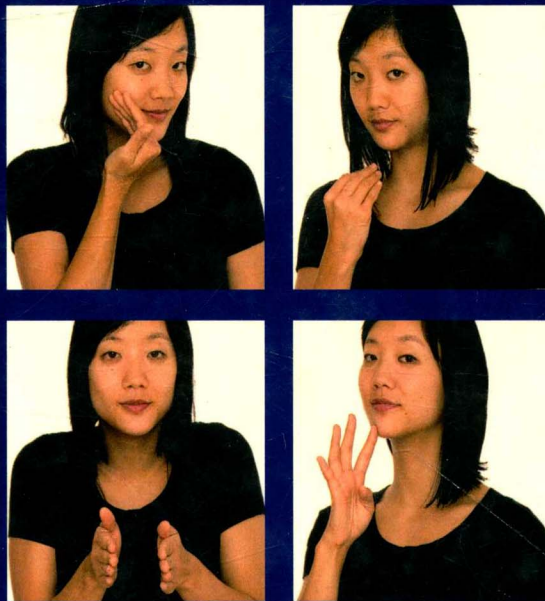


BARRON'S DICTIONARY OF AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE



GEOFFREY S. POOR

PROFESSOR OF ASL

NATIONAL TECHNICAL INSTITUTE FOR THE DEAF

- **More than 1,000 signs shown with cross-references to synonyms in the dictionary**
- **Each sign demonstrated in a close-up color photo**
- **Includes notes on the history of sign language**

AN INVALUABLE RESOURCE FOR PEOPLE WHO WANT TO LEARN ASL AND
ANYONE WHO WORKS WITH DEAF PEOPLE

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ASL CONSULTANT & SIGNING MODEL
CHRISTINE KIM

BARRON'S

This dictionary is dedicated to those who created and defended the stage upon which ASL grew and flourished, most prominently Lauren Clerc, Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet and his son Edward Miner Gallaudet, and George Veditz. The book is also dedicated to the National Association of the Deaf and to the many ASL teachers and researchers who have taught and illuminated this wonderful language.

About Christine Kim: Christine Kim, a deaf native signer, grew up in Orange County, California and attended University High School. She received her BS degree in Interdisciplinary Studies: Fine Arts and New Media Design from the Rochester Institute of Technology, and her Master of Fine Arts in Studio Arts from the School of Visual Arts in New York City. She currently lives in New York City where she works as a freelance educator in the arts.

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Introduction

When seeing American Sign Language (ASL) for the first time, people often describe it as “beautiful” and “fascinating.” Its endless variety of movement, sometimes slow and graceful and other times sharp and staccato, combine with playfulness and changes in facial expression to create an eloquent visual world rich in subtlety and precision. Since its beginnings in the early nineteenth century, with roots in French Sign Language, it has evolved into the dynamic language we know today through some odd twists of history and some extraordinary characters. This introduction will examine this history, and then discuss some of the many aspects of ASL that are different from English.

THE HISTORY OF ASL

In 1814, in Hartford, Connecticut, Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet was about to launch an unanticipated career change. Home after his graduation from the Andover Theological Seminary, and as his son Edward Miner Gallaudet wrote in a biography, “preaching occasionally, and waiting for some decided indication of Providence as to the path of duty,” Gallaudet noticed that Alice Cogswell, the nine-year-old daughter of a neighbor, was not talking with the other children. When he learned she was deaf, he started teaching her words by writing them in the dirt and pointing to the objects they represented. “Hat” was easy enough, as were people’s names, but going beyond these simple concepts was far more difficult.

Gallaudet was already an accomplished man at the age of 28. He’d entered Yale University at the age of 15 and graduated in three years. He studied law independently and did his apprenticeship, then returned to Yale to earn his Masters degree. He became a traveling salesman in Kentucky and Ohio, and was profoundly affected by the poverty suffered by rural children. This, combined with his family’s strong Protestant background, led him to theology. He decided to become a traveling preacher.

As he worked with Alice, though, his priorities began to shift. Although he had considerable success with her he also became more and more aware of what he did not know. How can teaching happen without language? How can English be taught to someone who cannot hear it?

“Hearing” people study English through books, yes, but only after they spend the first years of their lives listening to it and then speaking it. And, in an echo of the religious motivation that Gallaudet would soon discover in Europe, how can those without language become true Christians?

Alice’s father, Mason Fitch Cogswell, was a prominent and well-connected physician in the Hartford area. He’d long been searching for a way to educate his daughter, and knew that methods for teaching deaf children had been developed and were in use in England and France; England employed “articulation,” using spoken English and lip-reading (or “speechreading”) to teach deaf students, while France used sign language. He had a book of the French manual alphabet. He gathered some friends and got commitments—in one day—for enough money to send someone to Europe to learn their methods, with the goal of returning to Hartford and establishing a school for deaf children. Gallaudet was the obvious choice. After considerable hesitation, considering himself unqualified for the job, he agreed.

In London and Edinburgh he found little help and cooperation from those he anticipated would be keen to share their teaching methods. However, while in London, he met the Abbé Roch Sicard, a teacher at the school for the deaf in Paris.

The French school’s approach to communication and teaching was completely different from the English articulation method. The English school emphasized making spoken language visible through speechreading and writing, and required the deaf students to express themselves with their own voices. No signs, or “manual communication” were used or permitted. Their aim was to minimize the effect of deafness by giving the students as much of the hearing world’s communication as possible.

