FACE + BODY

Facial Grammar + NMMs

The face, head and body carry language too.

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Raised brows

Often mark yes/no questions.



Lowered brows

Often mark WH-questions.



Head shake

Marks negation across a phrase.



Head nod

Affirms or marks a boundary.



Head + shoulders

Add stance and perspective.



Mouth movements

Show manner, degree or size.

Nonmanual signals are grammar, not decoration. · Source: Gallaudet ASL Standards + ASL University

CONNECT

Visual Communication

Make the space work for everyone.

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Face each other

Keep gaze, expression and signing space easy to see.



Light the face

Even front lighting; avoid a window behind the signer.



Open sightlines

A circle or gentle arc so everyone can see.



Gain attention

Wave in view, tap gently, or use a visual cue.



Take turns

One signer at a time helps everyone follow.



Clear the space

Keep hands and face visible; move objects aside.

Ask each person what works best for them.

5 PARTS

The Five Parameters

Small changes can create a different sign.

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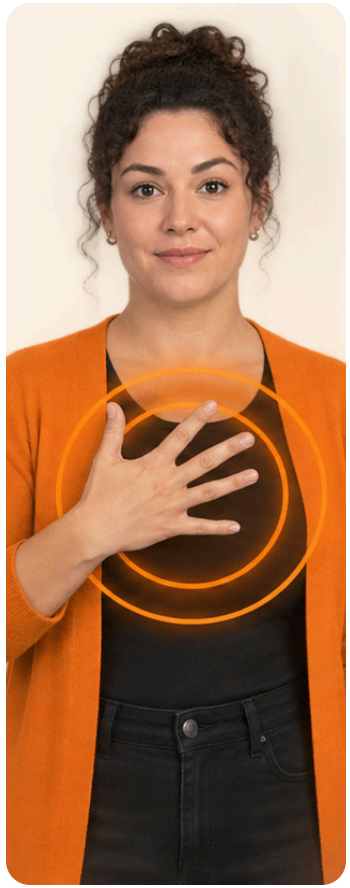
1 Handshape

What shape do the fingers and thumb make?



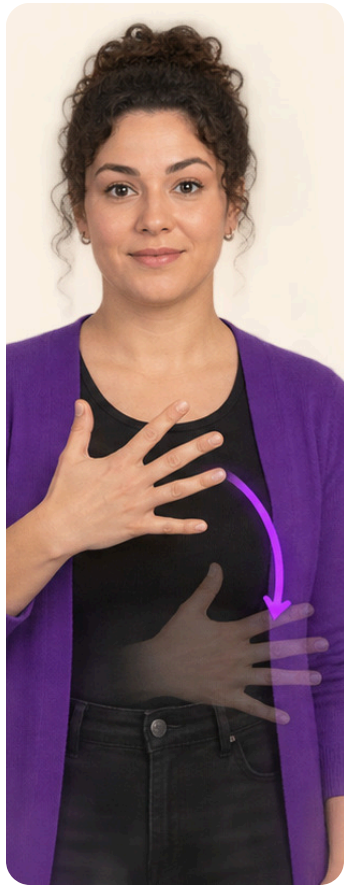
2 Palm orientation

Which way do the palm and fingers face?



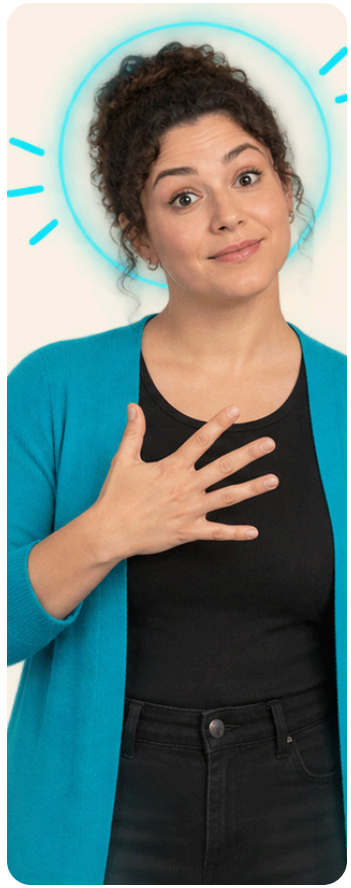
3 Location

Where is the sign produced on the body?



