**. Online is the **cheapest and most flexible**; in-person and hybrid courses cost more but usually include **observed teaching practice (a practicum)**, which sharpens your skills and strengthens applications. Beware very cheap, fully online courses that include **no teaching practice at all**.

BY THE NUMBERS

Online

cheapest, most flexible

In-person/hybrid

includes a practicum

Beware

no-practicum bargains

HOW TO HELP

Pick a format for your goals — online for flexibility and cost, or in-person/hybrid for the **observed teaching practice** that makes you a better (and more hireable) teacher.

GOOD TO KNOW

A course with a **practicum (observed teaching practice)** strengthens your application — favour one over a bargain course with none.

Weigh CELTA vs a Strong TEFL

WHAT TO KNOW

CELTA is a top-tier, Cambridge-backed certificate valued by competitive schools, international schools, and native-English-speaking markets — but it costs far more (~\$1,500–2,600) and is usually adult-focused. For **most first-time teachers going abroad, a high-quality, accredited 120-hour TEFL course is enough** and far cheaper.

BY THE NUMBERS

CELTA

top-tier, pricier

Best for

competitive/int'l schools

Most teachers

accredited 120-hr TEFL

HOW TO HELP

Decide by goal and budget — a **CELTA** helps for competitive or international-school roles, but an accredited **120-hour TEFL** suffices (and saves money) for most teachers heading abroad.

GOOD TO KNOW

CELTA is **great for competitive markets and international schools**, but by no means necessary — most abroad roles accept a strong 120-hour TEFL.

Budget Realistically

WHAT TO KNOW

Prices vary widely: an **accredited 120-hour TEFL runs roughly \$200–700** (budget online courses at the low end, in-depth courses higher); a **CELTA runs roughly \$1,500–2,600**. Factor in whether the course includes a practicum, tutor support, and job-search help — and remember a certificate is a one-time cost that opens years of opportunities.

BY THE NUMBERS

TEFL

~\$200–700

CELTA

~\$1,500–2,600

Factor in

practicum, tutor support

HOW TO HELP

Budget for the whole package — an accredited TEFL (~\$200–700) or a CELTA (~\$1,500–2,600), weighing practicum, tutor support, and any job-search help, not just the headline price.

GOOD TO KNOW

A quality accredited course is a **one-time cost that opens years of opportunities** — weigh value, not just the lowest price.

Match the Certificate to Your Goal

WHAT TO KNOW

Let your **destination and goals** guide the choice: **TEFL or TESOL** for teaching abroad (widest global recognition); **TESL or TESOL** if you plan to teach within an English-speaking country; and **CELTA** (or later a DELTA) if you're targeting competitive markets, international schools, or a long-term career.

BY THE NUMBERS

Abroad

TEFL / TESOL

English-speaking countries

TESL / TESOL

Competitive/long-term

CELTA / DELTA

HOW TO HELP

Choose by destination — **TEFL/TESOL** for teaching abroad, **TESL/TESOL** for English-speaking countries, and **CELTA/DELTA** for competitive markets or a long-term career.

GOOD TO KNOW

Your **target destination** should drive the choice — check the country guides for what employers there expect.

Remember the Degree Question

WHAT TO KNOW

A TEFL certificate is **not the same as a university degree**. Many countries and most international schools **also require a bachelor's degree** (often for the work visa), and a certificate won't replace it. Check each destination's requirements early — some markets accept TEFL-only teachers, while others require a degree by law.

BY THE NUMBERS

TEFL

≠ a degree

Many markets

also require a degree

Check

destination rules early

HOW TO HELP

Know the difference — a TEFL certificate **doesn't replace a degree**; many markets (and most international schools) require both, often for the visa, so check each destination's rules.

GOOD TO KNOW

Some markets accept **TEFL-only teachers**, but many require a degree by law — confirm before you commit to a destination.

Verify a Course Before You Pay

WHAT TO KNOW

Before enrolling, confirm the course is **accredited by a recognised body**, includes **tutor support and (ideally) a practicum**, has **strong, verifiable reviews**, and is **internationally recognised**. Be wary of vague accreditation claims, unusually low prices with no teaching practice, and pressure tactics. A little diligence protects your investment.

BY THE NUMBERS

Confirm

accreditation + tutor support

Look for

practicum + real reviews

Be wary

vague claims, hard sells

HOW TO HELP

Do your diligence — verify **accreditation, tutor support, a practicum, and genuine reviews** before paying, and be wary of vague claims or high-pressure sales.

GOOD TO KNOW

A little research up front **protects your investment** — an accredited, well-reviewed course is worth more than the cheapest one.

Get Certified & Find Your Program

WHAT TO KNOW

Once you know which certificate fits your goals, **find and compare accredited providers and the country programs that suit you in the K12 Academics directory**. Pair your certificate with the right destination (see our Teaching in [Country] guides), prepare your degree and documents, and start applying. Confirm requirements with each provider and employer.

BY THE NUMBERS

Find & compare

providers & programs

Pair with

the right destination

Then

prepare & apply

HOW TO HELP

Use **the K12 Academics directory** to find and compare accredited providers and country programs, pair your certificate with the right destination, and start applying.

WATCH OUT

Browse **the K12 Academics directory** to find the specific providers, programs, and recruiters that fit your goals.

TEFL & TESOL Certification: The Essentials

A snapshot — program-neutral. Confirm details with each course provider and the schools or programs you apply to.

The acronyms

TEFL (teaching abroad) and TESOL (broader) are largely interchangeable; TESL is for English-speaking countries; CELTA is a specific, respected 120-hour certificate (adult-focused); DELTA is advanced, for experienced teachers.

The standard

The industry standard is a 120-hour accredited course (most employers' minimum); longer Level 5 or diploma courses boost the CV, but don't automatically raise pay.

Accreditation & format

With no single global standard, accreditation by a recognised, independent body is essential; courses run online, in-person, or hybrid, and one with a practicum (observed teaching practice) strengthens applications.

Cost & choice

An accredited 120-hour TEFL runs ~\$200–700; a CELTA ~\$1,500–2,600 (best for competitive or international-school roles); most teachers going abroad need only an accredited 120-hour TEFL.

The degree question

A TEFL certificate is not a university degree; many markets and most international schools also require a bachelor's degree (often for the work visa), so check each destination's rules early.

YOUR TEACHING-ABROAD JOURNEY STARTS HERE

Find Your Community.

Explore our Teaching in [Country] guides, and find and compare providers, programs, and recruiters in the K12 Academics directory — among **1,297 free resources**.

tools.k12academics.com →

