

A TEACHER CREATURE TEACHER GUIDE

IMPROVE YOUR PROFILE

AND GET MORE PRIVATES

IN THIS GUIDE YOU'LL LEARN THE FOUR ELEMENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL PROFILE, WHAT WORKS AND WHAT TO AVOID, AND THE STEPS YOU SHOULD TAKE TO IMPROVE YOUR PROFILE



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Intro

Hi,

Most of my friends aren't teachers. But in the last year I've made an effort to go out of my way to meet a lot of you. It was surprising how many similarities there were in the stories I heard. It was also surprising how many similarities there were with my story.

I came to Prague in 2004, got a few jobs in a few language schools (some were ok, one was horrible), but by the first pay day I had figured out that I wasn't going to be able to make enough money to go home for Christmas. Ever again.

A week later, when I got yelled at for making too many photocopies, I figured out I hated having a boss.

And by 5:30 on the same day, I figured out that if I met a student in a café, I could charge him double what the school was paying me, and he'd be happy because it would still be cheaper than paying the school.

Yes, it was a very educational month. But how to find these privates and make more money so I could go home and see my cute nieces and nephews again before they grew up and flew to Prague with a backpack and went on a pub crawl and vomited on my couch(not so cute...)?

It wasn't easy. And these were the days before ubiquitous internet access. But I figured it out.

And now, years later, I'm 100% freelance. I'm at the point where I can charge a lot... I can choose my students and my hours... my students come to my apartment (so no more running around the city)... they pay in advance... and it's good.

Whether you yourself want to be independent, or just want a few more privates to get some extra spending money, my hope is that you'll be able to do it faster and easier by learning from my experience and mistakes.

Good luck getting privates,
-Ryan Viguerie

CHAPTER ONE – YOUR PHOTO

One week a teacher wrote me that he wasn't getting any emails from his profile. I thought this was quite interesting because I had also been emailing with another teacher who told me that she got so many emails and new students that her schedule was now full.

So what was the difference? I had my suspicions, but I decided to ask my students directly. (Yes, sometimes I use my students as guinea pigs.)

Here's the experiment and the results.

The experiment: Cut and paste eight Teacher Creature profile photos on one page. (No other info was shown.) Show it to my private students.

The question: If you were looking for a teacher on Teacher Creature, which teacher would you click on first?

Number of pages: three

Number of students polled: 13

(Note: Only pictures of men were on the page. The first version of the test was an unaltered screenshot from the site. But when I noticed how many 'clicks' the blonde from California was getting, I realized the only lesson to be learned from it was that life isn't fair. But you probably already knew that.)

The results:



Page One Winner

Some comments (their grammar was corrected later):

"He's looking professional."

"Serious teacher. Friendly approach. Reliable."

"I would trust that he's a real teacher and not some creepy guy."

"There I can see face. And he smile."

"This one looks professional (the photo). It's sharp. It's light."



Page Two Winner

Some comments:

"He looks serious."

"Here I can see smiling guy."

"He looks professional."

"He looks positive."

"This picture is sharp. I can see very clearly how he looks like. He's smiling. I feel him like positively."



Page Three Winner

Some comments:

"Looks professional"

"most serious"

"This picture to me looks like a professional one. Either by a professional photographer or someone who knows how to take photos. But quality not good."

Notice any similarities? Any patterns? What words come up more than once?

Here's my interpretation. While in fact almost all of the teachers were chosen at least once[1], a theme that kept recurring was someone who looks like a teacher.

Does that make sense? Let me explain.

We all have ideas of what people in certain professions look like – banker, DJ, nanny – and with no other information available, we're looking to match what we see to what we expect to see. In fact, I would say even with overwhelming credentials and references, appearance is still the most important factor.

Would you invest your money with someone who had face piercings and his pants pulled half-way down?

Would you hire a middle-aged dude in a brown suit and a comb-over to headline at your club's New Year's party?

What about hiring a teacher who didn't look like a teacher?

