

Useful Tips for Tandem Language Learning

In order to work effectively with your tandem partner, you may follow the following hints for successful tandem language learning.

1. Be autonomous

Partners are responsible for their own learning. They should decide what they would like to learn and how to do it. Still, goals and methods are to be matched with those of the partner.

2. Try to match age and language level

The tandem partners should be approximately of the same age. This is often a precondition for a shared living environment, which can serve as a basis for finding appropriate conversation topics; the same is the case for interests and goals. Moreover, the partners should ideally be equally proficient in their foreign language.

3. Be consistent and realistic

The tandem partners should meet on a regular basis. They should arrange a fixed time for meetings. Of course, the frequency and length of tandem meetings will depend on the schedule of both partners. The partners should not set too high goals; rather, they should estimate realistically how much time and energy they would like to spend on their language tandem. Otherwise, demotivation may be an inevitable consequence!

4. Look for the right place to meet

The choice of an appropriate place for meeting is not to be underestimated. It may be better to agree on a neutral place at the beginning (e.g. somewhere at the university, in a coffee bar, etc.)

5. Keep languages apart

The partners should refrain from mixing both languages. They should establish at the beginning how much time will be devoted to each language and switch to the other language only after that time. Both languages should be granted the same amount of time, so both partners can equally benefit from the tandem exchange.

6. Act both as a learner and as a mediator

Each one of the tandem partners will alternatively act as a learner and as a language mediator for his foreign language and his mother tongue respectively. Yet both partners should bear in mind that learning in tandem exchange is not the same as taking individual lessons with a language teacher. As a rule, tandem partners are no qualified teachers. This means that tandem partners will probably answer specific grammatical questions or explain linguistic issues only on the basis of their feel for their native language.

7. Help each other

The tandem partners respect each other; they keep their appointments, come in time to their meetings and inform each other in advance if something has come up. Additionally, both partners should respect mutual agreements and bear responsibility both for their own and their partner's learning process.

8. Be helpful when correcting your partner

Both tandem partners should have the opportunity to ask for corrections. However, partners should refrain from correcting each mistake. It is advisable that they point to mistakes when one of the partners does not understand what the other means, when an error occurs very frequently or when the partner is searching for the right word and explicitly asks for help.

9. Be honest to each other

If one of the partners loses interest in language tandem, he/she should be honest and tell his/her partner about this. That way they can discuss together if they should stop meeting or if the existing problems can be solved somehow.

10. Avoid monotony

Chatting together over a cup of coffee may prove to be boring after a while. Diversified activities give both tandem partners the chance to experience new communicative situations and to use the foreign language “in context”. For instance, partners may practice different language skills from week to week: they may read and discuss texts, send each other e-mails, write short texts and discuss them... You may find further guidelines for successful meetings here (this is the website of the Tandem Foundation).

We are happy to help you with any question you may have. Please contact us: tandem@sli.uni-freiburg.de

www.sli.uni-freiburg.de/selflearning/tandem

We wish you lots of success and fun with Tandem learning!