Sicard’s approach was based on the recognition that people unable to hear language can best communicate with a truly visual language. In other words, if the ears aren’t available, instruction must make maximum use of the eyes. But there are many facets to this simple principle. While it’s true that speechreading makes use of the eyes for receiving information, it’s merely a secondary form of the spoken language. The primary form of English, of course, is speech; reading and speechreading

are secondary modes of receiving spoken language. Hearing people are able to learn reading and writing as well as they do, usually starting at the age of five, largely because they first spend those preceding years listening to the language and essentially mastering its primary form. What they see on the page, whether it's just a "t" or a full word, is a representation of sound to which they have attached meaning through countless repetitions and variations. There is always more vocabulary to learn, and idioms and grammatical nuances, but this is overlay; they are quite competent users of the language when they start to learn reading and writing.

It is for this reason that mastering reading and writing is an extraordinarily difficult challenge for those who lose their hearing before acquiring language. When all those words and meanings have to be learned first through the written form of the language, or, far less precisely, through speechreading (under the best circumstances, 40 percent of the English language is visible through speechreading), the process of learning the language becomes much more complicated. Speechreading and writing are not visual languages—they are visual codes for spoken languages. True sign languages come into being just as spoken languages do, through natural evolution driven by the need to communicate.

When Gallaudet arrived in France his first job was to begin learning French Sign Language (FSL). His tutor was Laurent Clerc, one of the deaf men he'd met in London, who had graduated from the school and was now its senior teacher. Various members of the faculty also taught Gallaudet their teaching methods, but it was Clerc, a man of impressive accomplishments, who was by far the biggest influence, and a deep friendship grew between them. After a few months, Gallaudet felt it was time to return to Hartford but did not feel that he'd learned enough to start a school on his own. In discussing his dilemma with Clerc, the Frenchman unexpectedly offered to accompany him back to America and help him set up the school.

Gallaudet and Clerc reached Hartford on June 22nd, 1816. His sponsors had not been idle during his absence. They had secured more funding, from both private sources and the Connecticut state legislature, and on April 15, 1817, the "Connecticut Asylum for the Education and Instruction of Deaf and Dumb Persons," opened its doors with, of course, Alice Cogswell as the first of the initial group of seven students. (The phrases "Deaf and Dumb" and "Deaf-Mute," relics of another era, are today considered offensive and their use has all but disappeared.) In less than two years, as the student body grew and students from other states attended, the name

was changed to "The American Asylum at Hartford, for the Education and Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb," and finally to the American School for the Deaf, as it is known today.

As Gallaudet and Clerc, along with the faculty they recruited, began to teach their students, a language evolution took place. Students, of course, did not present themselves as linguistic *tabulae rasae*. They did not all arrive profoundly deaf; some had various degrees of "residual hearing" that could be used for learning some spoken language. Some of those who were profoundly deaf had become so not at birth but in later years—scarlet fever was a leading cause—and those students might have had several years of learning and using English before their hearing loss occurred. More significantly for the growth of ASL, many students arrived with home signs.

In the early decades of the nineteenth century, with most travel and communication in New England limited to foot and horse power, there was no way for deaf people, scattered as they were, to discover each other and congregate—meaning that there was no standardization in the signing they brought to the school. There was no language community, and no communication system can evolve into a language without a community of a certain size, a critical mass. The school provided that. Gallaudet and Clerc taught signing to the teachers, the teachers taught the students, and, most importantly and dynamically of all, the students adapted it to their own purposes. It is axiomatic of any natural language that its users will find a way to express whatever needs expressing; the teachers used signing to discuss history, math, religion, and woodworking, but the students also used this wonderful visual language—with no struggling to read lips and printed words, a language to which they could apply their own creativity—to discuss all those serious and frivolous things that children and adolescents everywhere do, and to play, poke fun at their teachers and dorm supervisors, and laugh together.

This was not the only use of signing in the New World at that time. The plains Indians used signs for communication between tribes when there was no common spoken language, although this appears to have been more a collection of vocabulary than an actual language. (One sign for "to die," simple and clear, was the index finger held up vertically in front of the signer, then gradually falling forward to the horizontal.) And on the island of Martha's Vineyard, off the coast of Massachusetts, hereditary deafness grew in the limited gene pool to the point where such a large percentage of the population was deaf—twice the national average in all, but up to 50 percent in some places—that their own

variety of signing was in effect a second language for the island. There were so many deaf people, mixing and marrying freely amongst both themselves and the hearing population, that signing was often used as a matter of course in public areas.

But these other varieties of signing seem to have had limited impact on the deaf community of New England in the 1800s, and so ASL today is a combination of French Sign Language and the home signs that arrived with the students, all mixed together in a joyous cauldron fueled by human imagination and creativity.

Inventor Alexander Graham Bell possessed a powerful intellect of extraordinary depth and breadth, and his interests ranged from the medical to the agricultural to the mechanical. His strongest passion in life, however, was not the kind of pursuit that led to his invention of the telephone. The son and grandson of “elocutionists”—public speakers and speech therapists—his great interest was teaching speech to deaf people. Even his signature invention was the result of an agreement with his bride’s father, Gardiner Hubbard. A lawyer and entrepreneur, Hubbard agreed to provide financial support to the new family, enabling Bell to pursue speech teaching. In return, Bell was required to devote a specified number of hours each day to his work on the telephone, which Hubbard saw as a great investment opportunity.