- And finally, some of the negative comments:
- "Too unprofessional"
- "Like a party man"
- "On the other pictures I cannot recognize people." (referring to low quality photos and photos where the teacher was in the background and too small to see)
- "I don't like symbols" (referring to the blue head)

SUMMARY

- ✓ Look professional
- ✓ Look friendly – smile
- ✓ Use a quality photo



CHAPTER TWO – THE WORDS YOU USE

Challenge One – Get Their Attention

Have you ever had to read a stack of resumes? Pick someone to write to on a dating site? Or choose a dentist out of a huge online directory of dentists?

If you have, you probably had the experience where after about the tenth one they all started to look the same, your eyes glazed over, your mind went numb, and you started looking for any little reason to disqualify the person.

Read through a page or two of the teacher blurbs on Teacher Creature and I think you'll see what I mean.

Why do the teacher profile blurbs sound the same? What are the similarities you noticed?

Imagine you're a student and you've got dozens, maybe hundreds of teachers to choose from. You've read through four pages, and you get to your ad. What would make you stop and pay attention? What would make you want to click on you? What would make you want to read more?

Lesson One: look at what everyone else is writing, and write... something different!

Challenge Two – Get Them To Click

Let me tell you about an experience I had a few years ago looking for an accountant, and what I learned about getting someone interested.

I was reading through a long list on expats.cz, in which they had about three lines to write something that would make them 1.) Stand out, and 2.) Make me want to click to read more.

So what did almost every single one of them decide to tell me?

- This is our company's name.
- We've been in business since 199_
- We do accounting and many other services
- We're an s.r.o.
- We're the best

Translation: me, me, me, me, me

And then, I came across an ad that said something like "Paying taxes is complicated and confusing. If you don't know what you're doing you could make a mistake. Work with us and we'll make sure you're not paying more than you have to."



Pretty good, right?

You know that feeling when you're at a party and all the other person can talk about is himself? Even if he just got back from partying with Caligula and the dust from his time machine is still heavy on his tunic, if he never shows any interest in you, you're only going to listen for so long before you excuse yourself to go to the bathroom and find someone else to talk to.

It's another interesting quirk of human nature, the most fascinating subject for each of us is ourselves.

Talk about the other person at a party, and you've got his attention. Talk about the customer in the ad, and you'll have the same effect. (If you're hearing this for the first time, I highly recommend you read the classic "How to Win Friends and Influence People.")

So instead of writing only about yourself, here are a few other things you could write about:

- The biggest challenges your students face
- Your best student
- A student you helped with a particular problem
- Why you love teaching
- The most valuable thing you learned on your TEFL course and how it helped your students
- Your difficulties learning a foreign language and what you learned from it.

Lesson Two: Save the info about you for the 'About me' section. Get the student interested in you by showing you're interested in them.

Challenge Three – Don't give them a reason to disqualify you

At this point, even if the student has eliminated every teacher with a crappy photo and a boring blurb, he still probably has a long list to choose from.

So to make his job easier, he starts to look for more reasons to disqualify you. Here are a few that are common, but easy to avoid.

1. No Grammar/Spelling Mistakes

This one seems obvious, especially for those selling themselves as English experts, but I've seen plenty of mistakes on profiles.

But here's the thing, even if you're a professional writer, there's still a good chance you'll make a mistake. And if you've been writing and rewriting the same sentences for more than a few minutes, you can become a bit blind to the details. So a basic rule of thumb is, whenever you're about to hit the 'save' button, grab your roommate and ask him/her to take one final look.

If no roommate is handy, put it down for a while, walk away, go to lunch, come back, and look at it one last time with fresh eyes.



2. No words/sentences in all caps

You might think you're standing out and getting someone's attention, but the effect it really has is that IT LOOKS LIKE YOU'RE SHOUTING! AAAAHHHHH!!!!

3. No Confusion

Confused? Here's what I mean:

- No jargon. One Wednesday I decided to survey all the students I had that day and ask them if they knew what 'TEFL' meant. Only one did. And he used to be an English teacher. Better to say that you're 'trained', 'certified', or 'qualified.'

Other examples: DELTA, CELTA, BA, EFL, B2, etc.

