Disclaimer: Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information contained in these notes. However the British Council cannot accept responsibility for any errors which may exist or for any subsequent changes.
Congratulations on your recent allocation to a post as an English Language Assistant in China.

This document contains important information and advice regarding a variety of practical and administrative matters affecting UK assistants in China. They should be read carefully, retained for reference and considered in conjunction with any papers issued by the Chinese authorities. It is important that you take this information with you whilst doing your year abroad in order to be able to consult it at all times when problems/questions arise.

If your permanent (UK) home address, personal e-mail or phone number should change at any time from now on, please inform us immediately by sending an e-mail to assistants.uk@britishcouncil.org. We may need to contact you during the year with updates to these notes, invitations or urgent messages.

We hope that you find the following information useful and that you enjoy the year ahead.

Best wishes,

Language Assistants Team, British Council
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Co-operating partner

Every year, the British Council recruits UK graduates to work for one year as English Language Assistants (ELAs) in schools around the world assisting with English language lessons. Since 2010, China Education Association for International Exchange (CEAIE) has been the Chinese partner of the British Council Language Assistants programme.

The assistantship programme in China is administered by:

**Organisation name:** China Education Association for International Exchange (CEAIE)

**Address:** Yifu Conference Center, No. 160 Fuxingmen Nei Street, Beijing 100031

Zhou Lidong (Doris) is specifically in charge of British Council ELAs.

**Tel:** 86-10-66416080-8033

**Fax:** 86-10-66416156

**Email:** zhoulidong@ceaie.edu.cn

**Website:** [www.ceaie.edu.cn](http://www.ceaie.edu.cn)

China Education Association for International Exchange acts as a facilitator between you and the host school, they cannot offer 24hrs support. You will be covered by standard consular cover and will be asked to register at the Embassy or local Consulate.

Role of the Language Assistant

The role of a language assistant is a very important one and one that we hope you will enjoy. Please remember that you are a **paid member of staff** with the responsibilities and required professionalism that this entails. Dress should be smart/casual. Take your lead from what the other teachers are wearing and ask them what is appropriate for that particular school. As you are in a professional situation please dress accordingly and respect the guidelines given. Please refer to our website for more information on your role: [www.britishcouncil.org/languageassistants-your-role.htm](http://www.britishcouncil.org/languageassistants-your-role.htm)

As a language assistant you are also an **ambassador for the UK and its culture**. The way you behave will influence how those around you view the UK and you should endeavour to be a positive example. If you set a bad example, you could damage the reputation of the programme and adversely affect the experience of future assistants.

Your first-hand experience of life in the UK is an excellent resource and you should draw on this during your lessons. We provide a lot of advice to help you incorporate cultural content into your lessons.

It is important to be resourceful and use your initiative. If you do not think that you are being used sufficiently, make suggestions of topics that you could discuss with the students, activities you could do.

The School will identify a mentor in the English department to be the first point of contact for you. This mentor will provide pastoral care and be your first point of contact. Where possible the school will provide internet access to you on campus or will identify the nearest internet café.

It is also very important to make sure that you are familiar with the education system in China as this will help you know what to expect when you start teaching at your school(s).
Please ask your host school for specific information. You will also receive further details at the induction course in Beijing. Keep an open mind and remember to respect the rules and regulations of your host schools and of China. Co-operation gets you much further in China than confrontation.

Period of appointment

The period of appointment for UK assistants in China next year will be 1 September – end of June (the end dates can vary so please check with your school).

Assistants in China are expected to work up to 20 hours a week. Those who have been appointed to more than one school will be asked to divide their time between the schools concerned. You can request information regarding how your timetable will be arranged from the head of the host school/mentor teacher. This is usually the first person mentioned when you are sent details of your posting and contract.

The maximum number of schools to which you can be appointed is three. Please contact us if you have been appointed to more than three schools. If the different schools are several miles apart and you have to travel between two on the same day, you are entitled to ask for help towards travel expenses. If no regular public transport serves your school(s) and there are no lifts available to your school(s) please inform us of the situation.

Assistants are entitled to certain holidays, these should be stipulated in your contract or you should be able to obtain the dates from the school secretary. Please note that holiday periods in China do vary significantly so do check these in advance. You should not be absent on other occasions without prior permission. You may occasionally be asked to work at the weekend to cover the day off you will have received for a public holiday. This is a normal occurrence in China so please be aware.

You should have already been in touch with your school but you should also ask them for some information about the school(s) that you will be working in. For example, it may be useful to know the age range of pupils, the average class size, the general level of ability, the social background of pupils; the facilities availability and if you should bring any specific materials from home. It is also important to enquire about the dress code for teachers and any other general school information.

Please note: that a breach penalty is likely to be included in your contract. This is normal and helps protect the school from losing a foreign teacher. If you leave your contract early you may have to pay a fine and you will have to give back your foreign teacher certificate.

