

**Title:**

Japan & ESL Teaching Contracts - What You Need to Know Before You Sign

**Word Count:**

637

**Summary:**

In this article learn what to look out for when signing a contract to teach English in Japan.

We'll look at common things employers sometimes do to trick new teachers and what you can do about it.

**Keywords:**

teach english in japan, esl, work abroad, work overseas, jobs in japan, esl jobs, teach in japan, working in japan, esl teacher, esl teaching jobs

**Article Body:**

If you've spent any time at all browsing through forums on teaching English in Japan, you've probably run across more than a few horror stories. Topics range from working hours and conditions way in excess of what's in the contract, to horrible living conditions and exorbitant rent. Some of this is avoidable if you take a careful look at your contract and ask the right questions before you take a teaching position. One of the most important part of the contract are the contact hours. We'll look at this first.

**<B>Contact Hours - What They Are</B><BR>**

Contact hours are actual hours spent teaching or being "in contact" with the student. The industry standard for full-time sponsored ESL instructors is 22-27 per week. They are not the same qualitatively as office hours. You can't get up and get a glass of water, chat with a friend at the water cooler or check your e-mail during contact hours--though you can during regular office hours at most regular jobs.<BR>

The point is -- if you directly compare office hours and teaching contact hours, you're comparing apples to oranges. 45 contact hours will grind you into the dirt in no time (in addition to being illegal) whereas 45 office hours won't. Be careful when you look at ads. And don't be afraid to ask questions.<BR>

Another point to consider when you sign a teaching contract is contact hours and stated hours. <B> Often schools will state 22-25 teaching hours in their contract but they don't mention office hours.</B> These are hours between classes where you perform services for your students. For example, chatting with students and evaluating and grading their work. If you're grading reports in

between classes instead of preparing them, it makes for a long day. <B> So when you negotiate, make sure you get the "total time" that is involved in the job. </B><BR>

<b>Teaching Contracts and Salaries</B><BR>

Ah yes...salaries. Expect to be paid 250,000 yen per month for a standard contract. This is the "minimum wage" for full-time sponsored ESL instructors. This is considered an entry-level salary for conversation teachers with little or no experience.

<B>Other Perks </B><BR>

Look carefully at vacation days. Ask for a total of weeks off per year. Expect at least 2. Also <B>make sure to ask if the time-off that is quoted to you is in addition to national holidays.</B> Also be sure to ask which national holidays the school observes. Some schools that are generous with paid holidays will give you every one off, others won't.<BR>

Let's not forget health insurance. Most employers provide health insurance for free or at least subsidize it. If you're getting stuck with the whole bill, make sure the deal is sweeter in other areas like salary or vacation days.<BR>

<B>Teaching Contracts and Accommodations</B><BR>

Living in a nasty apartment will make your stay in Japan... well...nasty. Schools that provide you with a working visa, generally take care of accommodations as well. It's important to make sure you have a private apartment if you don't want to share. Don't assume you'll have your own private place!<BR>

<B>Your Rights as a Teacher</B><BR>

Many teachers are easily intimidated by contracts or believe them to be the final word. The reality is that any contract is subservient to established labor laws. Labor laws are the final word - not your contract.<BR>

It's important to know your rights as a worker under Japanese labor laws. If you feel you're being treated unfairly, you can contact General Union for representation (by joining the union) or contact the Labor Standards Office for help in your disputes.