- Keep your words small. How many intermediate students do you think know what "versatility" means? (An actual word from an actual profile.) How many do you think are going to bother to look it up?

If you want to attract intermediate/pre-intermediate students, then write for their level. Remember that your potential students didn't study English vocab to pass the SATs/the whatever-the-hell-you-have-in-the-UK. So use words that they know.

- Keep the words common: Just because a native speaker living in Prague would understand you, doesn't mean a Czech/Slovak/Russian from a small town hundreds of kilometers will.

For example: Kiwi, Language House, gap year

- Avoid phrasal verbs. Have you ever asked a student, What's up? When I have, they usually look confused, at least until I explain it to them. I'm sure they're thinking about things like the sun and the clouds and the birds. Makes sense, if you've never heard the phrasal verb before; they're confusing. So to be safe, just avoid them.

Another Survey

Remember the survey I did with the photos? I also did a similar one with the blurb descriptions (no other info visible, just the blurbs).

The results for these were less conclusive; that is, there wasn't a clear winner. So instead of showing the blurbs, I'll just give you a sampling of the quotes I wrote down. I think the patterns are helpful.



CHAPTER THREE – WHAT TO CHARGE

Did you know that products whose prices end in an odd number are perceived as having a lower value than products whose prices end in an even number? That's why you see items at the grocery stores with prices like 9.99, but a Rolls Royce would never have a price tag of 399,999.99.

When there's millions to be made, big brands take care of every little detail. A number that might seem arbitrary to us is part of a strategy that was arrived at after months of research and testing.

Basic Strategy

But let's keep it simple. And let's do this by returning to the student's perspective. If he goes to a language school he'll have to pay, according to my research, between 550 and 800 kc an hour for a private lesson. So if you charge less than that, your price will immediately be more attractive.

The next question is, How much less?

A lot will depend on how much experience you have and what others are charging.

To start, you might want to pick a number close to what other teachers who have a similar amount of experience are charging. See what the response is and adjust accordingly.

And if you get to the point where your schedule is full or almost full, then raise your price and see what happens.

Three Reasons To State Your Rate

In my research on whether or not a freelancer should reveal his prices before meeting the potential client, I discovered a lot of debate on the topic. Some believe it's best to be up front about your rates, and they have good reasons for it, while others don't, and also have good reasons.

My opinion is, if you're on a site where customers can immediately compare you to others, it's better to state your price, or at least your price range, on your profile. Here's why:

1. Customers Expect It

When customers are shopping on line, one of the main pieces of information they look for is price. And when they don't see a price listed, they don't bother to contact you. They just move on to the next offer. I don't know about you, but this describes me exactly. If I don't see a price, I just assume that if I call I'll be sucked into some sales script just to find out at the end that it's too expensive anyway.



2. Eliminates Negotiating

I've noticed that most people who contact me don't want to negotiate. Which is great, because I'd rather not do it either.

Partly, it's cultural. But also, I believe it's because my price is always clearly stated. There's something about information that's written down that gives it more credibility. (I even go one step further and print out my price list on thick paper which I put in their hands when we meet.)

3. Saves Time

More than once I met with a potential student who came through a recommendation and who also didn't know my price. My idea was that I'd impress him at the meeting, he'd see the value in the lessons, then I'd show him my prices.

Sometimes this worked, but other times they flinched and I got an email a few days later saying thanks but no thanks. Sure, it was only 30 or 40 minutes out of my day, plus the price of a cup of coffee, but these days I'd much rather save my time by screening first. If a student comes through a friend, I make sure they've read my website (where my prices are listed), and then if they're still interested they can arrange a first meeting.

If you want to read more about the pros and cons of listing your price, this article goes into much more detail.

<http://www.passionforbusiness.com/blog/want-to-turn-off-website-visitors-dont-include-your-prices/>

4. You'll be in the search results

If a student refines his search to sort by Price (either highest to lowest or lowest to highest) then your profile will be listed. If you don't write your rate, you won't be included in these search results.

