



## 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?

Your partner's mother tongue will be the language you wish to learn. He or she will be willing to invest time to help you learn the target language, providing practical advice and support, notably drawing on his or her knowledge of the language as a native speaker.

The system is, of course, reciprocal and your partner will also wish to improve his or her knowledge of your mother tongue and learn about your culture, approaching the latter with respect and interest. He or she will be interested in working together to develop different approaches to learning, which match your learning needs. Your partner should be sufficiently disciplined to carry out what you agree to do, and it should be clear that what applies to your partner also applies to you.

### 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 programme sufficient time in your weekly schedule and to 'take your time' when you meet, i.e. not to rush or feel under pressure.

After the first meeting, 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.

You should also agree on a timeframe at the start of your Tandem partnership, fixing a date for the final session. At that point, you can decide if you want to continue, have a break, or stop.

### 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-learning Centres: Rämistrasse 74 (J15) and Stefano-Franscini-Platz 5 (HIL E2)  
→ [www.sprachenzentrum.uzh.ch/slz](http://www.sprachenzentrum.uzh.ch/slz)

### **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 and media on the Internet (is your Tandem partner a beginner, would he or she benefit from a course book or other learning materials? Refer to a grammar reference book for grammatical questions!)
- 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 his or her mother tongue. Brief exceptions to this rule are acceptable when the learner explicitly requests it.

### **When shall we begin?**

At the first meeting it is particularly important to get to know each other. Bear in mind that you will benefit from this initial exchange later in your Tandem work, which will be all the more motivating. Use the first meeting to draw up a joint workplan and ask yourselves the following questions:

- when will you meet each other? (the meetings should be regular)



- how will you organise your meetings so that each language is allocated equal time?
- where will you meet?
- how long should your initial Tandem partnership last?
- what are your and your partner's needs and objectives and what positive and negative learning experiences have you already had in learning a foreign language?
- what approaches can you take to learning and working together to meet your respective needs and objectives, and build on earlier positive learning experiences? How do you learn best?

Once you have decided when, where and how to start working, make an appointment to meet and begin working together. At this meeting, you can test your 'timetable' and the approach(es) to work you have chosen.

We also recommend you fill out a Tandem learning contract at the first meeting, which you should each sign. The contract, which you keep, renders the work you do together binding.

#### **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 library of the Language Center (Rämistrasse 71, floor P) and in the Self-learning Centre (Rämistrasse 74, J15) you will find teaching- as well as learning material to make the needed copies. In the Self-learning Centre you can use this material on site (educational books, films, games, audio-CD, etc.) In addition to that, you'll find many available online attractions in the resource pool (<http://www.sprachenzentrum.uzh.ch/slz/infosys/>)

#### **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, as previously discussed with your partner, what specific questions you want to ask and how you want to draw on your partner's mother-tongue knowledge.

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. Correcting your partner only makes sense when he or she can learn something from the mistake.



This can be the case when the learner has perceived a pattern or noticed something specific relating to form in an utterance. Corrections should come through your answers to the learners' questions.

Correct your partner and offer help, for example,

- when your partner asks to be corrected
- when you haven't understood your partner
- when your partner is looking for a particular word
- when a particular mistake or type of mistake keeps occurring

### **How should we correct each other?**

There are many different ways to correct mistakes:

- you can ask questions to clarify something you have not understood
- you can repeat an originally incorrect utterance in the correct form, without explicit reference to the mistake
- you can interrupt your partner to correct the mistake, but should consider beforehand whether the mistake merits interrupting the flow of communication
- you can make a note of typical mistakes and discuss them together referring to your notes at the end of the meeting.

Try out different ways of correcting and consider their advantages and disadvantages together. Make sure your corrections are never offensive.

### **How can we check our progress?**

When you begin your Tandem, complete the „Self-assessment checklist“ from the European Language Portfolio (Language biography 3.1-3.6; use the list which best corresponds to your level). This contains one column for self-assessment, another for your partner's assessment of your level and a third column relating to your aims. At the latest at the end of your Tandem ‚programme‘, or preferably in the middle of the academic year, you should review your initial self-assessment and your partner's assessment of you, to check to what extent you have already met your learning objectives. Go over these points together to determine whether your workplan is still feasible. Keeping a learning diary can also be helpful (see the European Language Portfolio: Language Bibliography 5). If you are not happy with your progress, try to identify the reasons. If necessary, you can seek specialist advice concerning your Tandem work.

### **Where can I get help?**

As Tandem partners, you are also entitled to one separate counselling/advice session. Please contact Dr Ueli Bachmann, Head of German as a Foreign Language, on: [ueli.bachmann@access.uzh.ch](mailto:ueli.bachmann@access.uzh.ch). Ms Caroline Röthlin is responsible for setting up Tandem partnerships, and is also available to answer your questions on: [tandem@sprachen.uzh.ch](mailto:tandem@sprachen.uzh.ch).

### **Contact Address**

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