Predecessors

Contact details of assistants appointed to your area in 2013-14 are included in a separate document. It should be noted that schools do not necessarily receive assistants from the same Anglophone country each year, and the British Council holds records of assistants from the UK only. Past assistants have emphasised how useful it is to contact former assistants in their area and have described their advice as invaluable.
Arrival

Passports and Z working visas

Assistants must be in possession of a standard 10-year passport before leaving the UK and are advised to ensure that it will not need to be renewed before October 2015. Those who are not in possession of a passport, or need a new one, should complete the application procedure as soon as possible either through a regional Passport Office or online at: https://www.gov.uk/browse/abroad/passports

ELAs should apply for a single entry 3 month Z working visa – please research this independently, starting with the Chinese Embassy website who have consulates in Dublin, Edinburgh, London and Manchester and the Chinese Visa Service Centre (CVSC) offices are located in Edinburgh, London and Manchester. Please note that the price of a Z working visa will vary depending on the service which you choose please see the CVSC Schedule of Fees.

Please be aware that the Chinese visa office that you apply to may change depending on your home address and/ or your passport e.g. if you have a Scottish home address you will need to apply at the Chinese Consulate in Edinburgh. Please also note that if you have an Irish passport you can apply at the Dublin or London Consulate.

Please note that you will not be able to apply for your visa until you receive all the relevant documentation from your host schools in China. The documentation provided by your host school in China will be as follows:
1) original copy of your work permit
2) original invitation letter

The host school will apply for the visa invitation letter from the Chinese Foreign Affairs Office and send to your address in the UK. Schools and local education authorities often face delays when applying for supporting documentation for ELAs visas due to the number of departments the paperwork has to be authorised by.

Note: You should take your original degree certificate and medical report to your host school. These documents will be used for the application of your Foreign Expert Certificate. You may not be required to do a full medical check if you have done it in the UK; however this is subject to the requirement of your host school and will vary in different cities.

Foreign Commonwealth Office (FCO) Information

Before travelling to China you should ensure that you check the FCO’s travel advice pages: https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice and ensure that you have subscribed to updates so that you receive any important changes to the FCO’s advice. During a crisis, advice for British nationals will be published on the travel advice website and updated regularly, so by subscribing you will ensure that you are aware of any updates. You can register for emails using this link: https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/UKGOVUK/subscriber/new

We also recommend that assistants read the ‘Advice for Travellers’ documentation provided by the FCO, which can be found here: https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/supporting-british-nationals-overseas/supporting-pages/advice-for-travellers
Induction meeting

The British Council Language Assistants (China) Induction course will be held in Beijing. The course and accommodation are paid for by the British Council, but you will need to pay for all evening and weekend meals during these two weeks.

Orientation: evening of Sunday 17 August
Start: Monday 18 August
End: Friday 29 August

The first week of the induction will consist of the Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL in China) course provided by the State Administration of Foreign Expert Affairs; with the second week focusing on teaching practice and language immersion.

China Education Association for International Exchange (CEAIE) have arranged a coach to take all ELAs to the Great Wall on Saturday 23 August, however ELAs will be expected to cover the entrance fee and lunch on the day costing around 100RMB (approximately £10.00).

Travel to China

Flight

ELAs allocated to China have to pay for international flights to China in advance, but your host institution will reimburse you for your return flight (inbound and outbound) on completion of your school contract. You should arrive in Beijing on the 16 August or 17 August, further details below.

Flight reimbursement limit

Please be aware of any flight reimbursement limit detailed within your contract when booking your flight, money spent on flights above this limit will not be reimbursed by your school.
Please also keep in mind that the China ELA scheme is the only British Council ELA scheme that sees assistants reimbursed with their international airfare.

In general single flights cost more than a return, fixed date returns usually have a date change fee so please ensure that you check the cost of this when booking your flight. Also please bear in mind that direct flight are usually more expensive than a flight with a stopover.

Booking flights

In the past we have advised ELAs to book flights once they have their visa confirmed. However the British Council understand that ELAs want to try and get the cheapest flights possible. If you do book flights before receiving your visa please check that your travel insurance covers flight cancelation or rebooking fees in the event of any delay in visa paperwork and processing.

All ELAs will be expected to arrive in Beijing on Saturday 16 August. Please buy flights from your desired start location to Beijing Capital International (PEK). CEAIE will arrange two separate transfers from the airport to the hotel on Saturday 16 August for all ELAs who arrive in Beijing before 7pm (CST- China time). If you arrive on Sunday 17 August, transfer will only be arranged before 4pm.
The exact times of these transfers will be based on ELAs flight times. The British Council will be sending a link to an electronic survey (via Survey Monkey) at the end of July to collect ELAs flight details.

If your flight arrives later than 7pm (CST) on Saturday 16 August or arrives on Sunday 17 August after 4pm you will need to organise your own travel to the induction accommodation.

Note: The British Council has been advised that the induction course hotel is not easily accessible by public transport and is located outside of the central Beijing area. If you have limited Mandarin it will be very difficult for you to get a taxi.

**Where to start looking for flights**

The British Council does not recommend or endorse any travel companies but the following websites may help you when booking your travel:

- [http://www.flightcentre.co.uk/](http://www.flightcentre.co.uk/)
- [http://uk.omegatravel.net/](http://uk.omegatravel.net/)
- [http://www.statravel.co.uk/](http://www.statravel.co.uk/)
- [http://www.skyscanner.net/](http://www.skyscanner.net/)
- [http://www.expedia.co.uk/](http://www.expedia.co.uk/)
- [http://www.momondo.com](http://www.momondo.com)
- [http://www.kayak.com](http://www.kayak.com)

Working as a language assistant gives you a great opportunity to travel around China and you should make the most of your free time. Try to avoid coming home in the holidays and experience as much of the surrounding area as possible.