The Discount Teacher

There are some teachers on the site who, in my opinion, have some pretty low prices. Maybe it's not such a low hourly rate if you're working full time in an office, but when you subtract the price of a coffee from this, and figure in travel and prep time, these teachers are making less than a high school kid selling ice cream on his Christmas vacation.

Also, consider how you'll be perceived if your price is too low. What do we automatically think when something costs significantly less than the competition? My first thought is, 'What's the matter with it?' This isn't what you want a potential student thinking. So even if you're only worth a buck an hour, at least raise your price to the average, if for no other reason than to calm your students' nerves.

Advanced Strategy: Three Reasons To Raise Your Price

Years ago, when I was just starting out and had no experience and needed the cash, my price was on the low side. I think I charged just a few crowns more than what my language school was paying me. Over time, I slowly raised my price to where it's now equal to, or even above, what some schools charge.



Reason One: Supply is limited

Competing on price only makes sense if your product is potentially unlimited, such as something that can be made in a factory in China. But our product is really our time. At most, you've probably only got 30 hours a week you want to sell, or maybe just three free afternoons.

Right now, Prague has exactly 167,432 (I have no idea) people studying English (but it's a lot). If you raise your price, some of them won't be able to afford you, but will three people in a city of 1.2 million? Absolutely. And those are the students you want.

Improve your profile, advertise off the site, get a personal website, increase your exposure, increase your rejection rate, and you'll increase your number of higher-paying students.

Reason Two: Weed Out The Slackers

I noticed something very interesting a few years ago. I was having a first meeting over coffee with a potential new student and while we were talking and while I was asking her about her background and her goals and so on, these are some of the details of her life that stood out: horseback riding, vacation in France, iPhone (and that was in the days before everyone had an iPhone).

Now compare these details to my other students who had Nokias, rode bicycles as a hobby, and vacationed in Slovakia or Croatia.

You could say simply that she had money, but I think it's more than that. Sometimes rich people like to save money and get a good deal (maybe that's how they got rich). But with other people it's about identity. This was a person who had decided that she doesn't buy what other people have; rather, she buys the best.

And how does she know it's the best?

Did she know I was the best English teacher in Prague? She didn't. I was the only one she interviewed. What she did know was that my prices were the highest.

The logic here is: I want the best, but I don't have time to research which is the best, so if it costs the most it must be the best.

Rarely does the price accurately reflect the cost of production. It's about value and value is relative. A Ferrari is exactly 5.7 times (I have no idea) more expensive than a Skoda. Does it get you to work five times faster? Five times safer?

Does everyone want the best? No, some people want the cheapest.

These are also the types who hate paying for lessons. You know the type? They don't want to buy the book so they use the company's color photo copier hundreds of times. If the boss isn't paying for the lessons they complain about the price, whatever it is. And any supplemental audio or video material is pirated, no matter the time required to hunt it down online.





My point is, not all students are equal. Some are a pleasure to teach, and others a pain. The better you get, both at teaching and at marketing yourself, the more choices you'll have and the more freedom you'll have to pick your students. And having a higher price is one way of screening for students who are cheap and who don't take learning seriously.

Reason Three: A higher price can be motivating

A student once told me that he cancelled a meeting to make my lesson. Usually, it's the other way around. But this student had already paid in advance and knew my cancellation policy. It was either reschedule the meeting or lose his money.

Remember that what is not earned or does not come at a price is not appreciated. Conversely, what we pay more for and work harder to get we place a greater value on. Is it more likely that a student who believes his teacher is expensive will be on time? Turn off his phone? Do his homework? And be active in the lesson? I think so. Again, it's win-win: you get paid more and he learns faster. Sounds good to me.

By the way, whenever a student grumbles about price, I explain it in terms of providing motivation for them. Usually works.



CHAPTER FOUR – REVIEWS

Take a look at this email I got from a prospective student:

Hello,
my name is Jaroslav. I found your advertisement. I'm interested in your lessons. I'm looking for new teacher english, because my actual teacher come back to US.

Nothing out of the ordinary.

And in the next paragraph he asked me if we could have lessons in his office.

Again, nothing too unusual.

