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TANDEM
TIPS



Tandem: learning and teaching

The tandem method asks you to double your intellectual activity. On the one hand you 'learn' a foreign language and on the other hand you have to 'teach' your own language, therefore challenging you both as a learner and as a teacher. This double role is of major importance since any success in your tandem work depends on it.

Both of you decide on the learning procedure by choosing the issues you want to talk about as well as the materials. Tandem is a very useful method for dealing with the following:

- vocabulary
- comprehension
- speaking fluently and losing your shyness
- learning more about your tandem partner's culture
- improving the learning process.



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You should consider the following hints when meeting
1 language + 1 language = 2 languages



There is one basic rule of the tandem method which should always be respected even though it appears to hamper the communication between the two of you. Time wise a tandem meeting should be split in two equal parts. One language is spoken during the first half of your meeting, the other during the second. A two-hour meeting could be split up like this:

**60 minutes language A,
60 minutes language B.**

Do not switch languages even though it might be harder for you to stick to one language. One of the goals of tandem is the improvement of skills that have already been learnt. The reasons for switching to the other language are:

- you are unsure about certain linguistic aspects or you feel uneasy about specific topics.
- you want to help your partner by using his or her language when playing the 'teacher' role.

When you have switched languages once, you run the risk of one language becoming the dominant one. This will be the language of the partner whose language skills are less advanced. The one that already has advanced language skills will improve even more, whereas the other will not.



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Role switching

Tandem also means that two people succeed at the same time. Switching the roles of 'learner' and 'teacher' ensures that neither of the two is always being corrected while the other is always correcting.

It is particularly important that both partners contribute equally to the role switching. Otherwise one will always be playing the role of the passive listener while the other one will always be the interpreter.

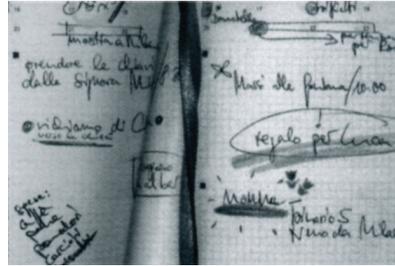
The one playing the role of the 'teacher' should try not to be too active. Any kind of skill the 'learner' has learned through their own experience will strengthen his or her knowledge much more than just passive repetition.



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Preparing the meeting

The less your language proficiency the more you have to prepare each tandem meeting. Once you have met, start on the following:



- **the topics** you want to talk about: think of how issues should develop during future meetings;
- **the way** of getting started on an issue and the materials you want to use with it. You can use a picture, a newspaper article, a radio or TV guide, a song etc. to start you off. There are no limits on learning materials. However, it is important to use authentic materials;
- **the place of meeting:** in order to start up a conversation it is recommended that you go to a cafe or go for a walk. In order to read, listen to music, or watch movies, look for a quiet place with the necessary equipment.



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Talk about everything

First you have to get to know your tandem partner. You can talk about everyday things, then the more you get to know each other the more interesting your topics should become. Think about vocabulary you do not yet know. After the first meetings you need to prepare the topics and materials for future meetings in advance.



- **your opinions:** *the role of men/women in certain cultures, immigration, technological progress, protection of the environment etc.*

- **common interests:** talking about your interests might be the best way to proceed with improving your language skills as both partners are well prepared and highly motivated. Common interests like computers, movies, sports etc. make a foreign language more accessible even if the two tandem partners are at different language levels.

The following topics might help you:

- **all kinds of personal information you want to talk to your partner about:** *family, friends, work, education, hobbies, habits, personal preferences etc.*
- **stories from your past:** *vacations, your first job, your first love, the best or the worst day of your life, childhood dreams etc.*
- **your future:** *where do you want to be in ten years? What would your biographer write about you? What would you want to become after reincarnation?*

It is important that your partner remains curious about you and is interested in you. That is why you should choose a variety of topics, learning methods and materials.



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Everything can be learned

When people communicate they basically make use of two language skills:

- **receptive** (listening) and
- **productive** (speaking).



Conversation with your tandem partner makes you broaden your vocabulary, improve your listening comprehension, speak more fluently, overcome your shyness and fear of making mistakes. In addition to conversation you might want to use authentic materials such as films and tape recordings. They can be watched or listened to many times.

As far as the written part of language is concerned two additional language skills are involved:

- **reading** (reading comprehension) and
- **writing** (written production).



Tandem will help you with these, too. Use original sources like newspaper articles, advertisements, or the news. First, practise your general understanding of the text by answering questions such as 'What's this about', 'Who was it written for', 'What does it say' etc. The second step would be a detailed analysis of the text. You might also want to correct texts you and your partner have written at home and discuss them at your meetings.

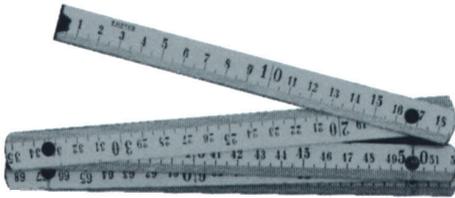




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Choose your own language variety

Typical of tandem is its flexibility which makes it easy to meet your individual demands. The partners not only decide on the specific language skills they want to practise but also on the language variety they want to speak. Not everybody wants to learn the standard language. Some might want to learn a



dialect or the regional variety. Others might want to learn professional language or language for special purposes, e.g. economy, gastronomy, administration etc.

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Communicating and understanding

Try to be spontaneous and natural when speaking. In order to improve your listening skills the context needs to be authentic and real. Avoid complicated idioms or sentence structures as well as exaggerated, simple words and structures or baby talk. It is essential to find the most convenient and appropriate register and content so as not to become bored or discouraged when communication is too difficult.

