GUIDE TO TANDEM

LANGUAGE EXCHANGE
TANDEM language exchange: What is it?

Students exchange their knowledge of different native languages, working together in pairs,

- to help each other to practise foreign languages,
- to learn more about their exchange partner and culture
- to exchange additional knowledge of other fields, e.g. of professional life.

TANDEM does not mean sitting in class and observing strict rules, learning grammar or enduring all kinds of tests. TANDEM pairs could discuss latest movies or best-sellers together, or even cook meals or enjoy a glass of beer. TANDEM partners may choose their own rules of language exchange.

How does autonomous language-learning work in TANDEM?

TANDEM Learning is based on the Principles of Reciprocity and Autonomous Learning.

- **Principle of Reciprocity**
  Both partners benefit equally from the partnership. Both possess skills which they would like to learn from their partner and both partners help each other to practise their native languages.

- **Principle of Learner Autonomy**
  Both partners are responsible for their own learning, i.e. for their own part of TANDEM work, both determine their own learning goals and methods. The learner decides for himself, what and when he would like to learn and which support he would like to receive from his partner¹.
  Both partners are experts in their own language and culture: If desired, they can read aloud, discuss topics selected by their partner, correct mistakes or make suggestions for improvement. On the other hand, they have not usually been trained as teachers: TANDEM partners must learn to identify and apply learning goals and methods, scrutinize them critically and prepare learning material, which means learning autonomically.

¹ For simplicity reasons, this guide only uses the masculine forms of wording when referring to people, although the number of female and male students taking part in TANDEM is almost the same.
TANDEM - How does it work?
You work together with a learning partner from another country. From your partner, you learn his native language while he learns yours.

What can you learn with TANDEM?
First and foremost, you learn to understand the foreign language better and to express yourself more easily in it - and this in an authentic oral or written situation. But you can learn much more from each other. More about this later.

How do TANDEM partners learn from each other?
Both of you talk and/or write about topics of interest, using both languages. You learn from what your TANDEM partner writes or says in his native language, from his corrections and help in other ways.

Who is TANDEM suitable for?
TANDEM is suitable for anyone who is presently learning a language or who wishes to brush up on old skills. Basic knowledge of the foreign language will generally suffice.

How to get started.
We have compiled tips to make it easy for you and your TANDEM partner to get your learning partnership started. You may find more support for learning as provided with the help of the University of Bochum here: http://www.uni-duisburg-essen.de/abz/studierende/sprachtandem.shtml. Help for learning is available in many languages and may be used to support your TANDEM partnership.

Partner Service
How do I find a TANDEM partner?
Interested students should fill in our TANDEM registration form. ABZ will attempt to find a corresponding partner for you. This TANDEM registration form is available at our offices or you can print it out on your own. Just complete the form and submit it personally at our premises or send it by post or as email attachment to sprachtandem@uni-due.de.

Our service is free of charge!

How to fill in the registration form
Target language indicates the language you would like to learn. Please set priorities if you have more than one target language and clearly state which comes first, second etc.

Native language: Please indicate precisely which language(s) your partner can learn from you (normally, this would be your mother tongue or the official language of your country). Please do not offer to exchange a language unless you have profound

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2 This information represents a revised version of part of the eTandem project, for which the University of Bochum is in charge. The development of their pages was funded by the European Union within the project "eTandem Europa".
knowledge of it. Being an expert of your own language and culture yourself, you may expect the same of your partner.

**Notes**

If you wish, you can submit individual requests or make additional remarks in this optional field. We will then try to comply with this additional information in our search for a TANDEM partner.

**Waiting time**

For certain languages demand is considerably higher than supply. This means that in such cases you may have to wait weeks or even months. But don’t get discouraged: Registrations come in daily, so the situation may change very quickly.

**Data Protection**

ABZ will only make use of your personal data in order to find a TANDEM partner and to provide services for you as a learner.

**Learning from your partner**

Neither you nor your TANDEM partner are language teachers - you therefore cannot "teach" each other.

Nevertheless, you are both native speakers of the language the other person is learning. In addition, you know a great deal about life in your own country. You can thereby learn a lot from your TANDEM partner, for he or she can:

1. Serve as a model - you learn from what he says or writes in his native language
2. Help when you don't understand something
3. Help if you want to say something and are not sure how
4. Correct your mistakes
5. Give you information about life in his country

On the following pages you will find additional information about how this works.