**Travel to host schools**

On Saturday 30 August ELAs will travel to their host schools. ELAs are not expected to book their travel to their host schools as CEAIE will organise this.

At the beginning of the induction course CEAIE will collect money from assistants to cover the cost of the journey from Beijing to your host destination. Please ensure that you have cash available to you upon arrival in Beijing (unless you are exchanging currency at Beijing airport. Please note that in terms of exchange rates airports don't usually offer the most competitive rates).

For those ELAs that travel to their host city via train, tickets are usually less than 1000RMB (approximately £100). ELAs allocated to Chongqing, Sichuan and Yunnan will be required to fly to their host school – the cost of flights is around 2000RMB (approximately £200). The travel cost will include money to cover transport from the induction hotel to the train station/airport which costs approximately 50RMB (around £5). The ticket fee will be collected at the orientation (evening 17 August). Please note that your school will then reimburse you the cost of your travel from Beijing, minus the transport fee from the induction hotel to the train station/airport, upon arrival. Please keep hold of your ticket for reimbursement.
CEAIE will book tickets on behalf of ELAs and will inform your mentor teacher of your arrival time and station (or airport if applicable). During your communication with your mentor ensure that you get their mobile number and text him or her once you have arranged a Chinese sim card to ensure you can contact them once you have arrived.

Money matters

Monthly allowance
Details of your allowance will be stated in your contract with your school. Please note this will vary across the different schools. You should be paid between 3,000 – 4,000 RMB a month for 10 months which includes payment for the winter holiday (approximately one month). You should be given an average of 20 hours of teaching a week; this is the average teaching time for a Chinese teacher. Extra lessons can be agreed on an overtime rate payable to you monthly. You should also be aware that although the allowance is at a local level it may be more than that of your Chinese colleagues.

Please note that you may not receive your first payment until the end of October or later, so you should ensure that you take around £500 or a credit card to cover initial costs. This amount may differ depending on your location and how much rent you are required to pay in advance. Be aware that you are often charged for using your British debit card to withdraw money abroad. You may wish to check what your bank will charge you to use this service. Your monthly allowance is adequate to survive on but you will need more if you intend to travel.

You should check the conditions of your visa before looking for or taking on any additional work during your time in China. If you wish to supplement your income by giving private lesson in English, you are strongly advised not to advertise in local papers or public places. (Please read the relevant sections of our Personal Safety Leaflet). In general, pupils are easily found through school or private connections, i.e. by word-of-mouth. However, it is essential to check that the school will allow this. Please note that the assistantship is your priority whilst you are in China and any additional work must not impact on this.

Currency and banks

In the past assistants have opened bank accounts in China but you are advised to wait until you arrive in your town of appointment before looking into this. This will allow you to research all the local options, seek recommendations and help from your school and choose what will be most convenient for the rest of the year.

Income tax

A Double Taxation Agreement exists between the UK and China. Under this agreement UK assistants are normally exempt from China income tax for a period of up to 2 years. However, it is normally the case that 100% of the remuneration received abroad will be liable for UK tax. It is important to note that this agreement only covers teaching jobs. You might be taxed for any non-teaching jobs and should check how much you are allowed to earn per year without having to pay taxes. Please check your contract for information on taxes as well as sometimes schools do ask you to pay. If this occurs please contact CEAIE for information.
You are reminded that the UK tax year extends from 6 April to 5 April and that income earned in the UK between April and the start of your assistantship may be taken into account when you're own or your parents' tax liability is being assessed.

Enquiries regarding UK income tax should be addressed to a local tax inspector, not to the British Council. We cannot assist you is this area because we are not trained in tax, cannot give advice on how your personal circumstances will affect your tax, and for data protection reasons. Please check http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/ for information about who to contact.

Insurance

You are strongly recommended to take out travel insurance for the period between leaving home and taking up your appointment, and again for the period between ending your appointment and returning to the UK. The British Council is unable to advise on private insurance packages, you are recommended to consult an insurance broker for professional advice and to check whether you are covered by your parents' insurance policy. Please be aware that some insurance policies, usually 'backpackers' insurance, do not allow for trips home during the year and it is important to check the small print of your policy to make sure that you are covered. It is important to cover medical and other expenses, personal accident and personal liability, luggage and personal possessions and cancellation charges.

Remember when booking flights and researching medical insurance please share on the Facebook group.

Please see the FCO website for more information regarding healthcare in China and the preparation needed before you leave: https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/china/health.

If you take regular medication, please ensure that you have a supply before you leave. It is also important to find out where you nearest doctor, dentist and hospital as soon as you arrive. You should ask your school for information about the facilities in your area and always advise staff and your landlord of any medical conditions.

Note: Ensure that you take original copies of any medical information undertaken for your school; this will be used upon arrival for the application of the Foreign Experts Certificate (without which you will not be able to teach in China).

