



Tandem guidelines

Why Tandem?

Learning a foreign language through a tandem partnership is an efficient way to learn languages independently; it is free of charge. A tandem allows you to decide what and how you wish to learn.

With your tandem partner, you will arrange to focus on certain areas, for example,

- Speaking in the foreign language and improving your spoken skills
- Expanding your vocabulary
- Reading and understanding texts in the other 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 tandem partner is a native speaker of the language you wish to learn. They are willing to invest time to help you in your language learning with native knowledge. They are interested in your native language and culture and approach you with respect and curiosity. They are motivated to develop ways of working with you that are tailored to your needs, and they are also prepared to stick to your mutual agreements. These rules apply to both tandem partners.

When and how often should we meet?

You decide with your tandem partner how often and when you meet. Ideally, when you begin working together, 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, you should 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 for at least 45 minutes per language. Whatever you decide, it is important to create a clear division between the two languages, allocating equal time to each language. Discuss at the start how long your tandem meeting should go on for.

Where should 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, in

- Open UZH/ETH study areas, where speaking is permitted
- Cafeterias and canteens outside mealtimes
- Seating areas in UZH/ETH buildings and your institutes
- Empty classrooms
- UZH Self-Access Centers (Rämistrasse 74 / UZH RAI J15 and ETH Hönggerberg campus, Stefano-Francini-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.

Consider your language learning needs and priorities: What do I need to do in the language, in what situations would I like to have a better command of the language?

Review your previous language learning experience: When and how did I make progress in learning a language in the past?

The European Language Portfolio is a helpful tool for doing language self-assessments, specifying learning objectives, and reflecting on one's learning experience (<http://www.sprachenzentrum.fu-berlin.de/slz/lernberatung/PEL/index.html>).

What is my role as instructor?

As a 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 your understanding
- Ask questions to clarify meaning and vocabulary
- Answer questions about the language and culture
- Give feedback on spoken language and exercises your partner has done, if necessary, providing corrections
- Go over learning material and help motivate your partner to work regularly
- Supplement your work with learning materials, course and grammar books, and online media
- Seek targeted solutions to specific language problems

If necessary, spend time with your partner discussing your specific learning objectives and approach to language learning. If you need help, arrange for an appointment for a tandem consultation.

What language should we speak?

As a basic principle, both languages should be spoken equally, with the learner speaking the foreign language and the instructor their native language.

What learning materials should we use?

Whatever you usually use when learning languages and find helpful and stimulating will be good learning material. These might include texts, pictures, audio files, films, newspaper articles, stories, advertisements, and 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 texts based on specific topics.

If either of you is a beginner, then it would probably be helpful to use a textbook. In any case, you should have access to a grammar book and a good dictionary.



We provide a range of materials for tandem learning at our [Self-Access Centers](#). Our [online Resource pool](#) also contains a wide range of learning tools: To access these, first choose your desired language. Then click on “Lernformen und -tips” and “öffnen.” Check the “Tandem” box, and finally click on “Senden.”

You will find more useful tips and ideas on tandem learning in the document [Tandem ideas \(PDF, 143 KB\)](#). The [Ruhr-Universität Bochum](#) tandem platform also has some useful exercises.

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 we get help?

You can request a consultation on tandem learning under “[Advice on autonomous learning](#)”.

If you have questions about arranging a tandem partnership, please contact Sandra Lazzeri or Marion Dittli: tandem@sprachen.uzh.ch

More advice and support about learning materials is available at our [Self-Access Centers](#).