Mabel Hubbard, Bell’s wife, was his first student. She was deaf but never learned sign language. This fitted into Bell’s image of a successful deaf person; his mother was hard of hearing, and although she had trouble speechreading, she was able to engage in conversations and played the piano.

In Europe, the education of deaf people was still split into two camps: the “oralists,” who felt that all deaf people could be taught to speak and should therefore be educated through those means exclusively, and the “manualists,” who believed that a natural visual language was best for communicating with and teaching deaf students. When the controversy spilled across the Atlantic, the oralists found a ready and energetic champion in Alexander Bell.

The basis of the disagreement went far beyond teaching methods. At its core were opposing views on what the very purpose of deaf education should be. For Bell and the oralists, it was solely to enable them to integrate into the larger hearing world; they viewed deafness as something of a calamity (although this was merely a stronger form of a common attitude—even Clerc referred to deaf people as “poor unfortunates”), and its only proper mitigation was to make them, in

effect, less deaf. For the manualists the goal was broader: the development of deaf people to their maximum potential. While Thomas Gallaudet and his son Edward Miner Gallaudet, who carried forward his father’s work, tried to turn their students into educated, happy and well-adjusted deaf adults, Bell wanted them to become as much like hearing people as possible.

Astonishingly, the reason Bell was so unalterably opposed to the use of signing in education was also a major reason Edward Gallaudet supported it: it is so very effective. Gallaudet appreciated how well sign language can impart information to those who can’t hear, and how natural and comfortable manual communication can be. Bell knew this also, but felt that deaf students who knew sign language would use it whenever possible, to the detriment of learning speech skills.

At two European conferences of the International Congress of Educators of the Deaf, in 1880 and 1900, the oralists swept aside the manualists with the cry, “*Vive la parole!* Long live speech!” These were decisions made by hearing people; at the second conference, when deaf participants arrived to support the manualist cause, they were denied participation. One member justified the exclusion, and illuminated the attitude of the conference, this way: “Since when does the physician consult with the patient on the nature of the cure?”

What followed was something of a dark age for sign language in America. In the oralist tide that swept the country, most deaf teachers were fired, regardless of talent, dedication and experience. No signing was permitted in the classroom, and it was often forbidden on the playground as well. Hands were slapped and punishments given for those caught communicating with their hands. The goal was to eradicate signing in the schools by forbidding its use, but the horse was already well out of the barn. Languages aren’t eliminated by rules and policies. Signing continued to thrive in dorm rooms and on playgrounds when no one was looking simply because it was the best way to communicate.

In 1960, a hearing English teacher named William Stokoe was on the faculty of Gallaudet College. Sign language was the *lingua franca* of the college, of course, but nationally it held a lowly status, generally considered something less than a language, mere broken English and gestures. Stokoe saw something else—he noticed that every time a signer asked a yes/no question, the signers’ eyebrows went up at the end of the sentence. He studied other signers, and noticed that they all did this. He quickly broadened his research and had soon identified many other behaviors among signers that were used consistently and uniformly. He had discovered that ASL

was governed by grammatical rules—that ASL was a true language. In 1965 he published *A Dictionary Of American Sign Language On Linguistic Principles*.

This was the nudge that turned the battleship. With signing recognized as a language, schools for the deaf began to rethink their insistence on oralism. Many years had passed since the height of Bell's influence, and the civil rights movement stimulated a greater openness to Gallaudet's perspective on human potential as it related to deaf students. Schools for the deaf began to adopt signing, but not yet ASL. Instead, they generally used manual codes for English—while they accepted that speech was less important than had been believed in the past, they recognized the value of reading and writing skills, and thought signing which presented English visually would be most effective. A Tower of Babel emerged as invented systems sprouted during the 1970s: Seeing Exact English, Seeing Essential English, Linguistics of Visual English (LOVE), etc. Some were logical and attempted to add common sense visual markers to ASL vocabulary, and some were nightmares of language butchery that served only to confuse. By the 1990s these artificial systems were waning in schools for the deaf (and the use of ASL growing), although they held on longer in “mainstream” programs where deaf students are taught in their local public schools with interpreters alongside their hearing peers. The latest strong signing movement in deaf education is the “bi-lingual/bi-cultural” approach—giving deaf students a strong foundation in their natural visual language, ASL, and the culture of the American deaf community, while also teaching them English as a second language.

Throughout all these changes, and the overlays of hearing paternalism, however well-meaning, ASL has maintained its position as the natural language among the American deaf population.

Today there is greater use and acceptance of ASL than ever before. It is the fourth most used language in America. The National Association of the Deaf, formed in 1880 to counteract the oralist movement, has some 20,000 members; their biennial conferences draw about 2,000 participants from all over the country for workshops, arts and celebrations (they tend to take over the conference hotels, turning the tables on the hearing businessman who finds himself the only person in the elevator that doesn't know what everyone's laughing about). Thousands of college and university ASL classes are offered every semester, often with long waiting lists. Many colleges and high schools around the country accept ASL for fulfillment of foreign language requirements.

Why? ASL is a beautiful and playful language, and it's fun. It's extremely plastic; signs can be changed, or inflected, in large and small ways to convey a huge range of meanings. Its graceful movements provide endless possibilities for humor. Stories in ASL are visual journeys; characters disappear and reappear with a glance, plot lines diverge and twist, and worlds are created in space, all guided by the signer's personality and creativity.