Administrative matters

Absence from school

Please remember that you are a member of staff and must therefore adhere to the holiday dates set by the school. You must observe the timetable that the school sets for you and attend school on those days. Always ask permission, in writing, from the Headteacher for any unscheduled day of leave that is a genuine emergency, and abide by the response; it is not acceptable just to leave a message with any other member of staff and assume permission is granted.

Requests for leave of absence for any other reason should be made in advance to the head of the school(s) who is within his/her right to refuse it. You are reminded that if you are absent from school without prior authorisation; your allowance will be discontinued from the first day of your absence.

If you cannot work because of illness you should inform your school(s) and local education authority (if applicable) immediately by telephone. You may be asked to provide a letter from
Notes for English Language Assistants appointed to China 2013/2014

Document compiled by British Council: Information correct @ 23.07.2012. Please inform us during the year of any changes that you come across

a doctor. This should cover the entire duration of the absence and must be sent to the school and, if applicable, local education authority as soon as it is issued. Any prolonged absence on account of illness should be reported as soon as possible to CEAIE and to the British Council. Please remember that you should offer formally to make up any and every class missed on account of personal illness or any other reasons.

If it becomes necessary to resign from your post, you must give sufficient prior notice in writing of your intended departure to the school, CEAIE and the British Council, setting out your reasons in full. You should consult your contract for information on this as well as there may be termination charges.

Official Holiday Schedule and Golden Week Holiday explained

Beginning January 1st, 2008, mainland China will have two week-long (five- to seven-day) "Golden Week" national holidays: National Day, which begins on October 1st and the Spring Festival, celebrating the lunar New Year, which can fall in either January or February, depending on the lunar calendar. However, these holidays—in actuality—are only three-day holidays that are extended to five and seven days, respectively, to promote and encourage domestic tourism—with the understanding that employees will make up the two or four extra days on their normal days off.

So let's say Wednesday and Thursday are your normal days off and Saturday and Sunday are your two busiest work days. During this Golden Week holiday, you will most likely work your rescheduled Saturday and Sunday classes on Wednesday and Thursday, respectively, immediately preceding the beginning of the holiday week. In theory, you could end up teaching for nine consecutive days for the "luxury" of having the following five to seven consecutive days off.

Solving problems

Conditions in schools in China differ from those in this country. Any difficulties should be discussed with your mentor teacher and/or the teacher of the class concerned in the first instance. If the problem cannot be solved then talk to the head teacher or get in touch with your contact at the local education authority (if applicable). Satisfactory solutions can usually be found through such consultations but if the problem remains unresolved, you may contact Zhou Lidong (Doris) from CEAIE. The British Council in the UK will be happy to offer advice, but should only be contacted when all other attempts to solve the issue have been made. Problems are dealt with most quickly and effectively locally and British Council will instruct you to take the steps mentioned above. Please see the provided 'Who to Contact' document for your line of referral.

To avoid problems at school, it is a good idea to form a good working relationship with other members of staff. You should introduce yourself to all members of the English department. It is important to be patient and polite and to be aware of the work pressure of others. Please remember that it is not good practice to correct the teacher in front of students. You should always be punctual, responsible and prepare adequately for your lessons. Furthermore, meeting regularly with your mentor gives the opportunity for them to feedback about your performance and for you to raise any concerns or issues.

Do tell people if you have problems or if you need information as otherwise they will assume everything is ok. The authorities will not appreciate it if you suffer in silence and complain six months later. A lot of past assistants may tell you that their assistantship in China was the best year of their life. This can raise expectations and often leads to people feeling low especially during the first few weeks until they settle in.
Settling in

Accommodation

As part of your contract your school must provide you with accommodation. This may be within the school or close by. Further details of this will be included in your contract. Please note that the quality of accommodation for assistants is often of a higher standard than that of the other teachers. Be sensitive to this. If you feel however, that the standard of your housing is not acceptable then you should discuss this with your school and if nothing is resolved then get in touch with Zhou Lidong (Doris) from CEAIE.

Your accommodation should be prepared in advance and be ready when you arrive. The school will meet the costs of the utility bills (gas, water, electricity) as well as rental costs. However, ceiling limits on how much the school pays may be set regarding these costs. If you use the telephone provided in you accommodation please be aware that you will be liable to cover the bill.

Some accommodation may be subject to an evening curfew. This is because your safety and the safety of the students living on campus is the responsibility of your host school who may be asked by the Public Security Bureau to establish a curfew. This can be a common area of cultural conflict between ELAs and their host schools, as they feel as though their freedom is restricted. However it would be appreciated if you could abide by the rules, and try to negotiate a compromise with your school if you can arrive back a little later on days where you do not have classes the next day. Please note that if your accommodation is on school premises, you must abide by the school’s regulations regarding noise, visitors etc.

We recommend that you take photos of your room and the flat when you move into your long-term accommodation to show and when you leave to show that the accommodation is in the same condition as when you first arrived.

Please take the necessary precautions with regards to your accommodation to avoid health and safety issues. For example when you leave for holidays, turn off any electrical devices to avoid fires and secure the premises – closing all windows and doors (locking where applicable), to avoid theft.

