

# PREPARATION FOR SUMMER TEACHERS



*Helena first joined Teach English in China in 2013 when she completed a two-week summer placement in Haining then travelled extensively with people she met at her school. She taught five classes of around 25 students per day and used her day off to see local sights and explore Shanghai. Helena later returned to Shanghai to complete our year-long placement once she had graduated.*

## **Helena Sykes, 2013 Summer Teacher & 2014-15 Long-term Teacher**

As my bio suggests, I originally went to China for the travel opportunities. I'd never really given teaching much thought but after completing both placements and loving them, I signed up to start Teach First as a primary teacher.

I would describe my Mandarin level as basic to okay. I can hold a simple conversation, order food, get in a taxi and barter in shops comfortably. The key is to put in the time and the effort. Even if, like me, languages aren't something that naturally stick, it looks really good to be able to do the simplest of things like saying thank you or wishing someone good morning. The best place to learn is China where you can practise and be supported by locals and friends. Everyone wants to help you!



Like most of the other teachers on my placement, I first went to Haining with no Mandarin and no teaching experience. This can seem daunting but you pick things up quicker than you think. Everyone's in the same boat – you're in it for this crazy ride together! Help each other and share resources and you will have the best experience imaginable.

## **How can I prepare for my placement?**

There are a few things you can do to prepare before departure, which I have outlined below;

- **Useful websites & games**

The internet is absolutely bursting with great teaching resources for students of all ages. Even just being aware of high quality sites is a great start to planning lessons or getting inspiration when you're stuck. To name a few, I love TES, waygook.org, Dave's ESL Café, Busy Teacher and both Super Simple Songs & Maple Leaf Learning on YouTube.

It's a good idea to research games that can be tailored to any age. Things like hangman and noughts and crosses are good, but it's better to think outside the box. Think interactive PowerPoints, props and things you enjoyed doing at school.

It also may be handy to come up with your own 'settle down' technique. If the students get a bit too chatty it is helpful to have a go to clapping, counting down, crossing arms or stomping routine that signifies that it is time to simmer down. Once you've got one, get your teaching assistant to explain it, practise it a few times then stick with it.

- **Gathering resources**

Prepping in the UK before you know the level of your students can be tricky, but there are some simple things you can do, especially in terms of special subjects you'd like to cover. If you'd like to throw in a topic about anything from space, the Royal family, underwater animals, photography, life in the UK – have the pictures and basic facts ready. Anything from tongue twisters, nurse rhymes or funny YouTube clips can be brilliant materials to have up your sleeve.

- **Familiarise yourself with a lesson plan template**

Get to know what a basic, stripped back lesson looks like via our blank template. Even just being aware of what you need to do and timings is a great way to start, especially if teaching is new to you.

- **Mandarin Learning**

Do not, I repeat, do not, get yourself in a tizz about this! It is handy to bring a phrase book (I liked the Lonely Planet one) and download the app 'Pleco.' This app lets you translate simple words and even plays them aloud for you.

- **Talking to buddies & other applicants**

Bring any questions, queries or worries to your assigned buddies. Even if it's something small like packing, they are there to help. It can be helpful to chat to each other and make the most of your Facebook group, often other people have the same questions as you!

## What will happen when I arrive at the summer camp?

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After an initial briefing day and tour of the school, you will be given your list of suggested topics to work from. It's not unlikely that the following morning you'll be teaching by gam, so it is a very quick turnaround! Although this may sound daunting, the best way to settle is to get stuck in and learn as you go along. Help each other with lesson planning and sharing ideas, put together a little study group during your lesson gaps and you will soon get used to it. Keep lessons light, fun and always have a Plan B up your sleeve in case an activity doesn't pan out!

## How is the curriculum laid out and what will I need?

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The general rule of thumb is that you will be provided with an outline of what topics you are expected to teach and your job is to add context, be it through songs, games, role plays, debates and any other engaging method you can think of. The more fun and imaginative the better. Remember, a lot of these pupils will not have had a foreign teacher before, so you really need to ensure they are making the most of practising their oral English with you.

If you want to plan any extra lessons that require props (e.g. a class about life in the UK) then you should take anything you'll need with you. Postcards and reward schemes like stickers and stamps always go down well. It is also extremely helpful to download WeChat once your school has given you a Chinese SIM. Your colleagues will all be on it so it's a great tool for communicating with them.

## Will I have a teaching assistant?

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You will be assigned a Chinese teaching assistant who will follow you to your various classes each day. Generally, these are university age locals with a high level of English who are hoping to become teachers themselves. They will help you translate anything you need to tell your class as well as being your life-line in terms of communicating with other members of staff. Treat them well and they will help you with life outside of the classroom too! They often become more like friends than colleagues.

## Will I need to evaluate my classes?

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You should not be asked to carry out any formal tests or exams during your summer placement, however, it can be nice to add in your own short term goals in order to give pupils something to work towards. Star charts, 'student of the week' or little prizes like stickers and stamps are great methods to keep them motivated.

In my classes I split the students into rows, letting the quietest row pick a team mascot first, the second quietest next etc. I switched these mascots up using anything from Minions to Marvel characters. I would then award stars for good work throughout the lesson or for the winners of activities, letting the row with the most stars at the end go for lunch first. This was also a handy way to get my students to practise English numbers as we would count up each row's stars to determine the winner.

