Foreign Language Conversation Partners Program

SHU provides a co-curricular program for one-on-one verbal foreign language exchange between two students, as a mechanism for building speaking skills. When you participate in the program, you will be partnered with a student who is a native speaker of the language you are learning. With your partner, you will engage in conversation in that language. Conversely, your partner is learning your language, and you will in turn provide conversation practice for your partner in your language.

How it works

The LRC assigns a conversation partner to you based on the information and preferences you provide when you sign up. You make a commitment to meet regularly for the duration of the semester. You spend the first half of each meeting speaking in one of the languages; during the second half of your meeting, you converse in the other language.

How to Sign Up!

It’s easy to sign up for the Conversation Partners Program!

You can sign up:

- In person at the Language Resource Center (Fahy Hall Room 202)
- Online at: http://www.shu.edu/academics/artsci/language-resource-center/

One-on-one conversation with a native speaker benefits you by:

- Providing you with an opportunity for real and extended foreign language practice.
- Allowing you to set the pace for your own progress.
- Providing you with feedback that addresses your individual needs.
- Giving you access to cultural insights first-hand.

The Conversation Partners Program collaborates with the following departments:

Modern Languages
Asian Studies
English as a Second Language
The Ruth Sharkey Academic Resource Center
Frequently Asked Questions

How long do we talk in the language I’m learning?
You and your partner agree to spend an equal amount of time in each language. We recommend meetings of one hour, allowing you to dedicate a ½ hour to each language.

Will I be able to talk for 30 minutes in the language I’m learning?
Yes. You determine the difficulty and complexity of the conversation. Your partner will adapt his language to your skill level. You are not expected to speak without error for 30 minutes. Your partner is understanding, and is in the same situation when you change languages.

What do we talk about?
You can talk about any topic that interests you and your partner agrees to discuss with you. We’ll give you some ideas to get you started or to keep the conversation going if you run out of topics.

Will my conversation partner be at the same level in my language as I am in his or her language?
Not necessarily. Partners at the same stage of language learning share common experiences and difficulties in their learning and can therefore identify directly with their partner’s difficulties. However, a partnership between learners at different stages can provide a chance for more advanced speakers to reflect about differences between the languages they would otherwise not have noticed. In addition, it can provide a chance for less advanced speakers to be helped by someone who has just recently overcome the same difficulties they are experiencing.

Basic Guidelines

- Meet at least once a week. Set a specific time to meet. Do not commit to a meeting time unless you are certain you will be able to honor that commitment.
- If you cannot make your scheduled meeting, contact your partner in advance.
- Choose a public location (such as the library, the LRC or the ARC) for at least the first few meetings.
- Learners should be prepared and able to do as much for their partner as they themselves expect from their partner.
- Be sensitive to the language learning needs of your partner.
- Use the conversation starters guide, or other materials you are interested in sharing, to find a topic that is appropriate to your skill level.
- Make sure you spend equal time in each language.
- The LRC will not share your personal information with your conversation partner. Use good judgment when sharing any personal information.
- Contact the Language Resource Center if you cannot continue to meet.
- Share your experience with us, both good and bad, so we can improve the service for you and future participants.
Keys to a successful conversation partnership

Neither you nor your partner is a language teacher, but you are both native speakers of the language the other person is learning. Therefore, you can learn from your partner when he or she:

♦ Serves as a role model
  - As the learner: listen closely to your partner. Rephrase and repeat, to make sure you understood, and to practice the phrasing yourself.
  - As the native speaker: encourage your partner with follow up questions. If your partner is describing one family member, ask him to describe another one.

♦ Helps you when you don’t understand something
  - As the learner: ask about words or phrases you don’t understand. Restate or rephrase the words in question. Ask if the words require a specific context.

♦ Helps you if you want to say something, and are not sure how
  - As the learner: don’t get discouraged if your partner does not understand your first attempt to express an idea.

♦ Corrects your mistakes
  - As the learner: make an agreement with your partner about how much of your language you want to be corrected. Don’t hesitate to ask your partner to correct your grammar or pronunciation.
  - As the native speaker: correct your partner when asked. Remember that it may be better to allow the conversation to flow rather than correct every single mistake.
  - As the learner: listen closely when your partner restates what you’ve said for indirect corrections.

About learning a language with a conversation partner
Language learning with a conversation partner is autonomous learning which does not replace language courses but complements them. It serves much the same function as independent preparation and follow-up work at home, learning from foreign language newspapers, books, radio broadcasts, and television programs or videos.