Creating social networks

Even if you have been to China before, it is possible that you will find some things strange at first and will need a little time to settle in. On arrival, the thought of making friends and mixing with the locals can seem like a daunting task, but as long as you are prepared to put yourself out there, it is a part of the experience which previous assistants have found the most enriching. Give yourself some time to adjust – you don’t need to feel like a local within a week and in the beginning you’ll have a lot of administrative matters to deal with.

The best way to start is with colleagues at school. Make sure you always seem positive, enthusiastic and willing to learn. Socialise as much as you can with colleagues and accept all invitations to events, dinner etc. Tell people what your interests are and ask them to let you know what’s going on in the local area. Do keep in mind that teachers can be very busy, especially during exam periods.

Apart from your work in the classroom you may be able to attend other classes in subjects which interest you. This will help you understand more about different teaching techniques and observe how other teachers work. You will find that you become much more integrated into school life and gain considerably more from your stay if you become involved in activities organised by the school, such as sports days, theatre or music productions or
modern language societies. Go to school ‘open days’ or parent evenings as these are also a good way of meeting people. If you hear about something happening which interests you, ask if you can become involved. Don’t wait to be invited as people may assume that you’re not interested.

It is also a good idea to get in touch with other people in the area before you leave. One useful way to do this is to get in contact with a previous assistant in your region and ask them to give you any e-mail addresses or numbers of contacts they made. Another excellent way to meet new people is to set up language exchanges with local people who want to practise their English. You could also enrol at a local language school, join societies at a local university, offer English lessons to colleagues/locals, join a club and link up with nearby ELAs.

If you do use local social networking sites while you are an ELA in China you should be very careful about how you use them. Keep your profile private so that it can only be seen by people you intend to see it. If you invite other teachers to be ‘friends’, remember to remain professional in what you say on your wall and be careful what you say about your employer.

You should not exchange personal contact details with students, invite them to be ‘friends’ or accept similar invitations from them. This is likely to be regarded as inappropriate behaviour. Check with teachers about the school’s internet policy, particularly regarding any online communication involving students either in or outside school.

It is exceptionally important that you understand issues around child protection, both to protect the students and also to protect you from any damaging and potentially serious accusations.

Former assistants have recommended not spending all of your time with other assistants, as you won’t be able to integrate into your community and life in China. On the other hand, don’t feel that you must cut yourself off from them – assistants can provide a very good support network for each other, as you understand each other’s experiences. Don’t forget that there may be language assistants from other countries in your area. You may wish to ask your employer if they have contact details.

As a golden rule, try to say yes to every social opportunity presented to you that does not compromise your personal safety. Accept invitations to places and activities even if they do not sound interesting as you might meet other people there who do share your interests.

**Travelling around**

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<th>Useful travel websites:</th>
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<td><a href="http://www.lonelyplanet.com">www.lonelyplanet.com</a></td>
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**Personal safety**

It is very important to stick to the same health and safety rules as you would at home and always heed advice given by local people. Please see refer to the Personal Safety Leaflet which provides an emergency telephone number as well as essential guidelines on how to avoid potentially dangerous situations.

We strongly advice that you spend some time looking at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website and check it regularly as there is a lot of useful and up-to-date information provided. We also recommend that assistants read the ‘Advice for Travellers’ documentation which can be found here: https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/supporting-british-nationals-overseas/supporting-pages/advice-for-travel
Please also refer to the FCO website for information regarding sexual attacks: http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/when-things-go-wrong/rape

Phoning home and mobiles

Be aware that calls to the UK from a mobile can be expensive.) Previous assistants have recommended using Skype and www.voipbuster.com as an alternative. It is also worth investing in a China based mobile. Ask your school for guidance on this.

Useful websites

You can read case studies written by former assistants on our website: http://www.britishcouncil.org/languageassistants-ela-success-stories-main-page-2.htm

Year Abroad Advice: www.thirdyearabroad.com

Internal flights booker: http://www.travelchinaguide.com/china-flights/

Lonely Planet: http://www.lonelyplanet.com/china

Teaching tips and resources

Observation period

When you first arrive at your school(s) you should ask for a period of observation of 1-2 weeks. It may not be offered to you automatically. Observation will allow you to familiarise yourself with the school environment, to experience classroom management techniques as well as to get to know the names, faces and personalities of your pupils and gauge their level of English.

Try to note the following:

- how the teacher starts and ends the lesson
- how the teacher speaks to pupils
- how the teacher involves all pupils, including shy ones, in the class activity
- what the teacher's attitude is to pupil errors and error correction
- how the teacher controls disruptive behaviour, lateness and lack of effort

British Council teaching resources

The British Council produces and co-produces a range of resources specifically for Language Assistants. Making use of these will help you greatly to deliver interesting and useful classroom activities and will support you in solving problems in the classroom.