**Individual coaching**

Individual coaching by foreign language learning experts on a regular basis can improve the effectiveness of your TANDEM work. ABZ is making efforts to establish a special language learning coaching service at the University of Duisburg-Essen. All students learning one or more languages should talk to their coaches specifically about this coaching service, asking them to correct e.g. pronunciation mistakes. Specially trained language teachers could, for example, make a list of mistakes. With the help of this list, it would be easier for your TANDEM partner to focus his/her mind on this topic and correct you correspondingly. For more tips how to correct, please read Chapter 4.
Learning tips
Learning from your TANDEM partner

1. Learning from your partner’s modelling

You can learn a great deal from what your TANDEM partner says or writes in his native language. This is similar to the learning effect through textbooks or foreign language television, only with TANDEM you have more of a say regarding content.

For example, you could ask your TANDEM partner to:

- write or talk about topics with vocabulary that is important to you
- give you a sample CV or a sample letter of application
- express himself differently (for example, more simply, using more or less slang), use more professional language, etc.

For this to be effective, it is important to remember to adhere to the basic rule of using your native language at least half of the time!

Pay definite attention not only to what your partner is trying to tell you but most especially also how he is expressing himself.

Here are some concrete tips:

**Oral TANDEM**

(telephone, video conferencing, etc.)

- Your partner’s words are soon gone, but there are still ways for you to keep what is important: interrupt your partner if you did not hear or understand something correctly. Ask him to repeat and/or explain himself.

- Repeat passages that are important to you in order to remember them better, and ask your partner to correct you - pronunciation and intonation as well.

- Perhaps you could also take notes to avoid forgetting important expressions.

**Written TANDEM**

(e-mail, letters, instant messaging, etc.)

- Make sure that you will be able to work with the texts later: save them (this goes for instant messaging as well), print them and, ideally, put them in a folder.

- Mark phrases and words that are new for you or that you had forgotten.

- Make sure that you will not forget what you may need again later. (Use your own system for remembering: vocabulary lists or cards, reread texts occasionally, etc.)

Of course, you cannot simply copy everything your partner does: he or she may have a very personal style or regional dialect, may make an occasional mistake here or there, etc. However, it won’t take long to get used to these things.
2. Learning from your partner's help through comprehension aids, explanations and information

If you do not understand something, you can ask your TANDEM partner to:

- translate it into your native language - he learns from this, too
- express the same thing with different words
- give additional examples, explanations or background information

Here are some concrete tips:

**Oral TANDEM** (telephone, video conferencing, etc.)

- Interrupt your TANDEM partner if you have not heard or understood something correctly. This is the only way you can learn something new and simultaneously make sure that you can keep up with the conversation.
- Ask questions (it is fine if you do so in your native language) like: "Could you please repeat that?" "What does that mean in English?" "Is that the same as ... in English?" "Can that be used in other contexts?"

**Written TANDEM** (e-mail, letters, instant messaging, etc.)

- Your TANDEM partner can't answer your questions until he writes his next message. Therefore, it is a good idea to start out by using your dictionary; certain things will become clearer after reading the message more than once.
- But be sure to ask your partner if you are unsure if you have understood everything correctly or if you need additional explanations.
- When you explain to your partner what you have not understood, you can naturally also use your native language.

Once in a while you will not understand something because, for example, you are not familiar with the country-specific connotations: ask your TANDEM partner about them.

Your TANDEM partner may not be able to answer all of your questions, yet you can still learn new things from all of his explanations.

3. Learning from your partner's help with phrasing

If you would like to say something (in the foreign language) and do not know how, then you first have to try and somehow make yourself understood (Step 1):

- Say it in your native language (which your partner is learning)
- Try to somehow express what you want to say in the foreign language and don't be afraid to risk making mistakes
- Use other aids such as drawings, gestures, etc.
It is important not to just be content with your partner understanding what you mean, for then you have not learned anything new and will be confronted with the same problem the next time around.

Therefore **(Step 2):** Ask your partner to tell you how he would have expressed himself in your position.

And **(Step 3):** Make sure that you remember the new phrasings next time (through notes, highlighting the text, by saying them over and over again, etc.).

Here are some **concrete tips:**

**Oral TANDEM**

- Don't be afraid to interrupt the flow of conversation with questions - this is the way you learn.
- If you still feel quite unsure of yourself, then first try saying the entire sentence in your native language and then ask your partner for a translation.
- If you can already say quite a bit in the foreign language, then stop every time there is something that you cannot express. Try to find another way of saying in the foreign language or say it in your own language and ask your partner for help.
- If you ask your partner to repeat the entire sentence, then you can pay close attention to the right intonation and pronunciation.
- In any case, you should repeat the entire sentence as often as possible until you can say it correctly and fluently.

