Tandem Learning
*A brief guide to working ‘in tandem’*

**First things first**
*You need to decide together:*

- **Time:** How often will you meet, for how long and on what days?
- **Place:** Where will you meet?
- **Motivation:** What do you want to achieve? How are you going to work on it?

**Time**
*Begin by discussing when you will meet, how long the sessions will be, and how long you intend the Tandem to last.*

- Take a generous attitude to time. This type of cooperation should not be rushed.
- Avoid meeting too often at first, for example, no more than twice a week. Once you and your partner have become used to each other, you can always increase the frequency of meetings.
- Try hard to commit to a time and to keep that commitment.
- Together, decide on how long your tandem should last (e.g. to the end of the semester or year) and set a date to end it. At that moment, you can decide together whether you want to continue, to take a break or to bring an end to the Tandem learning.

**Place**
*Decide where to meet.*

Public seating areas around the university, classrooms not in use, the student cafeteria (mensa), which is empty except around lunch time, cafés, or the home of one of the partners.

Not all of these places lend themselves to concentrated work, and not all are suitable for the first sessions. We recommend beginning with a neutral venue – you can always switch later to a more relaxed environment, if you so desire.

**Motivation, objectives, ways of working together**

Under the UniTandem system you have complete autonomy. So seize the opportunity to decide for yourself what and how to learn!

*We recommend having an initial discussion which covers the following areas:*

- **Why are we doing this? Is it ...**
  - to be able to speak?
  - to become more fluent?
  - to learn words?
  - to overcome inhibitions about speaking?
  - to learn about another culture?
  - to get to know someone new?
  - for other reasons?

- Are there particular situations or contexts in which we expect to use the language we are learning?
  - for study purposes (e.g., seminars, presentations, reading, or writing)
  - for everyday life (e.g., shopping or friends)

*Try to be as specific as possible about identifying your needs – this will help you greatly to plan your work.*

Set goals. Ask about your partner’s goals. Plan the work you do together.

*How do I learn efficiently?*

It is very useful to have a talk together about your past experience of learning languages and how you think you learn best. Tell each other about what helps and what turns you off. Agree together that each of you will make sure that you will avoid working in ways that the other would hate.

**Remember:**

- **Responsibility**
  You are responsible for your own learning. You, not your partner, have the task of determining what you wish to learn and how. You must succeed in communicating your goals and methods to your partner. You will need to make sure that you prepare for your time together.

- **Respect**
  Keep all appointments and be on time. Show respect for your partner and his or her wishes, opinions and attitudes.

- **Avoid mixing the languages**
  If your meeting is for an hour or less, work on one language only at each meeting, alternating between the two. If you meet for a longer period, consider splitting the time between the two languages. Try each system and see which suits you best.
The Tandem rules

The Tandem sign-up form includes the following rules which you agree to follow:
I agree to accept the three basic UNITandem rules:
- We meet regularly.
- We use two languages, alternating roles between learner and informant.
- We try to avoid mixing languages and divide the time equitably.

Important: Roles

We all remember being in school where teachers decided what and how we would work. The teacher planned and ran each lesson and the learners had to follow the plan. Tandem is quite different: you, the learner, take your learning into your own hands. You decide what and how to work, and you are responsible for your progress. Your partner is not your private teacher. The learner takes on a lot of the work that the teacher normally does.

Corrections

Talk to each other about what you prefer as well as how and how often you wish to be corrected.

As you talk, try to focus mostly on what is being said and not to become too concerned about the mistakes that may be made.

When to offer help or corrections?
- When your partner is not able to say what she/he wants to say.
- When your partner is searching for the right word.
- When the mistake is very frequent.

Give your partner the chance to ask for corrections by him- or herself.

How should I offer corrections?

Here are some possibilities:
- Simply ask for clarification or repetition.
- Repeat the correct words without drawing attention to the error.
- Draw attention to the error. In this case, the conversation is briefly interrupted.
- Note down some points for later discussion.

Try to use the full range of strategies and not to correct in a way which inhibits your partner.

In your own language

- the native speaker accepts the learner’s wishes,
- goes with the flow,
- listens and helps to understand,
- tries to understand,
- gives feedback,
- acts as an expert informant on the language, a helpful colleague, but not a teacher.

In your target language

- the learner decides what will happen in the session,
- the learner is prepared,
- the learner is active,
- the learner tries hard to communicate,
- the learner is responsible for asking for help, because it is the learner who has the desire to progress.

Reviewing your work together

On occasion, especially in the earlier sessions, leave time to review what was more successful and less successful in each session. Try to apply the results in later meetings.

Materials for learning

No type of material should be excluded if you feel that it helps you learn. If you are a beginner, you should also use a reputable coursebook along with your Tandem sessions. This can be especially helpful where grammar is a problem.

If you would like to discuss in more detail

- ways of optimising your Tandem sessions,
- how to choose materials,

then please contact:

unitandem@unifr.ch

Learning Advice at the Self-Access Centre for Languages
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