The British Council is also closely involved with the teaching of English abroad. Local branches develop useful resources and organise a range of cultural activities, which may be of interest to you and your school. For information on forthcoming events, go to www.britishcouncil.org/china

Please note that many foreign schools are anxious to establish links with UK counterparts in order to share information and arrange pupil exchanges. Assistants are encouraged to help in whatever way possible in establishing such links and there is information and guidance on the British Council website: http://www.britishcouncil.org/learning-ie-school-partnerships
You may also wish to find out if your school has any projects or set up a project yourself. British Council Schools Online has a wide range of useful ideas: schoolsonline.britishcouncil.org/

Language Assistants manual

‘Language Assistant’ by Clare Lavery is a resource book designed for language assistants and provides information on all aspects of the role. This can be downloaded here: www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/whole_manual.pdf. Please read this carefully as it is extremely useful in preparing you for your assistantship.

TeachingEnglish website

TeachingEnglish.org is an online resource centre produced jointly by the British Council and the BBC has a specialised Language Assistants micro-site: http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/language-assistant

On the site you will have access to:

- Teaching tips
- Essential UK: Seasonal lesson plans based around UK topics
- Primary tips: Help getting started with primary-level students
- Classroom games

LearnEnglish website

The British Council Learn English website is an excellent free online resource for students of English with lots of games, stories, listening activities and grammar exercises: http://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/en/

This may be a useful tool for you to use for your teaching but also to pass on to your students for them to access from home.

Facebook page

Our Facebook page provides an opportunity to discuss teaching ideas and share your experience with other assistants (we send approximately 3000 Language Assistants around the world each year).


Teaching materials

One way of making language learning real for your pupils is bringing authentic materials from the UK into the classroom. Take the opportunity to collect a variety of resources while you are still at home.

Past assistants have found that the following materials worked well: Photos of family and friends and your home town, lots of postcards, examples of UK coins and notes, train tickets and timetables, stamps, posters and tea towels to decorate walls, Christmas cards and crackers, posters and games, UK TV programmes and listings, magazines and local newspapers, CDs, photos of school uniforms, a school timetable and school report, flashcards, word searches, maps, tourist brochures, UK food (marmite, jelly, chocolate, custard, mince pies, gravy granules, etc), adverts, menus, cartoons, comic books, DVDs...
Notes for English Language Assistants appointed to China 2013/2014
Document compiled by British Council: Information correct @ 23.07.2012. Please inform us during the year of any changes that you come across

(e.g. Ready Steady Cook for catering students), simple recipes e.g. scones, recordings of the weather forecast, London tube map, tapes of friends’ accents and conversations, bingo, Taboo etc.

The more materials you can find the better. Think about what worked well for you as a language student and about which items you find interesting when you are in a foreign country. You can also ask your host school(s) whether there is something specific they would like you to bring and to find out about topics you are likely to be asked to cover during your assistantship.

**Useful teaching websites**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching websites</th>
<th><a href="http://www.onestopenglish.com">www.onestopenglish.com</a></th>
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<td><a href="http://www.englishclub.com">www.englishclub.com</a> *</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.learnenglish.org.uk/kids">www.learnenglish.org.uk/kids</a></td>
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**Etiquette, cultural differences and adapting to change**

Aside from the oppressive language barrier, you can expect to feel initially overwhelmed by the drastic differences in the physical environment, climate, air quality, and unavailability of familiar (comfort) foods and other items. Aside from all of that, it will take some time to get used to China's money, as well as the exchange rate, and everything will appear “so cheap” at first—until you start thinking in terms of renminbi instead of your own country's currency. Unless you come from very humble beginnings, you will also need some time to acclimate to the (most likely) comparatively poor overall quality of your apartment, and may even feel demoralized by it for quite some time.

In China there is a culture which might give the impression of a lack of organisation and forward planning. Things tend to happen at the very last minute and many assistants from the UK find it hard to adjust to what they consider to be a disorganised society. You will need
to prepare yourself for certain frustrations particularly at bureaucratic level, even prior to departure, especially when it comes to finding out specific details regarding your post and visa applications.

This is an ingrained part of the culture and nothing you can do or say is going to have any influence. Complaining repeatedly about how you expect to be given advance notice is not going to change the system, so it is best that you simply remain flexible and learn how to roll with the punches, so to speak. In fact, many long-term Western expats report that they have come to actually prefer the Chinese system of etiquette in regard to time management and scheduling over their own.

**Relations with teachers**

Colleagues - Many language assistants in the past have complained about other teaching staff treating them coldly upon arrival. Aside from unintentional misinterpretation, the reasons for this can be a little complicated and are often tied up with modern China’s complicated interaction with its cultural heritage.

One possible explanation is that other members of the English language department will simply be shy about talking with a native speaker. For many years the emphasis on language learning was very much on reading and writing and some teachers have not had that much exposure to native speakers. As China opens up and more and more foreigners go over there this is becoming less and less common, but nevertheless is still true in some instances. It is not worth trying to reform China’s entire education system over personality clashes with other members of staff.

Another reason lies in that they have a lot of work in hand to deal with. Especially for the mentor teacher, he/she may be responsible for both classes and administrative work related to foreign affairs, in particular at the beginning of academic year. In most cases, they are just too busy to talk to you or help you solve problems.

These examples are exceptions rather than the norm; the majority of teachers will be welcoming and friendly. It is definitely worth taking some kind of gift, such as a box of chocolates, for the foreign languages department.

