

So, You Want to be a TA...

What You Need to Know about the English Language Certification Exam (ELCE) & Process

Overview...All international graduate students at UC San Diego are required to demonstrate a high level of oral and aural competence in the English language before they can be appointed as a teaching assistant. In order to assess the level of language proficiency, all hiring departments are required to screen prospective TAs. A screening consists of a 15-minute live interview, during which the student engages in conversation and responds to general and discipline-specific questions typical for a TA. The testing panel assesses the responses for overall spoken language proficiency, including pronunciation, listening comprehension and question-handling, use of general and technical vocabulary, speech flow, grammatical accuracy and organizational clarity.

Who must be tested?... Any prospective TA whose native language is not English must be tested, except those appointed as language assistants in courses taught only in their native language and those who submitted one of the following Speaking Subscores: TOEFL 28-30, IELTS 8.5-9, or PTE 83-90.

Who schedules the test?...The hiring department's graduate coordinator schedules the test with a representative for the English Language Program for International Instructors (ELP-ii). The test periods are the month of September, and each quarter's Finals Week and the week after. The location of the test is typically a room or office with a board, provided by the hiring department.

What is the test and what can you expect?...The ELCE is a 15-minute live interview. In the interview, you will be asked both general and technical questions. The general questions will be about you, your background, your interests, etc., while the technical questions will be related to the course you may be assigned to TA, questions that an undergraduate would ask in that class. To teach the technical questions, you must use the board to organize your ideas and use visuals to help explain.

Who will give the test to you?... A screening panel consisting of at least one faculty member and one linguist will evaluate your spoken English language proficiency. The hiring department appoints the faculty member, the expert in the field of study. The ELP-ii appoints the linguist, the expert in language assessment. Together, the panel interviews you and evaluates your language skills.

What will be evaluated & how can you prepare for the test?...During the interview, the panel will evaluate your ability to engage in conversation and to respond appropriately to the questions using comprehensible pronunciation. The panel must consider your competency in the following language skill areas: **pronunciation, listening comprehension & question handling, general and discipline-specific vocabulary, smoothness and fluidity, grammatical accuracy and organizational clarity.** The panel will also consider the use of communication techniques including eye contact, boardwork and presentation manner. Excellent communication techniques may compensate for deficiencies in English, thereby elevating the overall performance. **Language skills are scored on a 0.0-4.0 scale.** Students can prepare for the test by participating in communication skills courses or practicing speaking aloud, using the board, and by reviewing in English the basic vocabulary, concepts and problems of the course they will TA. Students who do not pass this test require training.

What happens if you're nervous?...Nervousness is not uncommon during this test. The panel will do its best to calm you and make you feel comfortable. If you feel your nervousness is increasing to excessive levels, tell the panel. It's possible to take a break, calm down, and resume the test. The panel wants to give you the chance to do your best.

What happens after the test?...After the test, you must leave. The panel will then discuss its evaluation of your performance. Possible recommendation results from the test include:

Pass (3.5-4.0): You have met the requisite language skills for teaching, and you may accept an offer for a TAship. You will not be tested again.

Pass w/Conditional Certification (3.0-3.4): You have met the requisite language skills for teaching, but you must brush up on pronunciation accuracy and/or communication skills. You may accept an offer for a TAship but must work on targeted skill(s) concurrent with your assignment. Upon successful completion of the work, you will have satisfied the requirement to "pass." You will not be tested again.

Provisional Pass (2.5-2.9): You have met some of the requisite language skills for teaching, but must develop pronunciation accuracy, speech flow, and grammatical accuracy. You may accept an offer for a TAship but must work on targeted skills before or concurrent with your assignment. Upon successful completion of the work, you will be tested again to verify improved language skills.

Fail (0.0-2.4): You have not met the requisite language skills for teaching. You need to improve overall proficiency and/or especially pronunciation accuracy. You may not accept an offer for a TAship and you will not be tested again until you have worked to improve all proficiency skills.

How will you know the recommendation results?...The hiring department representative will be notified if you qualified to TA as soon as possible, in most cases, immediately after the test, and that person can inform you if you qualified or not. However, details of the formal recommendation, including your overall score, subscores, and comments, will not be immediately available during test periods. Instead, you and the hiring department representative will be notified by email as soon as possible after the test with the formal recommendation and detailed information. If the recommendation is to improve language and communication skills, you will be advised of the programs in which you can participate.

What programs or classes are available for English language, public speaking and teaching development?... For students who have been tested, the English Language Program for International Instructors (ELP-ii) at Engaged Teaching (ET) offers non-credit language training. For additional resources, please visit our website under "English Language Program for International Instructors." ELP-ii and ET at the Teaching + Learning Commons: <http://commons.ucsd.edu>