The only problems was, these days I ask all my students to come to my apartment for lessons.

Of course in the old days, when I was just starting, I had a typical teacher schedule where I would spend the days riding the trams and metros, bouncing between offices, and debating whether it was worth it to go home if I had a free hour or two.

Anyway, I wrote back and explained that I don't travel out of Old Town for lessons, and here's what he wrote back:

Hello Ryan,
thank you for your response.
I'm so bussy with my work, but your referencies are so good. I want to try your lessons.
Do you have some free time for lesson with me after 6pm sometime in working week?
Can you send me your apartment adress? I try find out how much time I spend on travel to you.
Thanks a lot
Best regards,
Jaroslav



Although his office was in Pankrac, which meant one transfer and an extra hour travelling during rush hour, he was willing to do it just because of the references.

And he's not the exception. Whenever I meet a new student, I make it a point to ask him or her, out of all the teachers online they could have written to, why they chose me. And the answer, most of the time, is because I have references.

The most important factor for students

Then I started to wonder, what's the most important factor for students? What's the one thing on a profile that will make a student want to contact you?

So, one weekend I typed up a list of what I thought might be the most attractive features to have on your profile. This was the list:

- 5 years experience
- university degree in education or linguistics
- references
- teacher training
- experience teaching in other countries

Then, during the week, I handed out copies to all my students and asked them to practice the third conditional.

"If you were looking for an English teacher, what would be the most important criterion?"

And every single one of them (except for one weirdo), told me 'references.'

Think of your own shopping behavior. How many times have you gone on Amazon to buy something and took a look at the ratings first? Checked out the reviews before seeing a movie? Looked at a hostel's score on Tripadvisor?

How To Get Reviews and To Make Sure They're Positive

Students aren't likely to voluntarily write you a review. It happens, but it's rare.

So if you want a couple stars next to your picture, you're going to have to ask for them.

It's how I got every one of my reviews, both on Teacher Creature and on my private site. It doesn't take much effort, students don't mind, and are often glad to help.

These are the steps I take:

1. Teach good.

Show up on time. Dress professionally. Have a plan. In other words, look like a teacher and act like a teacher.

2. Make a list of the students who like you the most.

Be careful about this, though. Sometimes it's not enough to just do your job well.

Once, I assumed that a student who I had taught for years and years would give me a good review. If he had kept me for so long, wouldn't he be satisfied? But when he emailed me the review and I translated it, it was just, well, kind of blah. Not negative, but nothing special. There was just no enthusiasm or positive energy in it.

And then I thought, hmm, this describes him – no enthusiasm, and not positive.

So keep your students' personalities in mind. And use your gut when deciding who to ask for a review.

3. Ask.

During the lesson, preferably at the end of a good lesson, tell your student you need to make some more money/you're looking for some more students, and if he could write you a short review that would be great

BONUS

Give your students a feedback form/survey before you ask for reviews. Why?

- You can better gauge their level of satisfaction.
- You can also fix any problems you might not have been aware of, give them better lessons, make them feel listened to and valued, and thus improving your chances of getting a good review when you finally do ask for it..

4. Email

In my experience, they always say 'yes.' But that doesn't mean they'll remember to do it. So it's a good idea to send a follow-up email the same day or the next day.

The idea is to remind them, but also to make it easy for them. You can do this by:

- Sending them the link to your profile.
- Stressing that the review can be short – a sentence or two or three
- Telling them they can write it in Czech.

Bonus: Ask for a photo!

In a study done by De Vries and Pruyn (2007), reviews that included a photo of the reviewer increased sales by 20%.



What if you get a bad review?

Don't sweat it. Read this quote from an interview with a VP at Tripadvisor

"Today, when you watch a user interact with user-generated content, they typically look for threads of consistency. They tend to ignore the extremes—the highs and the lows. When multiple reviewers start to mention the same thematic things, such as the service is poor, users then assume this could be true because multiple people have mentioned it."

Read the entire interview [here](#).

<http://www.emarketer.com/Article/TripAdvisor-Shares-Tips-on-Keeping-Reviews-Trustworthy/1009673>

So if you have just one bad review among many good reviews, chances are it will be ignored.

