



Jour fixe, 03.11.09

Learning tips

## Learning from your eTandem partner

### 1. Learning from your partner's modelling

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

For example, you could ask your eTandem 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**:

#### Written eTandem

(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.)

#### Oral eTandem

(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.

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 eTandem 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**:

### Written eTandem

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

- Your eTandem 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.

### Oral eTandem

(telephone, video conferencing, etc.)

- Interrupt your eTandem 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?"

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

Your eTandem 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**:

### Written eTandem

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

- 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.

### Oral eTandem

(telephone, video conferencing, etc.)

- 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.

## 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 eTandem partner to correct your mistakes.

Please remember in this regard that your eTandem 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 eTandem, each learner determines what he wants to learn and how. Regarding corrections, this means:

- It is your responsibility to let your eTandem 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.

## Written eTandem

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

- If you have a text from your eTandem 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 eTandem 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.

## Oral eTandem

(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.

## 5. Learning from information about your partner's life in his country

When communicating with your eTandem 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 eTandem 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 eTandem partner as an expert.

*Source:*

<http://www.slf.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/Tandem/etandem/etpartner-en.html>