**Relations with students**

For starters, and as a rule, your students will be physically, mentally, and emotionally exhausted. Related, because they have such little discretionary time, they will typically attempt to use their required attendance in your oral English class as a “time-out” or break period.

There are, of course, exceptions to this aforementioned rule. Some students are Western-bound or otherwise perceive a real need to acquire functional English language skills, and they will comprise your best and most motivated students—but they are in the minority. Others will simply be fascinated by the presence of a foreign teacher in the classroom and will seek to learn as much about your culture as they possibly can. A few more may just happen to be naturally gifted at acquiring foreign languages and will genuinely enjoy learning English.
The main task of the foreign English teacher in China does not lie in the facilitation of speaking and listening skills but, rather, in establishing meaningful and enduring relationships with one’s students. As it turns out, this is not an easy task. To begin with, the entire educational system in China—not to mention the enormous fear of losing “face” (mianzi)—actively discourages students from speaking out, asking questions, or taking exceptions with the presented material. What you will quickly discover is that many of your students won’t voluntarily answer a question if it is put to the entire class. You will need to walk around the classroom and specifically call on each student one at a time and, then, most will offer at least some response, usually in the form of one or two syllables.

To be effective as an oral English teacher in China, you will need a great deal of patience and you will have to be the kind of person who is a self-starter and works well independently with very little need for feedback, approval, or support. You will have to find more satisfaction in being a mentor, a role model, and a friend than an educator, in the traditional Western sense of that word. The reality is, you will have to be far more entertaining in class than educational and, as a rule, your “effectiveness” and success in China will be measured by how popular you are with your students - completely irrespective of whether they are learning anything or not.

Last but not least, remember that you are a teacher and you need to keep a clear line of professionalism between you and your students.

Face

Much is written about “face” being an essential component of the Chinese national psyche. When the Chinese talk about face (mianzi), they mean little more than having status in the eyes of others and personal dignity. Gaining and maintaining such status and dignity affects many aspects of social and business life.

Causing someone to lose face can ruin the business prospects and even invite recrimination. Insulting an individual or criticising them in front of others, especially where unjustified, is very damaging. Foreigners can unintentionally offend Chinese by making fun of them in a good-natured way, or by treating someone of status with too much familiarity, or by siding with a subordinate against his or her superior.

Likewise, giving face can do much to ensure smooth transactions. It earns respect and loyalty. Praise, though, should be used sparingly and appropriately- its overuse suggests insincerity, just as elsewhere.

Hierarchy

Chinese organisations maintain a strong sense of hierarchy. Rank is prized because it exacts obligations from others and, in a society which is more groups orientated than in Europe, rank in itself is respected. But high ranking people are not always the most powerful in the organisation. While protocol requires that the senior person is seen to be calling the shots, the key decision maker, the person you need to convince, may be several grades junior and difficult at first to identify.

The hierarchical nature of organisations can cause decision-making to be a slow, collective process. Foreigners often complain that there seems to be a lack of willingness to take
responsibility. Here, patience- and awareness of the internal niceties which have to be observed- is a virtue. The difficulty for outsiders is to judge when they are being deliberately stalled and when the machinery is moving forward, albeit at a snail's pace.

**Relationship building - Guanxi**

Relationship building, or guanxi (rapport), can oil otherwise slow moving bureaucratic wheels. It is difficult to overestimate its importance in China. Guanxi implies favours given and returned, and often, though not always is dependant on personal friendships (they can be exchanged between people who dislike each other but who each have something to offer). As with other relationships, “guanxi” is built up over time, exchanged favours gradually increasing in scale. Foreigners can unintentionally sever “guanxi” by turning down a request without careful explanation or by not realising the extent of effort and inconvenience caused by a favour done for them.

**Meetings**

Promptness is regarded as a courtesy. At the appointed time, your Chinese hosts may be well for waiting for you at the gate or front door of their institution.

**Entertainment and social etiquette**

Chinese host organisations will probably arrange a special dinner for their British guests. This will typically be in the form of a banquet with several courses. Such events should be regarded as an integral part of the process of doing business in China, and invitations to them should not be declined.

Etiquette is largely a manner of being respectful and fitting in with your Chinese hosts. You will not be expected to know Chinese customs in details and breaches of the finer points by foreigners is easily overlooked. However it is worth making note of the following points:

- Courses are usually served at the same time rather than in set courses, and usually everyone helps themselves from the numerous dishes on the table. There are very few rules about dining, compared to the West, and most people treat it as a more social and relaxed situation.
- Always let others fill your drinks, and try to keep others topped up. Helping yourself is a sign that your host or companions are not looking after you properly.
- Some local foods might be a little strange to foreigners visiting China for the first time. Don’t be surprised if anything ends up as part of the meal, and sometimes it is better not to ask what it is; just try it.
- Frequent toasts to good health, Sino-British friendships etc. are standard. Locally-produced wines or bai-jiu (spirit, sometimes over 50% alcohol and with a very strong flavour) are not to every foreigner’s taste and you won’t be required to drink. Any participation in local practices and the tasting of local specialities makes a good impression. Alcohol consumption at dinner can get extravagant but if you don’t want to drink any more leave your glass full and politely indicate that you can’t drink any more. If you do empty your glass out of politeness it is probable that someone will fill it out of politeness. If you host a meal, plenty of soft drinks should be available.
• Never arrive late for a Chinese meal. Chinese often arrive early and tend to leave en masse as soon as the last dish has been eaten. Chinese hosts make it quite clear when the meeting is over. You will not be expected to linger. The Chinese also tend to eat quite early. Lunch is served from 11:30am on, and dinner from about 6:00pm.