Gallaudet College is now Gallaudet University and is the only liberal arts college for deaf students in the world. In 1968 congress created the National Technical Institute for the Deaf, nested in a hearing university as one of the colleges of the Rochester Institute of Technology; both Gallaudet University and NTID have about 1,200 students, most from the 50 states but many from around the world.

LINGUISTICS OF AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE

The most obvious difference between ASL and English is, of course, that it's a visual language. But let's examine this a little more deeply. A spoken language like English enters the brain for processing through the ear. This is an entirely passive process. Ears never become fatigued with this process because no muscles are involved—it's not work. Brains may become tired from trying to understand what's being heard, but not the ear.

Not so the eye, which works like a muscle to focus on images. Eyes do become tired. Partly because of this, ASL has evolved in a way that is more spatial than linear. Instead of spoken words following each other one by one, ASL uses the “signing space” in front of the signer's body to convey a lot of information simultaneously. For example, the English phrase “that boy over there,” requiring the four words spoken consecutively, can be rendered in ASL in an instant, with one hand signing BOY and the other pointing to over there. The sign HAPPY requires not just a movement of the hands, but a matching facial expression; to express “very happy,” no additional sign is needed. Instead, the movement of the hands is changed (inflected), and the facial expression increased accordingly, to modify the meaning.

THE NATURE OF SIGNS

There are certain conventions in the production of signs, and learning them helps in understanding how the language works. Sometimes called the “parameters” of signs, these are handshape, location, movement, and palm orientation. (As we'll see below, facial expression and other non-manual behaviors are very important

when vocabulary is used in sentences, but these four describe the basics of how vocabulary is produced.) These parameters are pretty self-explanatory—handshape is the shape made with the fingers and palm, location is where the sign is made (near the forehead, at the chest, etc.), movement is where the hands start and finish during the sign (right to left, up to down, across the chin, etc.), and palm orientation refers to which direction the palms are facing during the sign (left, right, in, down, etc.).

It's good to get a grasp of these parameters, as a subtle change in just one of them can make quite a difference. The signs *COFFEE* and *MAKE* have exactly the same handshape, location and palm orientation, and are differentiated only by a subtle difference in movement. *FATHER* and *MOTHER* are identical in movement, handshape and orientation, and only the location is different.

ASL has both iconic and arbitrary signs. Iconic signs look like what they mean, and there are many of them; it's one of the reasons ASL is so much fun to learn and use. The sign for *TREE* is the right forearm raised vertically from the elbow, which is based on the back of the flat left hand, palm down. The right hand's five fingers are splayed out and wiggling. In this we can easily see a trunk with branches and leaves at the top. *HOUSE* is signed with two flat hands whose fingertips meet pointing up at an angle, showing the peak of a roof; the two hands then move out and down, indicating the walls. *GO* is two index fingers moving towards a direction, and *COME* is two index fingers moving toward the signer. *ACCEPT* is two open hands closing to "O" handshapes at the chest. The sign *SPIDER* looks like ... well, like a spider. (A spoken language like English has no visual iconicity, of course, but has something similar in onomatopoeia, where a word sounds like what it means—click, clink, boom, swish, buzz.)

Another kind of iconicity can be seen, we believe, in some signs that have come to us from FSL. The sign for female is an "A" handshape with the thumb moving down the side of the jaw a couple of times, and this is said to represent the strap of a French woman's bonnet; likewise, the sign for male, an "O" handshape opening and closing twice above the signer's forehead, would reflect the brim of a Frenchman's hat. Many signs having to do with gender incorporate these locations: *SON*, *SISTER*, *BROTHER*, *NIECE*, *NEPHEW*, etc. Other signs that seem to have come from FSL are examples of initialization—using the first letter of a spoken language's word, together with movement, to create a sign for that meaning. *SEE* is a "V" handshape, palm toward the signer, moving out from the eye, and *voir* is the French word for see. *LOOK FOR* is a

"C" handshape circling in front of the face, likely from the French word *chercher*. These signs probably go back to FSL as it evolved among the students and teachers at the French school and was brought to America by Thomas Gallaudet and Laurent Clerc.

Arbitrary signs have no apparent visual relation to their meaning. *ALCOHOL* is the right fist bouncing on the left; both hands have the index and little fingers extended. *APPLE* is an "X" handshape twisting at the cheek. *INSECT* is a "3" handshape with the thumb touching the nose and the other two fingers crooking in a couple of times, and *SOON* is the "F" handshape with the thumb and forefinger together bouncing on the chin; obviously, these signs' meaning cannot be guessed from what they look like.

ASL has its own ways of handling time and verb tenses. In English, verbs must agree with the time frame: "I worked yesterday until 3:00, then I went home." In ASL, once the time has been established in a conversation or story, that is the assumed tense until someone changes it. In an ASL translation of the example above, there would be no indication in the production of the sign for work that it's past tense; the sign yesterday takes care of it. When no time indication is signed, it usually means the present tense is being used.

Signs also make use of the "time line," running from behind the signer's right shoulder, over it and forward (past to future), to add a wide variety of options for using time and space. A flat straight handshape moving forward along this line (see the sign *WILL*) means in the general future; farther forward means farther into the future. A flat handshape bending and waving back over the shoulder means the past, and a longer movement means farther back in time. Facial expression is necessary also; the sign inflection meaning "very recently" is accompanied by squinting eyes, pursed lips and the right shoulder and chin moving closer together. "Far in the past" involves puffed cheeks, wide eyes and a slight lean back. "Once upon a time" has two flat hands moving back over the right shoulder in complementary circles; the larger the circles, the more distant the time.

