Tandem Guidelines

Why Tandem?
Learning a foreign language through a Tandem partnership offers an efficient and cost-free way of learning languages independently. The approach allows you to decide individually both what and how you wish to learn.

With your Tandem partner, it is important to agree on your focus, for example,
- speaking in the foreign language/improving your spoken skills
- expanding your vocabulary
- reading and understanding texts in the foreign language, and clarifying linguistic points
- discussing texts you have written and improving them together
- getting to know the culture(s) of your target language

Who is my Tandem partner?
The person you work with in Tandem is a native speaker of the language you want to learn. She is willing to invest time to help you in your language learning with native knowledge. Conversely, the other person is also interested in your native language and culture and approaches you with respect and curiosity. She is motivated to develop ways of working with you that are tailored to your needs. She is also disciplined enough to keep agreements made. Of course, these rules apply to both Tandem partners.

When and how often should we meet?
You decide with your Tandem partner how often you will meet and when. Ideally, when you begin working together in Tandem, you should meet once a week for each language. It is important, particularly at the start, to take your time when you meet.

After the first meetings, decide if you wish to meet more or less frequently, if you wish to have a separate meeting for each language, or if you wish to work on both languages in one session. However, you should allow at least 45 minutes per language. Whatever you decide, it is important to create a clear division between the two languages, allocating equal time for each language.

Discuss right at the beginning until when your Tandem should last.

Where shall we meet?
You and your partner decide where to meet. It is advisable, at least at the beginning, to meet in a neutral place, where you can concentrate, for example,
- open study areas at the University/ETH, as long as you are allowed to speak there
- cafeterias and canteens, outside meal times
- seating areas in the University and ETH buildings, and your Institutes
- vacant classrooms
- in the Self-Access Centers at the University Zentrum campus (Rämistrasse 74 / UZH RAI J15) and at the ETH Hönggerberg campus (Stefano-Franscini-Platz 5 / ETH HIL E2)
What is my role as learner?
As the learner, you decide what you want to learn and how. Discussing this with your Tandem partner will help you to find an appropriate approach.
On the one hand, consider your language learning needs and priorities: what do I need to do in the language, in what situations do I want to have greater mastery of the language?
On the other hand, review your previous language learning experience: when and how have I made progress in learning a foreign language in the past?
The European Language Portfolio is a helpful tool for self-assessment, specification of learning objectives and reflection on learning experiences (http://www.sprachenzentrum.fu-berlin.de/slz/lernberatung/PEL/index.html).

What is my role as instructor?
As „Tandem instructor“, pay attention to your Tandem partner’s needs and wishes and try to provide support that will help your partner to learn effectively. As a native speaker, you can:
– listen and confirm understanding
– ask questions to clarify understanding and vocabulary
– answer questions about the language and your culture
– give feedback on spoken language and exercises your partner has done, if necessary providing correct versions
– go over learning material and thus help motivate your partner to work regularly
– supplement your work with learning materials, course and grammar books and media on the Internet
– seek targeted solutions to specific language problems

If necessary, spend time with your partner thinking about the specific learning objectives and chosen approach to language learning. If you need help, arrange for an appointment for Tandem counselling/advice.

What language shall we speak?
As a basic principle, both languages should be spoken equally frequently with the learner normally speaking the foreign language and the instructor the native language.

What learning materials should we use?
Whatever you usually use in learning languages and find helpful and stimulating will be good learning material, e.g. texts, pictures, sound files, films, newspaper articles, stories, advertisements, games ...
In fact, you might not need any of these if you have enough ideas of your own to keep speaking, or inspiration to write based on concrete themes.
If either of you is a beginner, then it would probably be helpful to use a textbook alongside the Tandem. In any case, you should have access to a grammar book and a good dictionary.
In the Self-Access Centers (UZH RAI J15 and ETH HIL E2) you can use on site teaching and learning materials (educational books, films, games, audio-CD, etc.), borrow them or make copies. In addition to that, you’ll find many available online attractions in the resource pool.
How should we prepare for each meeting?
As a learner, you will certainly have good intentions, such as working on your vocabulary, reading, preparing presentations, revising grammar and doing related exercises. Make sure you do it! You should know in advance what you want to do at the next meeting focusing on the target language: what your needs are and what specific questions you want to ask.

In your role as instructor, you do not need to do a lot of preparation as it is the learner who decides on the content and approach in each session. Nevertheless, you could bring some materials with you, which your partner may find helpful.

When should we correct each other?
Decide together when and how you want to be corrected. Do not correct every ’mistake’, or become overly concerned with errors. There are many different ways to express what you want to say orally.

Where can I get help?
As Tandem partners, you are also entitled to one separate counselling/advice session. Please contact Ueli Bachmann, Head of German as a Foreign Language, on: ueli.bachmann@sprachen.uzh.ch Sandra Lazzeri and Caroline Röthlin are responsible for setting up Tandem partnerships and are also available to answer your questions on: tandem@sprachen.uzh.ch.