Proceed step by step when explaining something to your partner. Make sure they do not fall behind and give them the chance to check what they have understood.

This is an excellent way of learning successfully.



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**No translating
necessary**

Since you are not allowed to switch languages, you have to explain unknown words and idioms. Instead of just translating them you should try to describe what you mean, give examples, use signs and gestures, or drawings. Of course, this is an uncomfortable way of explaining, but it has been proved that words and idioms are more easily memorized in this way. You do not need to hurry, take your time.

Avoid translating unknown words. Instead, use:

- synonyms: e.g. shout, yell
- opposites: e.g. bitter, sweet
- words of the same category: e.g. orange, lemon
- derivations: e.g. fly, flight
- associations: e.g. ocean, vacation
- connections: e.g. tooth(-)pick
- comparisons and personal characteristics: e.g. you have black hair.

Only use a dictionary if you feel that it would take too much time to explain a word.

However, this should remain an exception to the rule.



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**How new words
can be memorized**

There are just as many ways of describing a word as of remembering it. Some hints:

- Write down the word and take a good look at it.
- Say the word loudly, sing it, shout it, or whisper it.
- Discover similarities to words you already know.
- Discover similarities to words in your native language.
- Learn the word in connection to its counterpart.
- Transform the word into a drawing or connect it to some other drawing.
- Form a sentence containing the word.
- Connect the word to other words you already know.
- Make groups or fields of the words you want to learn.
- Think of the feelings you have when hearing a word.

Role-playing also helps to remember and use words appropriately. Think of a common situation, e.g. an appointment at the doctor's, travel agency, or an argument about the quality of the things they offer at a grocery store.





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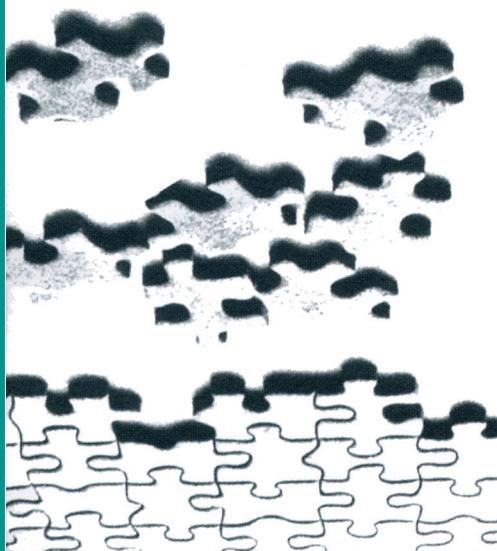
Learning from mistakes

Making mistakes is part of the language learning process, you do not learn by making no mistakes. Mistakes are not just made by accident, even though they do not occur regularly.

It is important that you both decide on the way of coping with mistakes. Sometimes it is better not to correct mistakes, e.g. if it is more important that the partner overcome his or her shyness or fear of making mistakes. In other cases the mistake must be pointed out and corrected because otherwise it might become a set phrase.

Beware of the following traps:

- If one partner has acquired less language skills you tend to not correct mistakes because there are just too many of them.
- If the partner is very good you might not see the necessity of correcting mistakes because communication works just as well without.



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Correcting mistakes

In order to have good command of a language it is not sufficient to be able to express oneself or to converse. You also need some feeling for the language.



A good way of correcting is to find your partner's most frequent

mistakes and to correct them at an appropriate opportunity. By

doing so spontaneity will not be destroyed. It also helps to write down the mistakes while speaking and to correct them afterwards. Or you can record your conversation and listen to the mistakes which should then be corrected. In any case be careful with correcting mistakes while speaking. It is better to use the correct term the next time you are talking, so that the flow of communication is not interrupted and the mistake is not over-emphasized. Ask your partner to repeat the correct word or to write it down, but do not expect your partner never to make the same mistake again after you have corrected them once.

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Between two cultures

Bear in mind that any kind of information you give about yourself, your world, your culture, and your way of life is of great value to your partner. In addition to the linguistic aspect, tandem is an interesting experience with regard to the inter-cultural perspective.

Working with tandem makes you reflect on your own clichéd ideas about the other language group. Not only do you get first hand information, but you can also find out details of yet unknown aspects. Similarities as well as differences can be discovered.

Here are some ideas for your discovery trip between two cultures:

- *your own problems with the other language and culture,*
- *festivities and tradition,*
- *living, housing, family, education of children, friendliness and hospitality etc.*



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Learning together how to learn

Do not worry if you are still confused after your second or third tandem meeting. The time you need to get to know each other, to find a working routine, and develop confidence may vary and depends on the partners.

You will notice that empathy is highly dependent on the atmosphere the two of you create. In a comfortable atmosphere you will gain the confidence which is needed in order to overcome the fear of asking questions or asking for explanations. Apart from the normal tandem meetings, why not go on trips or have dinner together - this will intensify the relationship.

When learning via the tandem method you will also be asked to observe and improve your own method and style of learning. You have to learn how to discover anything that might seem useful. Look for the methods and tricks that might help you to cope with particular language problems.

Talk to your tandem partner about your learning experiences and discuss your comments and ideas. Make use of difficulties or boredom by improving your way of working and by looking for new issues and tasks. If you have a difference of opinion it is best to be open about it. In any case there are consultants ready to help you with any questions, problems, and difficulties you might have. They are interested in your remarks and reports on the experience you have had with tandem.

tandem diary
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