Signs can take advantage of the time line in other ways. The sign *FAIL*, repeated a few times, each a bit forward from the last, means "will fail repeatedly into the future." Sometimes the hands aren't even needed to change the time; a simple quick lifting of the right shoulder towards the chin while telling a story (with the appropriate facial expression, of course) brings the time closer to the present from the past, and these indications are always relative to the context of the story. When talking about something that happened a few decades

ago, a slight shoulder lift could mean “but in recent years” and a more pronounced lift could mean “in recent months.” If the context is a couple of weeks ago, a shoulder lift could mean “the other day.”

Because signed languages do not have written forms, and video technology has only recently made sign language recordings possible, we have little direct evidence of the changes that ASL has undergone as it evolved on this side of the Atlantic. But some early writings and a bit of fascinating film footage from 1914, produced by the National Association of the Deaf, give us some glimpses. HELP was once signed with the right palm supporting the bent left elbow and moving it forward; today, probably for reasons of economy, the right palm is under the left fist in an “A” handshape. Other changes have taken place with the signs for LOVE and HAVE.

USE OF SPACE AND PRONOUNS

When referring to nouns in an English conversation, whether people, places, objects or even concepts, we use their labels and names: Emily; Rome; the car. For a shortcut, we use pronouns: she, it, us, and so on. ASL pronouns use space. For example, if the signer is talking about Emily, but she's not present, he identifies her and points in the general direction of where she is or where the signer places her for the purposes of the story. After that, the signer need only to point there again to refer to her (this is called indexing). This way of handling pronouns often gives them greater precision and economy than English pronouns. ASL can use indexing for two or three people, and because they are placed in exact locations, who's being referred to is always clear. In a story about a fishing trip, for instance, once the characters have been identified ASL can talk about their interactions using only pronouns—pointing to the people you're talking about. If you tried this in English, it would wind up like this: “When my father and my brothers Al and Fred got to the lake, he turned to him and said...” We're already lost!

VERB DIRECTIONALITY AND ADVERBS

Space can be even more dynamically used in a signed conversation or story with verb directionality. To show interactions among people and things, English uses word order and prepositions: “My mother helped me;” “I borrowed money from the bank.” ASL uses space and verb directionality to express the same meanings, reducing the number of signs needed. In context, because the locations of my mother and me are

established, the signer need only inflect the basic sign HELP, moving it in a line from Mom to herself. By varying her effect and the sign's movement, she can also convey her mother's attitude about the whole thing and how much or often she does it; whether she's helping willingly or reluctantly, whether it's hard or easy, and whether she helps once, repeatedly, or over a long period of time. With these inflections, ASL needs just one sign to say: “My mother reluctantly helped me over and over.”

CLASSIFIERS

Classifiers are handshapes that specify what an object is doing or its shape, and sometimes both. They have meaning only when referring to an established noun, whether by label or context. A “3” handshape, positioned horizontally with the palm in, can represent a car, a hay wagon, an ocean liner or a rowboat—any land or water vehicle—but it must be identified first. Movements of the hand can say that the vehicle is going forward, backward, fast, slow, sinking, etc. Other handshapes are used to show thinness, roundness, a spill, a mound, etc. A very thin, round object like a dowel or pipe is described with two “F” handshapes moving away from each other, accompanied by pursed lips, narrowed eyes and hunched shoulders. A very thick round pipe is shown by two “C” handshapes moving away from each other with wide eyes and puffed cheeks. Once again, the facial expression and other aspects of inflection are critical; describing a pipe incorrectly with “F” handshapes and puffed cheeks would be equivalent to the nonsensical “the thick thin pipe.”

FACIAL EXPRESSION AND BUILDING SENTENCES

While ASL is correctly described as an expressive language due to the emotions visible on the signer's face, as we've seen already, facial expressions have other important responsibilities. English changes the word order and adds helping verbs to change a statement to a question (“He went downtown” versus “Did he go downtown?”), but in ASL, the difference between the two sentences is that the question is signed with raised eyebrows, sometimes with a slight forward tilt of the head, and briefly holding the last sign. “Wh-” questions, those asking what, who, when, why, how many, etc., are usually signed with the wh- sign at the end, and require an eyebrows-down expression, similar to a frown, during the part of the sentence containing the wh- sign.

SENTENCE STRUCTURE AND WORD ORDER

ASL's word order, or syntax, can be similar to English when signing short, simple sentences (subject-verb-object), but longer sentences require the use of topic/comment structure. While it's fine to sign, "I like ice cream" in the same word order as the English, the sentence "I like that new restaurant over by the baseball statue" would start with its topic, restaurant, followed by signs and the use of space to specify it as the new one over by the baseball statue (these parts signed with an eyebrows-up facial expression), and ending with the point of the whole sentence, or the comment: that the signer likes it (eyebrows back down and a slight nod). There is always more than one way to translate something, but a description in English of how to sign this sentence could look like this: "[raised eyebrows] RESTAURANT NEW [point in the direction of the restaurant; point higher for farther away, lower for closer] BASEBALL STATUE NEAR, LIKE [eyebrows down with the verb and a slight head nod. The sign for I in this case is optional, as long as it's clear that the speaker is talking about her own opinion].

