



Study Buddy Activities for Online Language Learning

Study Buddy activities are a form of cooperative learning, or peer-to-peer learning, where learners are paired up with another learner in order to complete a specific task. This type of student-to-student interaction is a component of online community building as described in the [Community of Inquiry framework](#). An assigned learning partner for several weeks can serve as an impetus for building relationships and trust in the online space. In addition to any learning goals that are achieved by the activity, learners with less online learning experience may gain useful insights into what it takes to meet and get to know someone in an online setting.

Study Buddy activities may also be a useful time management strategy for course designers and instructors. Unlike instructor-to-student interaction, student-to-student learning is scalable. Instructors can only provide a limited amount of one-to-one interaction with learners, whereas learners can experience more frequent interaction in target language when paired with each other. As long as tasks are supported with specific goals, learners will be able to take social relationships beyond mere socializing and use them for effective learning.

Study Buddy activities in an online language learning context can be a powerful type of interaction to include in the design of your course or activity. Language is a socially negotiated product, and having a buddy to practice language with in pursuit of specific goals is a natural fit for language learning. The required presence of another person can also help to alleviate the potential feeling that learners are by themselves in the online space. Study Buddy activities can be particularly effective towards the start of an activity or course, while learners are new to the online space and are still exploring how to build their own presence.

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There are many websites that list cooperative language learning activities – search and use what suits you and your context. On the following pages are three Study Buddy ideas that you can use or adapt.



Study Buddy Ideas

SUMMARIZE DISCUSSION FORUMS

Activity description

This Study Buddy activity is designed so that partners must work together to process information and create an output that is useful for the entire class. It may be used solely as a written assignment; however, including an audio element will add to the variety of language skills experienced in the class and can increase digital literacy proficiency.

Activity instructions

When a discussion in the forums is coming to a close, one pair of study buddies must process the discussion and summarize it for the rest of the class. Buddies should work together to:

- sift through the discussion
- pick out the salient points
- position the selected information in a logical order
- create an audio recording of their summary
- post the audio file in the discussion forum for everyone to hear and use as a review later on in the course

Depending on the number of discussion forums used in the class and the number of study buddy pairs, pairs can take turns summarizing each discussion. Assessment can hinge on the use of language, pronunciation, and the selection of information, but it should not consider the skill level of using audio recording software. Have learners focus on creating effective introductions and conclusions, and the inclusion of key ideas and concepts from the discussion. Paraphrasing is one language skill that you might want to scaffold in this activity.

As a facilitator, you need to be careful about asking learners to use technology in superfluous ways. Requiring language learners to learn and use audio recording software might be one of the more useful digital literacy skills that you can promote in your class. Audio recording software is useful for language learners in bringing more robust language skills into the online space, where text (reading and writing) often dominate. There are also plenty of low cost, free, and simple to use recording software available online. See [this list](#) for examples of audio recording software.



DAILY LIFE DISCUSSION

Activity description

Study Buddies who are able to connect multiple times throughout the week to talk about language and culture will build habits of using target language and engaging with the course more frequently. The additional advantage of bringing authentic experience into the class will draw from the learners' own daily context, making the course content more relatable to their own life and prior learning.

Activity instructions

Have learners check in with each other two times each per week (or, two times each over the period of two weeks) to discuss a real-life, daily event. The event can be a common occurrence such as ordering coffee, going to a restaurant, going to the bank, taking the train, or another of their choosing. Learners should discuss details such as:

- the language used
- the formality of language
- new vocabulary and phrases
- the differences of a similar event in their own country
- any feelings or emotions they experienced

Learners should take turns in describing an event to their partner, so that only one learner describes an event each time they connect. This will help to clarify roles when they are conversing, and it will also help to promote more frequent interaction throughout the week for shorter durations. It may be strategic to allow learners to communicate by whatever method they choose. This will encourage learners to use target language as they try to negotiate an agreed way and time to communicate. The presence of cultural topics and authentic experience make this an excellent activity for language learning contexts. Additionally, learners can present highlights of their discussion to the class, in an email to the facilitator, or in a conference call with the facilitator and classmates.



PRESENT A CURRENT EVENT

Activity description

Including a presentation activity in your course will get your study buddies working together in target language to plan and rehearse. The presentation platform, a web-conference room for example, will give them experience with presentations technology, improving or solidifying their digital literacy skills. As well, connecting the presentation to a current event will bring real-world authenticity to your class and relevance to your planned content.

Activity instructions

Have study buddies search for and select a current news story that is relevant to the course. They should plan a short presentation and present it to the rest of the class. Alternatively, if your context does not allow for synchronous activities, learners can record the presentation and post it in the online space. The presentations should be short to reduce cognitive load for learners, and can include the following instructions:

- Find a current news article or video that is related to the class.
- Plan a two to three-minute presentation on the news article.
- Include reasons why you chose this new story.
- Explain how the story relates to language learning or to this class.
- State both of your short opinions about the story.
- Predict what you think will happen next to the people in the story.

Provide learners with searchable news websites or useful keywords that they can use to search. As well, if learners are using a technology to present, ensure that they have training and time to practice with the technology. If they are recording, ensure that they have support. Technology skill should not be a part of the assessment for this task; it should also not be a source of frustration for learners. Assess learners on use of language, pronunciation, and the organization of information. A “question and answer” period can also involve other classmates and even be part of an assessment.