However, if students keep complaining about the same thing, well, maybe that's something you need to fix.

Additional Reading

Still not convinced you need some references?

Here's a study that showed that when a company used reviews for their products, 67% more visitors made a purchase.

http://www.nutritionaltree.com/NT_Reviews_Report.pdf

And this is an interesting article on the psychology behind why reviews work.

<http://econsultancy.com/cz/blog/62266-how-to-use-social-proof-to-increase-conversions>



CHAPTER FIVE – EMAILING

Don't Be Too Eager

In one of my college philosophy classes we had to read a guy named Montaigne. I forgot most of what he said, but this quote stuck:

“Difficulty increases desire.”

No doubt you've experienced this in your own life:

...an unavailable/uninterested guy/girl you wanted

...an expensive phone/car/pair of shoes

...a job/college you applied for that was super competitive because everybody else also wanted in.

I wouldn't go to any extremes like lying about how busy you are, but when the first thing you write a student is “Yes, I would be happy to be your teacher” it sends the wrong message.

You don't know anything about the student, and he doesn't know anything about you. He expects to interview you, so let him know you're going to do the same.

Here's what I do:

1. thank them for the email
2. confirm something that they said
3. ask a few questions

Here's why I do it:

1. It's polite.
2. It communicates that you heard them, which communicates that their needs are understood, and that it's not a standard reply you send to all students.
3. Although you don't say that whether or not you meet them depends on their answers, that's the message it sends. You're qualifying them, which is just the wee bit of difficulty to increase their desire.



And here's a sample script:

Hello _____,

Thank you for the email.

I think taking the FCE is a good idea: it looks good on your CV and it's a good motivator to improve your English.

I do have some available time at the moment, but before we meet, can you please answer a few questions for me:

- How long have you been studying English?
- Why do you want to improve your English now?
- What are your available days and times?

Regards,
-Ryan

Do This Immediately

Reply.

Seems to contradict what I just said above, but here's why I think it's a good idea.

One time when I was having coffee with a teacher from the site, she told me she charges students 500 kc an hour. Not bad, I thought. But then when she told me she had only been teaching for about six months, I was really impressed.

I got a lot of good advice from her – she had a background in sales – but maybe the most valuable was:

“As soon as you get an email, respond immediately.”

As she explained, there are two good reasons for this:

1. Things change. When the student wrote you the email, he had the thought in his head: 'I need to find a teacher.' If he reads your reply email the next day, that thought could have changed to 'I need to learn Chinese/get another cat/change my underwear...'





So get him to schedule a meeting ASAP - when it's still a priority.

2. If you don't get in their appointment book first, chances are, you never will.

Although I always tell students they should meet with at least three teachers before deciding, I know from experience they usually just write one teacher, meet him or her, try a few lessons, and if there are no problems, he becomes his new teacher. So, you want to be that teacher he meets first.

It also helps if you have a smart phone or tablet so you can be online throughout the day (And in addition to being fully booked, you can also be one of those annoying people who's always checking messages when your friends are trying to get your advice on buying a new cat).



CHECK LIST

You should now know what to do and not to do on your profile. You should also have a better understanding of the student's perspective.

If you haven't already, I encourage you to post or edit your profile now while the information is still fresh. It doesn't have to be perfect, you can always change it later – mine is constantly changing. And there will be new students on the site tomorrow, so who cares if you didn't get any from today's version of your profile. The important thing is to just start.

Here's a checklist to make sure you haven't forgotten anything.

Photo check list:

- ___ Did you upload a photo?
- ___ Can you see your face in the photo?
- ___ Is it high resolution or blurry/pixelated?
- ___ Do you look: professional? Serious? Friendly? Like a teacher?

Blurb check list:

- ___ No jargon.
- ___ No big words
- ___ No all caps
- ___ Did you get someone to proofread it?
- ___ How many times did you say "I?" Could you say "you" more?

Reviews Check list:

- ___ Have you made a list of students you could ask?

When are you going to ask them? _____