**Written TANDEM**

- If you do not know a certain expression, rewrite it in the foreign language or replace it in your native language. You can ask your partner to give you the correct way of saying it by using an agreed upon system of marking (e.g. using brackets [...]).
- If you are unsure as to whether you have expressed something correctly or not, mark this place with your agreed upon mark (for example, [?]).
- If you want to make sure that what you have written is not only understandable but also stylistically perfect, you can also ask your partner to rewrite entire paragraphs as he would have expressed them in your place.

**4. Learning from your partner's corrections**

You can only learn from your mistakes if you are made aware of them - otherwise the wrong way of saying something becomes ingrained. Therefore, it is very important that you ask your TANDEM partner to correct your mistakes.

Please remember in this regard that your TANDEM partner is not a language teacher. He will usually not be able to explain grammatical rules to you, just as you might find this difficult to do in your native language.
However, you can both say with a good deal of certainty if a sentence in your language is correct or incorrect and how you would express something yourself.

In TANDEM, each learner determines what he wants to learn and how. Regarding corrections, this means:

- It is your responsibility to let your TANDEM partner know what and how he should make corrections for you (e.g. by marking spelling mistakes with an *, paying particular attention to verb forms or pronunciation, etc.).

- You should only correct what your partner wants you to correct.

Here are some concrete tips:

- Pay attention to the indirect corrections your partner makes: if he expresses the same thing to you in a different way, you may have used an incorrect or clumsy form.

**Oral TANDEM**

(telephone, video conferencing, etc.)

- With oral TANDEM, your partner has to pay attention to what you are saying and how you are saying it simultaneously - and this is not always easy. Also, you can easily get used to mistakes and then not hear them.

- Perhaps your partner does not like to interrupt you, thinking it might upset you. Or he plans to bring the mistakes you make to your attention afterwards - but this rarely works. If you wish to be corrected more, you should make a point of encouraging your partner to do so.

- Some mistakes are already automatic: you really know how to say it correctly, but in a conversation you make the same mistakes again and again. These mistakes especially - wrong pronunciation and incorrect sentence structure, for example - can be put right if they are consistently brought to your attention.

- Corrections do not necessarily need to interfere with the flow of conversation. You will quickly learn to pay attention to your partner's corrections and to correct them immediately.

**Written TANDEM**

(e-mail, letters, instant messaging, etc.)

- If you have a text from your TANDEM partner in front of you and can read it as many times as you would like, then it is often tempting to want to correct all of the mistakes. This is, however, not only time consuming for the person making the corrections, but it can also discourage the partner who is learning. Therefore, ask your TANDEM partner to concentrate on a certain type of mistake or to correct a limited number (for example, 8-10) of mistakes, the ones he considers most important.

- If you have the opportunity, use the telephone for making corrections: this allows for more thorough explanations and follow-up questions and usually saves time.
5. Learning from information about your partner's life in his country

When communicating with your TANDEM partner, you not only learn his language - you also learn a great deal about his daily life, his experiences from his profession/school and free time, his opinions and views, etc. Some of this information is only relevant to your partner as an individual and cannot be generalized, but it will definitely still expand your knowledge about life and culture in his country.

On the other hand, your partner cannot replace a dictionary. He does not know everything and can make mistakes, just as you can.

You will be able to learn most if you take his personal experiences and opinions into account: Questions such as "What are the differences between the policies of the parties X and Y?" or "What do people in your country think about …?" (would you always know the answers to such questions?) may put your TANDEM partner under pressure. The following questions would be more appropriate:

"What do you know about the parties X and Y?"

or

"What do you think about …?"

If the topics of discussion are, for example, his profession, his favourite sport or music, then you can certainly regard your TANDEM partner as an expert.
The TANDEM Rules

Now everything has been said, except for these words: Rules to accompany you on your TANDEM trip. Experience gathered from many other TANDEM projects show that there are two rules that may help you to enjoy a successful TANDEM and avoid disturbances.

- **The learner should respect the half-and-half idea**
  Make sure that time is shared equally. Half the time, you will be speaking in the language you’re practicing, and half the time in your own language - to give your exchange partner a chance to practice, too. Use a timer to make sure everyone gets equal practice time. It tells you when to switch languages.

- **TANDEM partnership is binding.**
  When you start a TANDEM partnership, this is as binding as any other seminar. It helps a lot to agree on fixed appointments: on a certain weekday or at a fixed time which you can enter into your personal time manager.

Good luck, have a nice time and enjoy your partnership!