Tandem guidelines

Why tandem learning?
Tandem learning is an **efficient, cost-free way of acquiring foreign language skills independently.** It allows you to decide what you learn and how you learn it.

You and your tandem partner choose what you want to focus on, for example:
- Speaking the foreign language
- Expanding your vocabulary
- Reading and understanding texts in the foreign language, and clarifying language issues
- Discussing texts you have written and improving them together
- Getting to know the culture(s) of your target language

Who is my tandem partner?
Your partner’s first language is the language you wish to learn. Your partner is committed to helping you learn your target language. He or she will provide practical advice and support from a native-speaker perspective. At the same time, your partner wishes to learn your first language and is interested in, and respects, your cultural background. Your partner is keen to develop learning methods that are tailored to your needs. Your partner is self-disciplined in that he or she sticks to the agreements you have made. You will help your partner in the same ways.

When and how often should we meet?
You and your tandem partner decide how often and when you meet. Ideally, initially you should meet once a week and give yourselves plenty of time.

After the first few meetings, you can decide if you wish to meet more or less often. Decide also if you wish to have a separate meeting for each language or, rather, prefer to work on both languages in one session. You should allow at least 45 minutes per language.

Where shall we meet?
You and your partner decide where to meet. We recommend that you initially meet in a neutral place where you can work undisturbed, for example,
- Open study areas at the University and ETH where you are allowed to speak
- Cafeterias and canteens, outside meal times
- Seating areas in the University and ETH buildings, or in your institutes
- Vacant classrooms
- In the Self-Access Centre (Rämistr. 74, J15, www.sprachenzentrum.uzh.ch/slz)
- Via Skype, if you can’t meet at the same time and place

What is my role as learner?
It’s up to you what you want to learn and how. You and your partner will find a method that is appropriate to your needs. Start by defining your language learning needs and priorities. Ask yourself: What do I need to do in my target language? In what kinds of situations would I like to be better at the language?
Then look at your previous language learning experience, and ask yourself: How have I made the most progress in language learning in the past? The European Language Portfolio (http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/elc/portfolio/index.html) offers tools for self-assessment, for specifying learning objectives, and for reflecting on the learning experience.

What is my role as teacher?
In your role as tandem teacher, you should to pay attention to your tandem partner’s wishes and language needs, and try to provide support that will help your partner to learn effectively. As a native speaker, you can:
- Listen and understand
- Ask questions to clarify understanding and vocabulary
- Answer questions about your language and your culture
- Give feedback on your partner’s spoken language and exercises, and make corrections, if necessary
- Assess learning materials and help motivate your partner to work regularly
- Supplement your work with learning materials and online media
- Try to find solutions for specific language problems

If necessary, reconsider your learning objectives and approach to language learning. If you need help, ask for an appointment for tandem counseling.

What language do we speak?
In principle, both languages should be spoken equally. Usually, the learner speaks in the foreign language and the teacher in his or her first language. Exceptions can be made when the learner explicitly requests them.

How do we begin?
At the first meeting you will want to get to know each other. A personal interest in your tandem partner and his or her language and culture will continue to be an important motivator for learning. Use your first meeting to plan your work. Ask the following questions:
- When will we meet? (Meetings should be regular)
- Where will we meet?
- How will we organize our meetings so that each language gets equal time?
- How long should our tandem partnership last for?
- What are our language needs and aims?
- What positive and negative learning experiences have we had in foreign language learning?
- What forms of learning should we use in order to meet our needs and aims, and to build on positive past learning experiences? How do we learn best?

Once you have decided when, where, and how you want to work, set a date on which to evaluate your progress and learning outcomes.

We recommend that you both complete and sign a Tandem contract at your first meeting. You both keep copies of the contract; it demonstrates your commitment to the partnership.
What learning materials should we use?
Anything that supports or stimulates your language learning is useful material (texts, pictures, audio and film clips, newspaper articles, poems, advertisements, games).
Alternatively, you might decide not to use any materials because you have enough ideas for speaking and writing practice, or you bring enough questions to your meetings.
If either of you is a beginner, it might be helpful to use a textbook alongside the tandem sessions. Always consult a grammar book and a good dictionary if you are uncertain about specific language issues.
The Language Center Library (Rämistr. 71, level P) and the Self-Access Center (Rämistr. 74, J15) provide teaching and learning materials, which you can photocopy. At the Self-Access Center, you can also use materials on site (text books, films, games, and audio CDs). There is also a wide range of additional material in our resource pool (www.sprachenzentrum.uzh.ch/slz/infosys).

How should we prepare for each meeting?
In the role of learner, you will have defined in advance what you want to work on, for example, vocabulary extension, reading practice, presentation skills, grammar revision, and related exercises. Try to follow through on your intentions. You should always know in advance what your language aims for your next meeting are, what your needs are, what specific questions you want to ask, and how you want to benefit from your partner’s native-language knowledge.

In the role of teacher, you won’t need to do much preparation: The learner chooses the content and approach of each session. Nevertheless, you could take along additional materials for your partner.

When should we correct each other?
Discuss when and how you want to be corrected. Avoid correcting every mistake and becoming overly concerned with errors. There are many different ways to express your ideas.

Correcting your partner only makes sense when he or she can learn something from the mistake, for example, when the learner has identified and expressed a concern about a specific pattern or idiosyncrasy in their speech. Think of your corrections as answers to the learner’s questions.

Correct your partner and offer help when
– Your partner specifically asks to be corrected
– You haven’t understood your partner
– Your partner is searching for a particular word
– A particular mistake or type of mistake occurs repeatedly

How should we correct each other?
There are several techniques for correcting mistakes:
– Ask for an explanation when you have not understood your partner
– Repeat incorrect utterances in the correct form, without making explicit reference to the mistake
– Draw your partner’s attention to a mistake, with the understanding that doing so will interrupt the communication flow
– Make a note of typical mistakes and discuss these later
Try different ways of correcting each other, and talk about the advantages and disadvantages of each method. When correcting your partner, make sure you avoid offending him or her.

**How can we check our progress?**

When you begin your tandem partnership, complete the “Self-assessment checklist” of the European Language Portfolio (see the European Language Portfolio: Language Biography 3.1-3.6; use the list which best matches your level). This contains a column for self-assessment, another for your partner’s assessment of your level, and one for your aims. At the end of your tandem partnership, and ideally about six months into your partnership, you should do another assessment to check your progress. Talk to your partner about whether or not you have been able to meet your targets and stick to your plan. A learning diary can help (see the European Language Portfolio: Language Biography 5). If you are not happy with your progress, try to identify what went wrong. If necessary, ask for help.

**Where can I get help?**

Tandem pairs and individual tandem partners are entitled to a counseling session. Please email Dr Ueli Bachmann, Head of German as a Foreign Language (ueli.bachmann@sprachen.uzh.ch). Sandra Lazzeri is responsible for organizing tandem partnerships; please contact her if you have any questions at tandem@sprachen.uzh.ch.

For help and support regarding materials for your tandem sessions, please contact the Self-Access Center (slz@sprachen.uzh.ch, Rämistrasse 74).

**Contact Addresses**

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