• It is advisable to stick to safe conversation topics. These include family, your hometown, etc. It will also be greatly appreciated if you can show you have a little knowledge about China, as the Chinese are usually well-served in their country’s history, poetry and geography.

• Be aware of certain sensitive subjects. Taiwan, Tibet and Xinjiang are considered to be part of China. Avoid talking politics unless you know the person very well. Do not criticise China.

• Avoid ridiculing your own organisation or British standards, even in a light-hearted manner. This is regarded as disloyal in China and will reflect badly on you. Avoid jokes of a sexual connotation.

Miscellaneous

Co-operating partners abroad have requested that the attention of British visitors be drawn to the severe penalties imposed for drug offences and for taking part in unlawful political demonstrations which may result in heavy fines and prison sentences. You are therefore strongly advised not to become involved in these activities.

Married students should note that the allowance is intended to provide for one person only. However, if an assistant’s spouse remains in the UK and is unemployed, he/she may be barred from income support or be required to refund whatever was received as such since the start of the assistantship. Enquiries should be made well in advance in order to prevent financial difficulties from arising during a married assistant’s period of appointment.

Please note the British Council is not the employer of UK assistants abroad and should not be given as a referee in future job applications. In general the head of the school would be the most appropriate referee.
Useful contacts

British Embassy and consulates in China

Please take note of the address of the Embassy below in case of emergency or loss of your passport.

The British Embassy - Beijing

ADDRESS
11 Guang Hua Lu
Jian Guo Men Wai
Beijing
100600
China

Telephone (Consular assistance for British nationals) +86 0(10) 8529 6083

Website: https://www.gov.uk/government/world/china

The above website also has the addresses and contact details of the consulates outside of Beijing. There are also British Consulates in: Chongqing, Guangzhou and Shanghai.

Emergency services in China

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<th>Police</th>
<th>Medical</th>
<th>Fire</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tr>
<td>China</td>
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</table>

Traffic accident: 122  
Directory assistance: 114 (Hotline for seeking general information such as phone numbers or addresses upon request) 
Weather: 121  
Private ambulance service in Beijing: 999 

Note:  
Dialing 112 on GSM mobile phones in China only plays a pre-recorded bilingual message about other emergency numbers.
Book list

Dictionaries

- BBC English Dictionary (BBC English/Harper Collins)
- Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (Longman)
- Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (Oxford University Press)
- Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture (Longman)

Grammar reference books

- Current English Grammar (S. Chalker, Phoenix)
- Basic English Usage (M. Swan, Oxford University Press)
- Practical English Usage (M. Swan, Oxford University Press)
- Discover English (R. Bolitho & B. Tomlinson, Macmillan Heinemann)
- English Grammar in Use (R. Murphy, Cambridge University Press)
- Advanced Grammar in Use (R. Murphy, Cambridge University Press)
- How English Works (Michael Swan and Catherine Walter, Oxford University Press)
- Learner English (Michael Swan & Bernard Smith (eds.) Cambridge University Press)

Basic methodology books

- The Practice of English Language Teaching J. Harmer Longman
- How to Teach English J. Harmer Longman
- How to Teach Grammar S. Thornbury Longman
- How to Use the Internet in ELT D. Teeler & P. Gray Longman
- One to One Peter Wilberg Language Teaching Publications

Also look out for the series of handbooks and source books for language teachers published by CUP, Longman, Macmillan and OUP.

Quotes

'I would recommend that ELAs find a native speaker to practice their language skills with, such as a tutor or language exchange partner. In my experience this proved a great way to make new friends and learn more about the local community. I would also recommend volunteering if possible - I volunteered at an orphanage, which gave me an invaluable insight into life in China.'

'Learn the language!! I came to China as a complete beginner in mandarin but have worked hard in it and can now speak basic conversational Chinese which is invaluable. Also make friends with the other teachers at your school and try and see as much of your city/country as possible in your spare time!'

'One of the ways I met locals was by attending the English Corner at the local university. This way I was able to meet lots of other young people who were interested in speaking and learning English. The areas by universities are generally great places to hang out too, as
there are lots of good food places, bars and cafes. Other than that try to communicate with the teachers, and visit local restaurants’.

‘If possible, don’t just go into school to teach your lessons and then leave. Try to spend a little time in the office - for example, lesson planning is a good reason to stay. You could also have lunch in school which provides a chance to socialise. Participate in all school events such as trips, dinners, sports days. Take an interest and observe some of your Chinese colleagues’ lessons. If you are learning Chinese, try to practice with the other teachers, they will appreciate it.’

‘Relax and don’t stress about things. If you stress about every detail in China it wouldn’t be healthy for you.’