

## UNDERSTANDING the process

---



### Learn systematically

Few learners can improve their language skills just by listening and speaking. Most learn more efficiently by self-study, practising their newly acquired language knowledge independently and then applying their skills at the Tandem meeting. To assess which of the available learning activities are most effective for you, it is helpful to note down what you actually want to learn, and how you learn best. Also don't forget to note down afterwards whether you have reached your goal! When after a week you look back at your notes, you can safely cross out those learning activities that haven't been helpful for you. Make a new plan for every week.

1

### Learn methodically

While at your Tandem meetings you mainly practise your speaking and listening skills, you can also take advantage of this opportunity to have your Tandem partner correct short texts that you have written. With writing it is easier to concentrate on the correct grammar and to practise patterns that we don't pay attention to while speaking. Choose the learning material that you like best and that most fits your interests. It is worth allowing yourself some time to search for the right learning material. By all means, use more than one textbook or learning software. Variation and different ways of experiencing a language are important for storing - and especially, retrieving! - the language knowledge independent of context. When you repeatedly encounter words and sentence patterns at different places, you will be better able to remember them.

**Phonetics:** Overcome your shyness for having to speak in an unusual intonation. Pay attention to a correct pronunciation right from the start. Search for suitable audio material on the internet, listen to it and repeat the sentences. Train yourself in concentrated listening and try to imitate the sounds. It may also help to read short texts aloud. Record your voice and listen to it afterwards. You'll be surprised how good it sounds!

**Vocabulary:** First learn the vocabulary that you need most. When you encounter too many unknown words when reading a text, be selective. Only translate those words that seem familiar to you and with which you can understand the content of the text. Ignore all the others. As you progress, fewer and fewer words will be unknown. You will find your own way to learn the vocabulary. The most important is that you actively work with the material, make sentences with the new words and have your Tandem partner correct you. For example, you could look for photos and think of suitable captions, make up dialogues to accompany expressive images, and compose vocabulary sets by finding suitable adjectives, synonyms and antonyms to certain words.

**Grammar:** Invest in an up-to-date (!) grammar textbook. Languages change, so it is possible that grammatical forms in old textbooks are no longer used today. Try to find instances of the grammar rules you have just learnt in texts or dialogues. Try to understand why and how these rules are applied here. Then make sure you apply those rules yourself!

**Listening:** Thanks to the internet, hearing foreign languages is not a problem. Understanding them, however, requires practice. Start with small steps. If you are using a textbook with audio material, listen to this material often! You can find additional material on the internet. Advanced learners can have a go at music lyrics or try to understand the news on the internet. The advantage of news programmes is that the pictures help you to understand what the news is about. An additional benefit is that you may already be aware of the content through the news in your own language. Listen to a piece several times. Try to note down words you don't know and look them up in a dictionary. Learn the new words and listen to the same piece again after a couple of days.

**Speaking:** Read a text, underline the keywords (together with the accompanying adjectives and prepositions) and tell your Tandem partner about the content of the text. You can use the keywords as an orientation, but you have to reorder the words and make new transitions between sentences. Although this may not be easy, it will help you learning to speak freely and correctly.

**Writing:** Pay attention to writing the words correctly. Also learn the comma rules of your target language: putting a comma in the wrong place can change the meaning of the sentence! Write dictations: listen to a short audio track, pausing the track after some words or after a sentence and write them down. Then look up in a dictionary whether you have spelled the words correctly. This way, you also practise your listening comprehension, apart from focussing on sentence structure.

## Learn actively

Prepare as well as you can for every meeting. Since your Tandem partner does not give you language lessons, but rather functions as a conversation partner, the input should come from the learner himself, you. The more time you spend on the language beforehand, the better you can formulate specific questions, try out new sentences and bring new words into the conversation. Take notes during your conversation and have a look at them afterwards. Use the words and expressions you have learnt as much as you can, so you will better memorise them. Write for example a short text based on the topic of your conversation. You can find a suitable writing task at the end of each topic sheet.

## Learn continuously

It is better to spend 20 minutes learning every day, than two hours once a week. Also engage in the language at the weekend and on holiday. There is always time for little exercises, short audio tracks, interesting texts and entertaining videos.