Complicated? Well, certainly no more than the nuances and idiosyncrasies of English (where the meanings of "slow up" and "slow down" are not opposite but identical, "through" rhymes with "rue" but not "tough," and "putting the dog on the leash" is the same as "putting the leash on the dog"). These basic principles of structure and inflection pervade ASL, and once they're learned and internalized everything starts to fall into place. Students often describe a series of plateaus when developing their skills; what's mysterious today starts to make sense tomorrow (well, maybe next week), and, as with any new language, classes and media and studying are best combined with conversing with native users of the language.

When these and other aspects of ASL signs and sentences are put together, the result is a playful, creative, and beautiful language of great precision and eloquence. As you study this book and watch skilled signers display their craft, you'll gain a fuller appreciation of the whole range of communication available to us. Have fun!

Geoffrey S. Poor, October 2007

Using The Dictionary

RIGHT AND LEFT HANDEDNESS

Some signs, such as MEETING, have both hands making the same movement with the same handshake, and some use only one hand, such as WOMAN. Many however, have the two hands using different handshapes and, to a much lesser extent, different movements. For these signs, the dominant hand (the right for right-handed people and the left for left-handed people) usually makes the movement you notice, and the other usually remains still, as in MOVIE, or makes only a very small and barely perceptible complementary movement. A good example of this is COFFEE; the hand on the bottom actually does make a tiny movement, reflecting what the top hand does, but it's not generally noticed. (Of course, this changes if the signer has a cup of coffee or a stack of books in one hand.)

