

Advice and Tips on Organizing a Tandem Partnership

1. Principles of the tandem partnership

Language learning in a tandem partnership is especially successful if you observe a few important principles.

- Meet regularly, if possible at a fixed time.
- Separate the languages: Both you and your partner should benefit equally from the tandem. Dedicate the same amount of time to each of the two languages (principle of reciprocity). Don't integrate a third language into the tandem.
- You are each responsible for your own learning. Each of you can decide what you want to learn and how you want to learn it. You and your partner should agree upon your goals and your method of working (preferably at the beginning).
- Tandem partners should respect each other.

2. Important questions you should settle at the beginning

When? How long? Where?

- It's advisable at the beginning to settle on a time for the meetings and to decide how long each meeting and the entire tandem partnership should last.
- Learning takes time in a tandem partnership, time that you should take for yourself and also allow the other partner to take.
- Try to settle on a fixed time for the meetings at the beginning and stick to it.

Talk at the beginning about where you'd like to meet, whether you'd prefer a concentrated atmosphere or laid-back surroundings for your exchange. There are many different possibilities: lounge areas in the halls of the university, empty lecture rooms, the library, or a cafe.

Why did you decide to start up a tandem partnership and what are your goals?

- to learn a foreign language
- to speak more fluently
- to extend my vocabulary
- to lose my inhibitions about speaking
- to learn about other cultures

Are there special situations or contexts in which you will or would like to use the foreign language?

- at the university/at work: taking part in class discussions, giving presentations, reading academic texts, writing texts, giving talks
- in daily life
- for a trip

Ask yourself the following questions:

- What could the tandem partnership help me to improve? What do I want to achieve?
- What is important for me in working with my tandem partner?

How do you learn best?

- Share your language learning experiences.
- Also talk with each other about how you'd like to be reminded of mistakes (it bothers me, it makes me feel unsure of myself, I don't like it when ...).

3. Roles in the tandem partnership

Each partner takes on particular roles in the tandem partnership:

- Help each other to express yourselves as clearly and intelligibly as possible.
- Give each other support when you have difficulties understanding each other.
- Correct each other's mistakes.

The partner speaking the foreign language

- decides on the topic of conversation,
- is active,
- tries to make him or herself understandable, and
- signals when he or she needs help.

The partner who is a native speaker

- responds to the tandem partner's wishes,
- listens and tries to understand,
- helps if necessary,
- gives feedback, and
- is an expert for usage in his or her native language.

4. Correcting mistakes in a tandem partnership

Talk with each other about when and how you want to be corrected. The important thing is to enjoy the tandem partnership and learn to see corrections as an opportunity to improve your own language skills.

- Correct your tandem partner when he or she uses words that could lead to communication problems.
- Help out when you, as the expert, didn't understand something. Ask what was meant.
- Help out when you notice that your tandem partner is searching for the right word, but also give him or her the chance to find a solution independently.
- Give your tandem partner the chance to ask for corrections him or herself.
- Correct mistakes your tandem partner makes frequently.

5. Where can I find more information on language tandems?

You can ask us questions any time by visiting us during our consultation hour or sending us an email (sprachtandem@frs.uni-freiburg.de) We'll be happy to give you tips and advice.

Tandem consultation hour: Every Monday from 2 to 3 p.m. (Freiburg Research Services, International Graduate Academy, Friedrichstraße 41–43, 79098 Freiburg, 2nd floor). If this time is inconvenient for you, just contact us to arrange an appointment.

The Seagull online platform <http://seagull-tandem.eu/> offers a wealth of additional ideas and suggestions (such as specially designed language learning material) that can be helpful for learning in a tandem.