4 Movement

What path, direction, repetition or hold occurs?



5 Nonmanuals

What do the face, head, shoulders and torso do?

Source: ASL University — parameters of ASL.

BUILD IT

ASL Sentence Building

Build meaning with signs, space and nonmanual signals.

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ASL is not word-for-word English. It has its own grammar: a common flow is TIME, then TOPIC, then COMMENT, with the face and signing space carrying part of the meaning. Word order can shift, so the examples below show one natural way, not the only way.

Set the time first

Time usually comes early, then it stays true until you change it.

English: "I read the book yesterday."

ASL ORDER

YESTERDAY · BOOK · I · READ · FINISH

Topic, then comment

Name what you're talking about, then say something about it.

English: "My sister started a new school."

ASL ORDER

MY · SISTER · SCHOOL · NEW · START

Let your face ask the question

Raised brows = yes/no. Lowered brows = who, what, where, when, why.

English: "Are you going to the store?"

ASL ORDER

STORE · YOU · GO · (BROWS UP)

Use space for who's who

Place each person or thing in its own spot, then point back to it.

English: "She gave it to him."

ASL ORDER

PERSON-A HERE · PERSON-B THERE · A-GIVE-B

Rule of thumb: TIME → TOPIC → COMMENT.

Glosses (CAPS) stand for signs, not English words. Always confirm real usage with a Deaf signer.

Sources: ASL University (Dr. Bill Vicars) · Gallaudet ASL Connect

FACE

Your Face Changes the Message

The same hands can mean different things depending on your face and body.

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Statement

Neutral brows. Clear, complete information.

What does the signer assert?



Yes/No question

Raised brows often spread across the question.

Can the answer be yes or no?



WH-question

Lowered brows mark who, what, where, when or why.

Which information is missing?



Negation

A head shake can mark NOT across the phrase.

Where does the head shake begin and end?



Degree

Mouth, face and movement size show intensity.

How strong, large or extreme is it?



Stance

Head and body show certainty, doubt or perspective.

What attitude is part of the message?

Watch the face and body. They carry the grammar.

TRY IT

Practice Prompts

Use one short signed phrase with several cards.

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1 Keep the hands

Choose a short phrase. Keep the manual signs consistent.

2 Change one cue

Add raised brows, lowered brows, a head shake, a mouth movement or a body shift.

3 View + notice

A partner describes what changed and where the cue began and ended.

4 Check the context

Decide whether the message is clear in this situation.

5 Record a clip

Film both versions with the face and hands fully visible.

6 Ask a fluent signer

Language use varies. Verify with Deaf signers and trusted sources.

Nonmanual signals are grammar, not decoration.

COMPARE

One Sign, Different Meanings

One sign can carry several English meanings. Mouth, context and space tell you which.

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These are examples to verify, not a finished list. Some signs below share one production with related meanings.

TRUE

CAN MEAN

- true
- real
- sure
- actually

RIGHT

CAN MEAN

- right
- correct
- exactly
- appropriate

HARD

CAN MEAN

- hard
- difficult

LATE

CAN MEAN

- late
- not yet
- haven't

FINE

CAN MEAN

- fine
- fancy
- formal

SICK

CAN MEAN

- sick
- ill
- disease

NOTICE

Compare the Variants

Use evidence, context and curiosity.

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1 Same concept?

Do the variants refer to the same idea in this context?

NOTES

2 Who uses it?

Record region, school, age group or community when known.

NOTES

3 What changes?

Compare handshape, orientation, location, movement and NMMs.

NOTES

4 When is it used?

A formal, casual, older or newer form may fit different settings.

NOTES

5 Can you trace it?

Link to a real signer and preserve their region label.

NOTES

6 What did you learn?

Write a neutral observation instead of choosing a winner.

NOTES

Regional and social variation show the depth of ASL.

TELL IT

ASL Storytelling Tools

Use the body and signing space to build a vivid world.

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Role shift

Turn the torso, head and gaze to embody characters.



Eye gaze

Look toward established people, objects and locations.



Character placement

Set references in space, then return to them.



Constructed action

Show a character acting, reacting or handling something.



Depicting signs

Represent shape, movement, location and interaction.



Pacing + transitions

Use holds, shifts and rhythm to guide the viewer.

Use holds and shifts to guide the viewer. · Source: Gallaudet ASL Connect — storytelling and spatial grammar