In this book, our ASL model Christine Kim is right-handed and signs accordingly. Readers who are left-handed will want to reverse the hands, so that it's their left hand that makes the greater movement. (An exception is the sign for motorcycle; one look and you'll see why.)

FACIAL EXPRESSION AND BODY MOVEMENTS

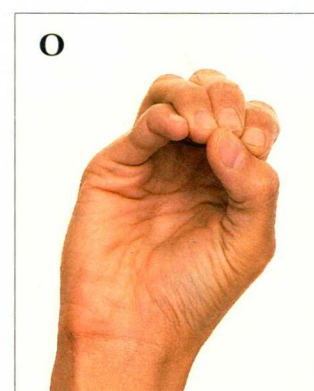
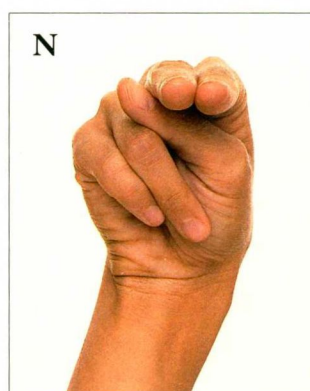
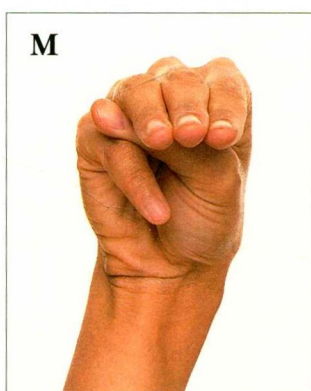
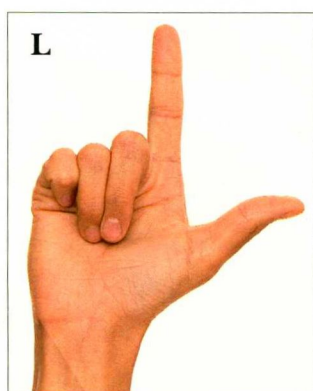
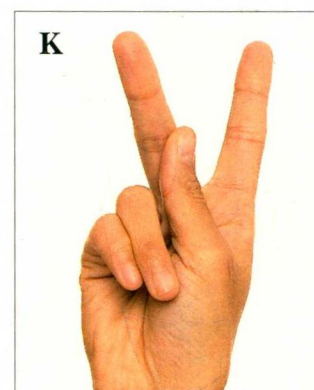
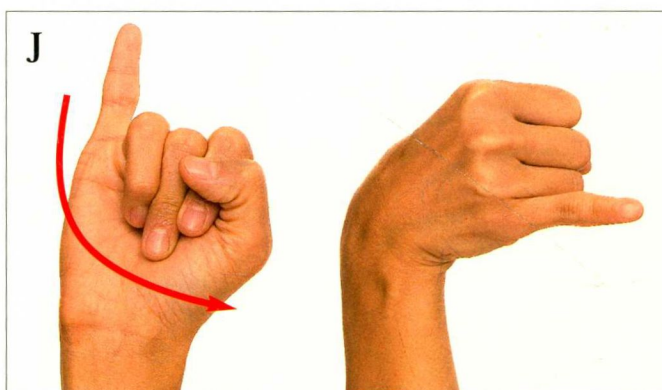
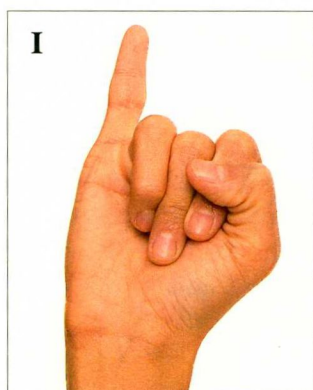
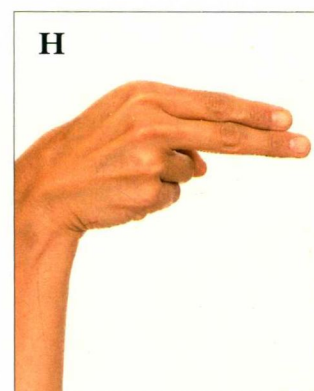
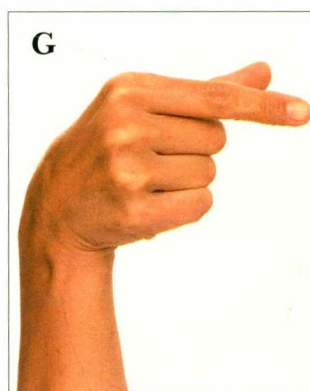
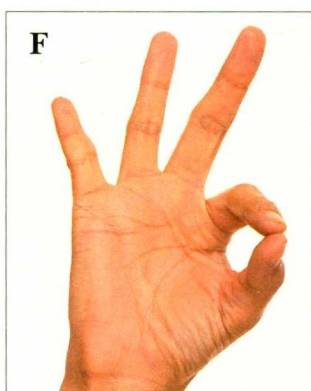
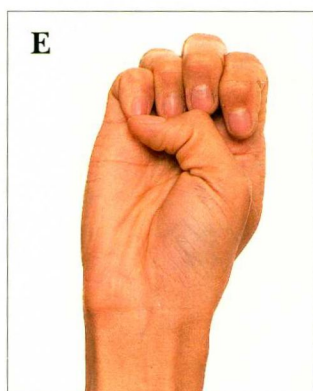
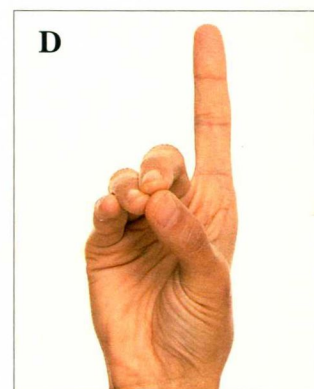
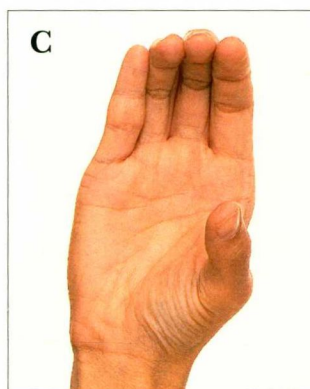
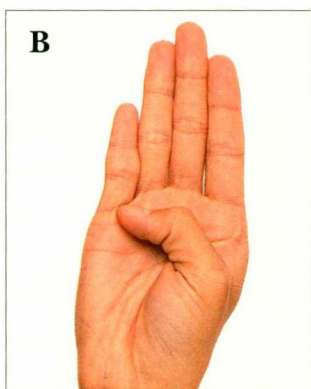
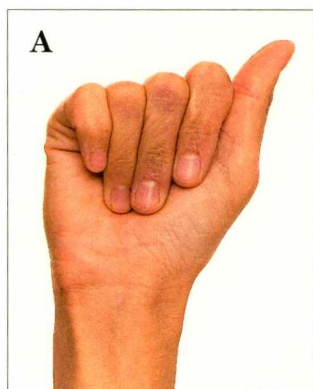
As discussed above, facial expression is critical in ASL. When using this book, keep an eye on Christine's excellent facial expressions and her skillful use of other subtle bits of affect. This affect is often not necessary with nouns like HOUSE, but other signs will be misunderstood without it. TIRED will send a very mixed and confusing message if the signer doesn't look tired, and WHO will not be perceived as a question if the signer doesn't furrow the eyebrows. CROWDED won't really mean crowded if the face is impassive and the shoulders are not drawn in.

