

Teletandem

Frequency:

1 hour-long session per week if possible, at a time to be determined with your assigned partner. You should total 4 or 5 sessions before the American students must return their portfolio. The American partners will have to write an account whose dimensions are listed on the last page.

It is best if you agree with your partner on a given time to be the same the whole semester. During each session, half should be in French and the other in English. You can alternate the order of the languages from week to week (e.g. week 1, English-French; week 2, French-English). Do your best to speak only in the target language of that half hour.

To do and not to do during a session:

- Be **aware of the technical limitations**: avoid speaking at the same time as your partner, enunciate clearly, reduce background noise to a maximum, ... It helps if you take time to familiarize yourself with the equipment, and verify that all is in working order (namely, check the camera is turned on and working, that your audio is working...)
- Be **considerate of cultural differences**, including being tolerant and aware that some behaviors may be considered polite in one country but not in the other (e.g. interrupting is not impolite in France). Be aware as well of sensitive topics, which you may be comfortable discussing, but not your partner; kindly switch to a different subject to discuss if you feel this is the case without putting her/him on the spot (but feel free to discuss this in your written report). When expressing an opinion, remember it might not be everyone's: be diplomatic at all times and keep an open mind.
- **Prepare questions/topics** to discuss with your partner: the first few sessions may be awkward, so to avoid too many long silences, it is best to have a few topics prepared or questions written down in advance. (*Can you describe your family? Where do you like to vacation? why? What is your favorite class? why? how do you go to the university everyday? Did you see a movie recently? which one? did you like it? etc...*) Using the topics being studied in class is highly encouraged (*We talked about in class, what do you think?*). Prefer open ended questions over those requiring a simple yes/no answer, it will encourage the conversation.
- Do not expect your partner to know everything about their native language or country, no more than you do of yours. If you have a question they cannot answer, feel free to bring that question to your teacher.
- **Be as honest and earnest** as possible with your partner; yet you don't have to reveal every aspect of your life. This will help build a good partnership and ease the conversations with each session.
- **Take notes during the session**. Write down new vocabulary, interesting observations of your partner's reaction to a question, use of visual cues or different gestures, how you feel, etc...

Topics / questions suggestions for French students:

The latest presidential elections. Trump, Pence, Biden, Harris, the storming of the Capitol, the conspiracy theory of the “stolen election”, the threat to voting rights etc.

The First Amendment and the American press: Trump’s onslaught against the fourth estate.

Freedom of speech on American campuses (cancel culture, boycotts, wokism)

Post-truth politics: how fake news threatens democracy : “Democracy dies in darkness”

Elections and young voters engagement

Social media, the internet and new ways of communicating

The NSA scandal in the USA / Snowden / post 9/11 surveillance

Native Americans: how visible/empowered are they in American society?

What about ethnic minorities?

LGBTI rights in the USA

Healthcare system / Obamacare, Trumpcare

The challenges of the US school system and equal opportunity: “promoting student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access?” / The rising cost of tuition fees.

Is Affirmative Action necessary to achieve diversity and/or equal opportunity?

Segregation in US universities

Fraternities and sororities / Life on campus

What about DREAMers at university?

Many walls and frontiers : “E pluribus unum”? (Il)legal immigration to the USA / the Wall / zero tolerance policy / separated families.

What does it mean to be American today?

The Second Amendment and gun violence: a history of violence.

America’s gun problem today and mass shootings.

To abolish or not to abolish the death penalty?

Black Lives Matter, Blue Lives Matter

Racism, the fight for Civil Rights

The current Supreme Court (Brett Kavanaugh, Neil Gorsuch, Amy Coney Barrett etc.)

#metoo / WeinsteinGate / Women’s rights in the USA

Reproductive rights in the USA / Planned Parenthood

Science, religion and politics. Creationism, Intelligent design, stem cell research etc.

Redefining the American Dream: "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness"

The pursuit of happiness : still a reality? Does the US still make people dream?

Why are Americans so cheery?

What about the creation of a Space Force?

COP21 and the Paris agreement: are we too late on climate change?

The rivalry between China, the USA, Russia.

etc.

American students' account : content suggestions

1. ***the linguistic dimension of teletandem interactions:*** parts of the teletandem sessions when the flow of conversation was interrupted to focus on language: a list of new words that were learned during the teletandem session, words that do not exist in our native languages and that were learned during the session, expressions (formal and informal), translations shared during the session, an interesting feedback on the target language that the partner gave during the session; about interruptions
2. ***the paralinguistic dimension of teletandem interactions:*** write about anything "different" that you see in the webcam images of your partner, about face expressions - are they different? How do you use the webcam images to learn the language? What else do you use the webcam images for? Does your partner make different faces and sounds to express different emotions (when not understanding, when thinking, when confused?) Which ones, describe them? Do you think these are personal, group or cultural characteristics?
3. ***the content dimension of teletandem interactions:*** students can choose a theme (the most interesting) or write an overview of themes that were discussed by the partners during the session, they can justify, give the reasons for writing about that specific theme (dissertation); the instructor can select these tasks according to genre (dissertation, newspaper article, narrative, formal letter, informal letter, message, e-mail message, business letter, recipe, list of themes); were there themes which the partners felt uncomfortable, uneasy, embarrassed to discuss? What could be the reasons for feeling like that?
4. ***the relational dimension of teletandem interactions:*** students can write about the partner, their online relationship, difficulties they are having when interacting, good and difficult points about the relationship, about their exercise of flexibility as they interact with their partners; Is the time for one language and the other well shared? Do you feel comfortable/uncomfortable speaking with your partner? Why?
5. ***the cultural dimension of teletandem interactions:*** certainly, of the most interesting dimensions of teletandem interactions, because of the chance of intercultural contact. Students could write about: dominance in conversation: is there dominance in the interaction? How is that dominance exercised? Are there aspects related to gender that affect your partner's opinions and ways of behaving? Are the themes and conversation based on "marking differences" between your culture and your partner's culture? Focus on "difference" and "similarities" about both cultures and write about them.