NOTE ON SYNONYMS

Many signs can be translated by more than one English word, even when those English words do not mean exactly the same thing. The sign for "president," for example, can also mean "superintendent." The synonyms listed next to the photographs in this dictionary are other words that the signs can mean. The index at the back lists the English words for signs used in this dictionary.

The Alphabet

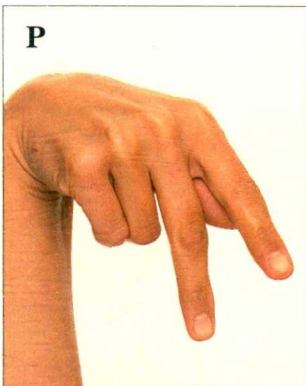
A-O



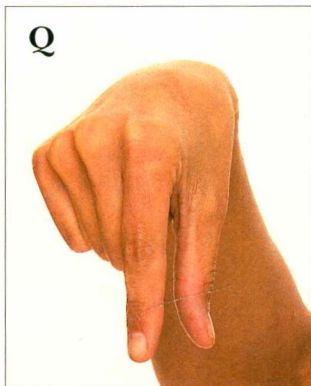
The Alphabet

P-Z

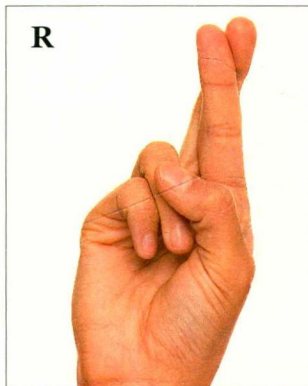
P



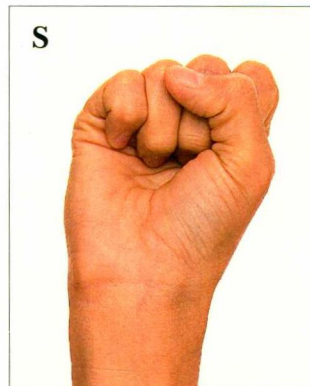
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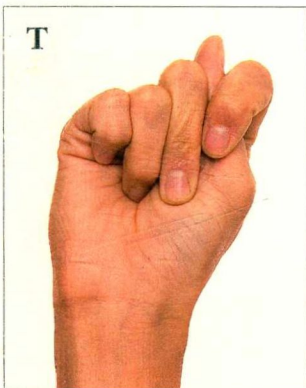
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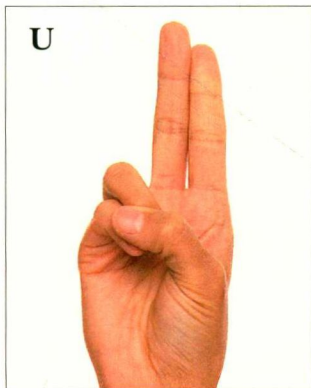
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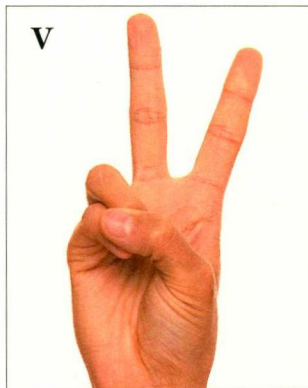
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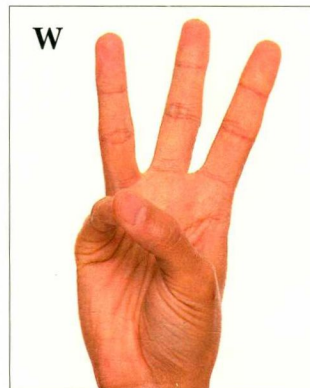
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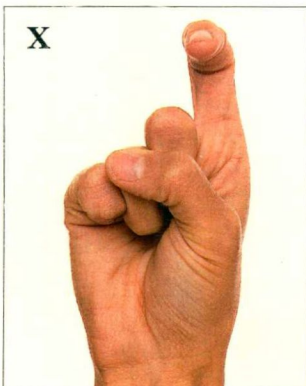
V



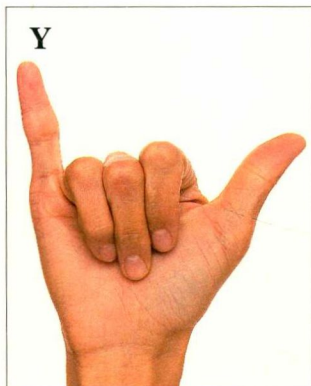
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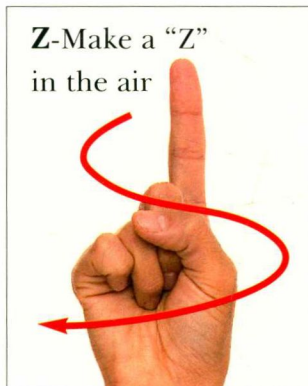
X

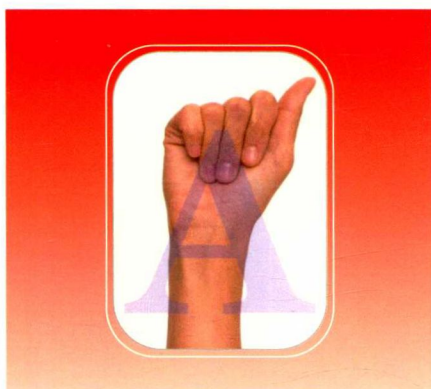


Y



Z-Make a "Z" in the air



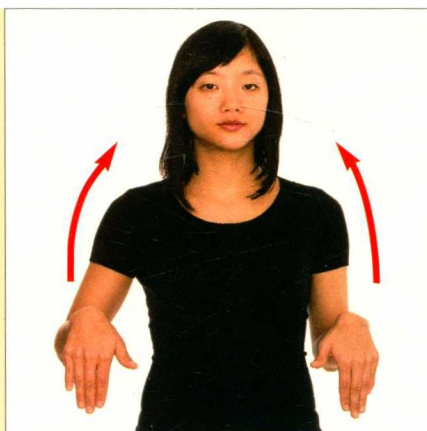


From Abandon to Awkward

ABANDON

Palms sweep up and face out

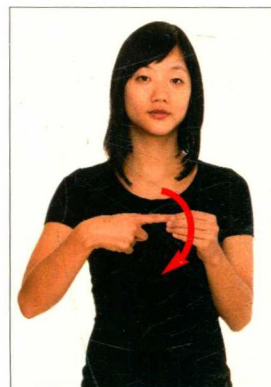
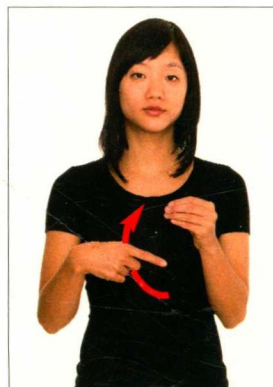
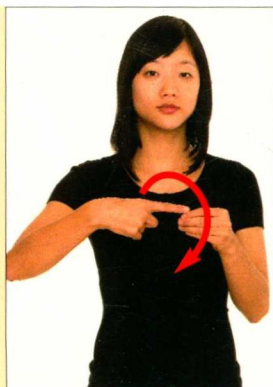
Synonyms—Surrender, give up



ABOUT (CONCERNING)

Index finger circles out, down
and around closed left hand

Synonym—Concerning



ABOVE

Right hand arcs slightly to the
right and up from left

